

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 5 March 2009

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 5 March 2009

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

Scottish Government (Record)

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-3609, in the name of Johann Lamont, on Scottish Government failures.

09:15

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): It is a privilege to open this important debate for the Labour Party. I am happy to speak to the motion, "Scottish Government Failures", which is in my name.

In discussing the Government's failures, the first question is the political equivalent of shooting fish in a barrel—which one do we start with? The remarkable gap between the Scottish National Party's view of itself and the reality could be laughable, but it represents the serious matter of opportunities lost for people throughout Scotland who depend on the Government at every level to act in their interest.

It is clear to us all that SNP ministers take themselves very seriously, but our central contention is that the SNP is not serious about government. What it has done lags behind the action that the Administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland have taken to use the powers that are at their disposal to make a difference, to be creative in stimulating economic activity and to put jobs and training centre stage. It is ever more apparent that, ultimately, the SNP will always put its party interests first. It is evident that the SNP's first, last and only priority is creating the conditions for separation.

That is why we plan to support the Liberal Democrat amendment. The referendum issue provides an example of SNP failure. The SNP could have had our support for an unrigged referendum—in which I am certain that the people of Scotland would have rejected the SNP's separatism—but it spurned the offer. Now, times and economic circumstances have changed. It is clear to us that a referendum would now be an unnecessary distraction from the challenges for the Government in sustaining economic activity and protecting people, their families and their communities. If—as ministers told us—it was outrageous to vote against the budget to secure apprenticeships and Labour's budget dividend at a

time of economic recession, how much more risky is it to create uncertainty to persist with a priority of constitutional division?

As for the SNP's amendment, rarely have I seen such a self-regarding and complacent amendment, even by the SNP's monumentally self-regarding and complacent standards. As SNP members ditch policies or pretend that other policies that are dead in the water still have life in them, they congratulate themselves because they are doing well in polls that they commissioned.

As a schoolteacher, I spent many years encouraging youngsters to be self-confident and full of self-esteem. However, I used to say, "Even when you believe in yourself, you still have to open the book and work." The First Minister might be bristling with self-confidence, but that is ill placed when he will not do the work that being in government demands. We have a six-point plan that did not even make its way on to the back of a fag packet; an analysis of the economic situation by the First Minister that changes daily and is informed by a view of the world that suggests that economic policy can be separated from its social consequences; and a Government that is spinning fit to burst by telling us how well it is doing. The Government centralises credit for the good news and delegates the blame for anything else. It is incapable of facing the reality of crumbling schools, teachers out of work and community projects closing.

There are too many broken promises to list them all, but even the edited highlights of not dumping student debt, not reducing class sizes and—of course—not introducing the local income tax are substantial. As we watched the public relations machine move into action to dump the local income tax—the SNP told the press about that before its own back benchers knew—we were puzzled as to why the persistent breaking of promises seemed to matter so little. All that was required was the wheeling out of an alibi. Of course, we made a simple mistake. We thought that the SNP thought that its manifesto commitments mattered. The reality is that the SNP does not regard its failure to deliver on its promises as a problem because, for the SNP, the manifesto's purpose was to get the SNP elected and not to describe what the SNP would do once it was elected. The process of promise making and promise breaking was, and is, an entirely cynical calculation about how to secure power.

Alongside the broken promises is the failure to deliver. The SNP actively chose, at a time of turmoil in the financial markets, to cut support to build affordable housing for rent. When we need security in housing and in construction, the SNP has wilfully developed policies that create uncertainty in the housing sector. When SNP

members are told that their policies are not working, their only response is that somebody else needs to give them more money, although the money that they have is not being used as it should be to meet housing need.

In health, the statistics show that bedblocking is re-emerging and that huge challenges exist locally. In justice, the police figures will not be achieved and an arbitrary cut in sentences of under six months will be made, while in this city alone, £100,000 is being stripped out of community sentencing support. In transport, the strategic transport projects review was dismissed as a wish list. On the environment, early action on emissions is lacking. In culture, the First Minister tells us that there is a renaissance, but unprecedented numbers of artists tell us that there is a shambles. In addressing poverty and disadvantage, the Government no longer has targets and no longer attempts even to assess the impact of its policies on disadvantaged groups. The SNP Government no longer attempts to secure equal access to services and no longer ensures that budgets are informed by concerns about poverty rather than rhetoric. That leaves the most vulnerable people in our communities without protection in these challenging times.

We have the damaging consequences of the SNP being against public-private partnership developments, although its opposition has never stretched as far as baulking at cutting the ministerial ribbon to open such developments. The SNP has found it impossible to produce the Scottish Futures Trust, so it has a particular tartan nationalist take on the Thatcher mantra, "There is no alternative." The Government says, "There is no alternative, so we shall simply not build at all." *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order. Only one member should speak in the debate at one time, but several other debates seem to be going on, for which all sides are to blame.

Johann Lamont: I regret that the Government is incapable of listening to people's concerns about its failures.

Government demands more than a shrug of the shoulders, especially when the Salmond slump is the consequence. *[Laughter.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Johann Lamont: I say to Mr Swinney that it is easy to laugh at me, but laughing at businesses and communities that are under the cosh is a different matter.

The Scottish Government's figures show £1.3 billion of construction projects in 2007. Under the SNP, that figure was slashed to £300 million in 2008. The cost of that reduction in jobs, economic

activity and the benefit of those projects is breathtaking and frustrating. That reality should make us rage at the Government's incompetence and lack of concern.

I have said that a referendum bill is unwanted and would be a distraction at this time. However, a greater charge than the wish to waste time and energy on pursuing a referendum bill in such uncertain times can be laid at the SNP's door. I beg the Presiding Officer's pardon while I find my place—I assure members that what is coming is worth the wait. When those with vision fought for and shaped the Scottish Parliament and when the Labour Party made decentralising power a priority—the SNP stood sullenly apart from all that campaigning and debating—we did not imagine that any party that secured power in the Scottish Parliament, which was intended to bring decision making closer to those who understand what is needed in our communities, would seek to reduce the Parliament in economically tough times to the role of spectator to ministerial decisions, as the SNP Government has.

We did not imagine that any party that sought power would use this institution crudely to say time and again what it could not do so that it could pursue its separatist agenda. The depressing charge against the SNP is that it will never strain every sinew and never use every power at its disposal to protect our people because its life's work is to establish that the Parliament cannot work as part of the United Kingdom. If there is ever a choice between action to improve people's life chances and action to improve the SNP's political chances—a choice between a fix and a fight—it is no contest for the SNP. It will never do all that it can, because it does not want people to feel that the Parliament serves them as part of the United Kingdom.

Although there is political knockabout in witnessing the SNP's self-aggrandisement, its finessing of hard questions, its spin doctors and their PR and the increasingly embarrassing spectacle of a First Minister demeaning his office by focusing on providing the cheap laugh rather than answers, there is no political knockabout in the realisation that the alibi seeking, the excuses and the spin are not about managing political action but are a substitute for it.

We have had enough of failure and will talk later in detail about how the SNP is letting down the people of Scotland on each of its responsibilities. We have had enough of inaction and a party-political strategy masquerading as a Government. It is about time that the SNP took responsibility for the powers that it has and used them in the interest of the people in this country. Scotland deserves far better than it has had so far from the SNP Government.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that SNP manifesto promises have been broken on a wide range of issues including health, housing, community safety and education; further notes the absence of a credible strategy to address the needs of people facing difficult economic circumstances and to tackle poverty and disadvantage; regrets that the Scottish Government prefers to focus its attention on the powers it does not have in order to pursue its party's agenda of separation, and urges the Scottish Government to examine how it might effectively use the powers at its disposal to meet the needs of people by sustaining economic activity and employment and supporting communities across Scotland.

09:27

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Even by Johann Lamont's standards, that was a pretty miserable performance. I assure her that, contrary to her assertion, it is anything but easy to laugh at her. She is not called No-laugh Lamont for nothing.

If truth be told, the debate is nothing more than a fig leaf to hide the fact that the Labour Party in Scotland has nothing positive to say and absolutely nothing constructive to contribute to the debate.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Deal with the subject.

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: Wendy Alexander famously said that the Labour Party had not had an original idea in 100 years. How right she was. It shows no signs of ending that record run.

It is a bit rich—in fact, more than a bit rich—for Labour to talk about the delivery of our manifesto because, halfway through the parliamentary session, we have already delivered half of the manifesto on which we fought the election. In the words of Iain Gray, who has not even bothered to turn up for this important Labour debate—

George Foulkes: Where is Alex Salmond?

Nicola Sturgeon: It is a Labour debate. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order. The point has been made.

Nicola Sturgeon: In Iain Gray's words, Labour has ripped up its manifesto because it was written on the back of a bag packet.

Johann Lamont: We lost the election.

Nicola Sturgeon: Johann Lamont says that Labour lost the election. It certainly did and, from her performance this morning, we see why.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: No.

We will take no lessons on delivery from the party that promised at successive elections to reform the council tax and make it fairer but, after 10 years in power, managed only to put it up by 60 per cent. We will take no lessons from the party that promised to cut youth crime by 10 per cent but presided over an increase of 16 per cent, and the party that delivered fewer than half of its manifesto commitments over two terms in office. A long, hard look in the mirror might have been more appropriate for Labour than any attack on this Government's record.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): I will not mention local income tax, the first-time home buyers grant or the police numbers target. I have one simple question for Nicola Sturgeon. On page 19 of its manifesto, the SNP said that it would introduce a not-for-profit trust—where is that trust?

Nicola Sturgeon: The Scottish Futures Trust is well established, as is the not-for-profit approach. That contrasts with the record profits through the private finance initiative that Andy Kerr still seems to propose.

Happily for the SNP, it is not Labour's verdict on the Scottish Government that counts, but the verdict of the Scottish people.

George Foulkes: Will the cabinet secretary give way on that point?

Nicola Sturgeon: Lord George Foulkes can make himself heard without making an intervention.

We are ultimately accountable to the Scottish people and, when the next election comes, we will be happy to stand on our record.

George Foulkes: Will the cabinet secretary give way on the point about the Scottish people?

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary has made it clear that she will not take an intervention, so sit down please.

Nicola Sturgeon: Even now, ours is a record of solid achievement. The Opposition might gurn and whine, but the polls put the SNP considerably and consistently ahead of Labour. That suggests that the Scottish people have a somewhat more positive view of the world because they know that this Government is on their side. As a result of our actions in the teeth of Labour opposition, council tax bills have been frozen.

George Foulkes: On the Scottish people—

The Presiding Officer: With respect, the cabinet secretary seems to be making it clear that she is not taking an intervention.

Nicola Sturgeon: That is a council tax cut in real terms. Business rates are lower. Education is free again, because the Labour-Liberal tuition fee has been abolished.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: No.

Patients are being treated more quickly and are paying less for their medicines thanks to the Government's policy of abolishing prescription charges. The cost of a prescription in Scotland is due to fall to £4 on 1 April. Let us contrast that with the position under Labour south of the border: in the past couple of minutes, it has been announced that, on 1 April, prescription charges in England will increase to £7.20—a policy that has been condemned by doctors.

Here is the real contrast: an SNP Government that provides real help when people need it most and a Labour Government that simply adds to their burden.

Communities have more police on their streets, and that increase is set to continue year on year. I have heard some scepticism being expressed about whether police numbers at the end of this parliamentary session will be 1,000 higher than the number that we inherited. We have rightly been cautious about that. We will recruit 1,000 more, but overall numbers depend on retirements and people leaving the service. Let us not forget that we inherited a spike in police retirement and the lowest recruitment level since devolution.

However, we are now two years into the session and police numbers are consistently rising, so we are in a much better position to forecast what the figure will be at the end of the session. I announce that we will undertake a police force projection study and will be very happy to publish the results. Given our recruitment policy, we are confident that the outcome will be positive. If it turns out that there will be 1,000 more officers at the end of the session than at its start, I will expect everyone who has doubted that to apologise unreservedly.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: Perhaps Richard Baker wants to apologise early.

Richard Baker: I will not apologise for the 1,500 extra police that were put on the streets when we were in government, in stark contrast with the current position. However, the SNP's promise was not for a projection study but for 1,000 extra police. Was the Cabinet Secretary for Justice wrong when he said that that will not happen?

Nicola Sturgeon: Labour's manifesto did not promise a single additional police officer and we

inherited the lowest recruitment rate since devolution.

The Government has a record to be proud of. Our actions have helped to reduce the financial burden on individuals, families and businesses. That reduction matters at a time when people feel the pain of Labour's recession. However, we know that, in times of economic pain, we need to do even more to help. That is why we have devised our six-point economic recovery plan and will continue to develop it to respond to Gordon Brown's downturn. We have already accelerated capital spending and increased the funding to tackle fuel poverty, which has enabled us to install a record number of central heating systems. We have put together a package of measures to help people who are in mortgage difficulty and increased the funding for it from £25 million to £35 million. I reassure the Liberal Democrats that our efforts are concentrated on economic recovery and will remain so.

Anyone who seriously believes that the issue of economic recovery can be divorced from the issue of the powers that the Parliament has with which to achieve economic recovery is deluded. The fact is that the state of our economy and the constitutional future of the country are inextricably linked. As a Government, we are doing everything within the resources and the powers that we have at our disposal both to help people to deal with the impact of recession and to help the country out of it. We will continue to do that.

The truth—the hard truth that every member of the Parliament has a duty to face up to—is that, without fiscal powers, the power to borrow and the normal powers of an independent country, we will always have one hand tied behind our back.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Nicola Sturgeon: No.

That is why it is not only right to give the people of Scotland the option to vote for independence; in these economic circumstances, it is imperative that we give them the right to choose independence. It is anti-democratic, disgraceful and downright wrong for any politician—Labour, Liberal or Tory—to stand in the way of the people's right to decide.

It is not just the SNP that backs a referendum. We know that a few members on other benches do, too. I wonder whether John Farquhar Munro will be allowed to vote with his conscience at 5 o'clock this evening.

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): He is not in the chamber now.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): He will not be allowed in the chamber.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am told that he will not even be allowed to be in the chamber.

More important, we know that 59 per cent of Labour voters, 63 per cent of Liberal voters and even 63 per cent of Tory voters want a referendum. The leaders of the Opposition parties should give their members a free vote on a referendum. Are they so scared of the result of such a referendum that they will block it at any cost? From what we have heard from Labour members today, they are not saying "Bring it on" so much as cowering in the corner.

I conclude by flagging up the real and present danger to Scotland's economic recovery—the £500 million of cuts that are planned by the Labour Prime Minister and the Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer. Labour says that that is all about efficiency savings. The truth is that it is about jobs and services. Those cuts will cost more than 8,000 jobs; the national health service share of those cuts alone is equal to 5,000 nurses or 1,000 doctors. Anyone who has Scotland's interests at heart will join the Government in opposing those cuts. Anyone who does not oppose those cuts will be judged at the ballot box.

I am very happy indeed to commend the record of Scotland's first SNP Government to Parliament, and I move amendment S3M-3609.3, to leave out from first "notes" to end and insert:

"commends the Scottish Government's record of achievement since May 2007; believes that the benefits to the Scottish people of lower council tax bills, lower business rates, lower prescription charges and a return to free education are reflected in the SNP's excellent poll ratings; notes the Scottish Government's six-point economic recovery plan that is providing much-needed assistance during Labour's recession; believes, however, that additional economic powers for the Scottish Parliament, in particular borrowing powers, are essential to steer the Scottish economy out of recession and thereafter to support economic growth; condemns the £500 million in cuts that the UK Labour government plans to impose on the Scottish budget in 2010-11 and 2011-12, which will cost more than 8,000 jobs and represents a serious threat to economic recovery; calls on all parties with Scotland's interests at heart to oppose these cuts, and looks forward to continuing a lively debate and National Conversation about Scotland's future."

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In what I understand is a heavily oversubscribed debate, can you reassure the members who are unlikely to be called that we will not have to sit here and watch time being allocated to members who do not have the courtesy to wait until they are called before they start their speeches? Or should I take it that the only way in which to be heard in the chamber is to heckle?

The Presiding Officer: I am not sure that that is a point of order. It is entirely up to Presiding Officers to decide how they conduct the debate. We are trying to fit in as many members as possible, and I have made quite clear my view on some of the sedentary interventions that have been made. Points of order such as this will reduce the possibility of our calling some members to speak.

09:39

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): After almost two years in office, the Scottish Government cannot—despite what Nicola Sturgeon says—get away from the fact that it has done very little of substance. It came to power full of its own promises. I think that the SNP believed that its new Government would be a radical and reforming Government. After all, it was committed to dumping student debt—getting rid of not just the student endowment, but all student debt. It was committed to an extra 1,000 police officers, but what we have now is a projection. It was committed to matching, brick by brick, the previous coalition's school-building programme. We were going to have lower class sizes and nursery teachers for every nursery-age child. We were going to have a Scottish Futures Trust that actually did something. Of course, we were also going to get rid of the council tax and replace it with a fairer local income tax. That is not even to mention the first-time buyers grant of £2,000 and the generous kinship carers allowances. Wow. Utopia was meant to be here.

Over the past two years, we have seen those and other commitments being ditched, one after another. On the council tax, every SNP candidate said that getting rid of that discredited tax was their main priority. However, the Government did not even go to the trouble of introducing a draft bill to Parliament to test support for its plans. On the funding for capital projects, answers to parliamentary questions from my colleague, Jeremy Purvis, revealed that only two of the 35 capital projects for which the SNP takes the credit did not originate under the previous coalition Executive.

In two months' time, in my constituency, we will have the long-awaited reopening of Laurencekirk railway station. Nicol Stephen, as a previous transport minister, gave the go-ahead for that project and allocated more than £3 million to it. I wonder who will open the station in May—I could certainly have a guess. Should we congratulate the current Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change on not cancelling it?

The chief executive of Transport Scotland admitted in a letter to Danny Alexander, the member of Parliament for Inverness, that work on

multimillion pound Highland road projects that are included in the strategic transport projects review will not even start for at least another eight years. The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson, admitted in Parliament just last week that he did not take one project out of the STPR. However, he did not put one project into it either. That is marvellous work from the do-nothing transport minister—or perhaps I should call him the do-something transport minister, as what he did was delay the whole thing for six months while he did nothing. Our transport minister elevates doing nothing very much almost into an art form.

On education, does the Government really expect us all conveniently to forget the fact that the slogan “Dump the Debt” appeared on every leaflet, badge and postcard that it distributed to students? The campaign was very effective. My own sons, who were students, were tempted to vote for the SNP on the regional list because of that promise, which was sent directly to them in the post. However, I persuaded them not to be so silly as to vote for the SNP on that basis and I am glad to say that they did not do so. Nevertheless, many others did and I believe that the SNP will rue the day that it abandoned that promise.

I could list a whole raft of populist policies that the SNP Government has unceremoniously dumped, but that would take a great deal of time and I have only three minutes left. It seems to me that the Scottish Government has spent the past two years doing very little indeed. Perhaps it will become known as either the do-nothing Government or, at the very least, the do-very-little Government. Perhaps its new cunning plan is to appeal to the voters at the next election, in 2011, as the Government that does nothing but does it very well.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): I am sorry to interrupt the member's flow, but I cannot help but recall that the last time my friend John Farquhar Munro had leave of absence it was to bury a cow. What reason has been given for his absence today, which has denied him the opportunity to talk some sense on the issue of a referendum?

Mike Rumbles: I am perfectly willing to take interventions on matters of substance, but I think that we should concentrate on the issue at hand.

Ironically, the two large items of policy that the Government has not dropped are the two items that it should drop. It should certainly drop its ill-conceived plans to demonise young people as far as irresponsible drinking is concerned. Instead of introducing new alcohol laws that miss the point, it should enforce the laws on alcohol that we already have. It will not do that, of course, because that would require the allocation of additional

resources, and it needs to be seen to be doing something.

The second policy that the Government should drop is its divisive plans on separation. This is where I come to our amendment. Over the past 24 hours, we have heard a great deal from the SNP about the undemocratic nature of the opposition to its plans to hold an independence referendum. We live in a representative, parliamentary democracy. We in this chamber are the democratically elected representatives of the people. We should never forget that. People elected us to these benches knowing that we do not support the break-up of the United Kingdom. It would be a huge betrayal of democracy if we now abrogated our responsibility on this issue. If people had wanted a referendum on independence, they would have voted SNP at the previous election; and if people want independence now, they can vote SNP at the next election. However, if they want a radically reformed home rule settlement, in which we have much greater tax-raising powers, and much more control over our own affairs within the United Kingdom, they can vote for the Liberal Democrats in 2011.

The Scottish Government must end its obsession with separation from the UK and must focus on protecting jobs and boosting our economy. That is what is important to the people of Scotland. The Liberal Democrat amendment seeks to put an end to speculation about parliamentary support for a referendum on separation. It will be made absolutely clear at the vote tonight that the Government has no such support. Ministers should drop their divisive plans and spend the next two years working hard to build an economic recovery. I urge Parliament to support the Liberal Democrat amendment.

I move amendment S3M-3609.1, to insert at end:

“and calls on the Scottish Government to concentrate its efforts on economic recovery and abandon its divisive plans for a Referendum Bill for the remainder of its term of office.”

09:46

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the Labour Party for giving us the opportunity to debate the SNP Government's record in office, but I was a little disappointed with Johann Lamont. She clearly did not have her porridge for breakfast, because we were spared the now familiar lesson from the Labour front benches on how to make confetti out of the SNP manifesto. She should have given us that lesson, because the SNP manifesto of 2007 will go down in history as one of the greatest frauds perpetrated on the electorate in recent years. Forget the surgeon's photograph of the Loch Ness monster,

the Roswell alien autopsy video, and the Hitler diaries—they have nothing on the SNP manifesto when it comes to deluding the public.

The SNP promised a £2,000 per head housing grant for first-time buyers, and there has been no sign of it. The SNP promised a one-in-one-out policy for new business regulations—a policy subsequently dismissed by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth as “too simplistic” and then ditched.

The SNP promised that student debts would be wiped out and loans replaced with grants, and there is no sign of that. It promised class sizes of no more than 18 in primaries 1 to 3—a policy that we found out last week would take another 87 years to implement, by which time most of the original intended beneficiaries would be pushing up the daisies. The SNP also promised a local income tax, which thankfully has now been ditched along with all the rest of the promises.

What will the SNP do with its manifesto at the next election? What a challenge: will it simply rerun all its old promises and ask for another shottie, or will it tear up the manifesto and start again? In the latter case we would be entitled to ask why we should believe a word of the new manifesto when the previous one turned out to be such a fantasy.

When did it all start to go wrong for the First Minister? I think that we can trace much of his present plight back to the humungous loss of credibility that occurred at the time of the bail-out by the UK Government of HBOS and the Royal Bank of Scotland. Back in September, the First Minister was forever telling us that those were two well-run Scottish institutions: they were soundly based and laid low only by the infamous actions of the so-called “spivs and speculators”.

What a difference six months makes. Only last Thursday at First Minister’s questions, a loyal SNP back bencher—yes, incredibly, there are still a few in existence—Shirley-Anne Somerville slated the Royal Bank of Scotland for

“the poor judgment of senior management”.

She went on to rail against

“the folly of previous RBS senior management”.—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2009; c 15274.]

How times have changed. Let us never forget that it was the First Minister’s bosom buddy Sir George Mathewson, the man he hand-picked to chair his Council of Economic Advisers, who personally hired Sir Fred Goodwin as RBS’s chief executive.

Where does the Government go from here? Well, one bright idea is still left to it, although it is an old and tired idea—an independence referendum. The Government is now devoting all

its energies to the legislation on that and has even appointed Mr Russell as a minister dedicated to the task. With the pledges on smaller class sizes, student debt, housing grants and local income tax all gone, how long can the pledge of an independence referendum survive?

I do not believe that there is any majority in the Parliament for a referendum. I hope that that will become clear tonight, but who knows when we are dealing with the Liberal Democrats? Their amendment represents the Lib Dem position at 9.40 this morning, but how many times will it have changed by 5 o’clock this afternoon? And where, as has already been asked, is the elusive John Farquhar Munro? He is a man who, uniquely in his party, has a fixed and principled position on a referendum, albeit one with which I disagree. Is it true that, by a remarkable coincidence, he has an unbreakable constituency engagement today? Or has Mike Rumbles locked him in a cupboard, a tactic last used during the passing of planning legislation when poor Jim Mather was held captive by the SNP whips to prevent him from voting for third party right of appeal?

Jeremy Purvis: I do not think that any member in this chamber could gag John Farquhar Munro.

Are the Conservatives relying on Lord Forsyth, a member of the House of Lords—an unelected chamber—to demand a referendum? I think that it was Lord Forsyth who said, “Bring it on.”

Murdo Fraser: I know that Mr Purvis sometimes has ideas above his station, but we are not in the House of Lords now. This is the Scottish Parliament and, to a man and woman, my party’s members will vote in favour of his party’s amendment this evening—despite all the temptations to do otherwise that he puts in our way. What a pity that the Liberal Democrats are not showing the same discipline in their party that we Conservatives are showing in ours.

People in Scotland want the Government to concentrate on the real concerns that affect them and not on an obsession with constitutional upheaval. It is time for the SNP to drop its referendum plan and get on with delivering real help for the people of Scotland.

Notwithstanding my criticisms, the Government has done some things right: it has removed the tolls on the Forth and Tay bridges; it has cut business rates for small businesses; it is introducing a new drugs policy for Scotland; and it has brought in a £60 million town-centre regeneration scheme. What do all those things have in common? It is, of course, that they are all Conservative policies. My advice to the SNP Government is therefore this: if it wants to get back on track, it should read this perfect guide—the Conservative manifesto from 2007. It is far too

sturdy a document for anyone even to attempt tearing it in two. Some of the good ideas in it have already been implemented, but there is much more that could be done.

As my colleague David McLetchie has said before, the next best thing to a Conservative Government is a Government that does Conservative things.

Andy Kerr: That is this Government.

Murdo Fraser: I can see that Mr Kerr agrees with me. It is not too late for even this Government to see sense and find its way again.

09:53

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): We have certainly heard plenty of rhetoric from the SNP this morning, but let us look at some of the reality.

We are now two years into the SNP Government, and it ought to be considering what its actions mean for local communities instead of looking to the past or trying to put the blame on the UK Government. After two years of the SNP Government, health boards across Scotland are being forced to consider hundreds of millions of pounds-worth of cuts. That is not because of Westminster; it is because, after eight years of Labour investment at record levels, the SNP has delivered the worst settlement for the NHS since devolution.

Nicola Sturgeon can sit there, refusing to listen and continuing with the complacency and arrogance that are becoming her hallmark, but it is not just Labour that is saying that about the NHS.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Cathy Jamieson: Not at the moment.

This is the reality: NHS Tayside is planning staff reductions to meet its targets; NHS Forth Valley is taking more than £1 million away from acute services such as accident and emergency; and NHS Borders is looking at staff numbers. In my constituency, NHS Ayrshire and Arran is having to consider plans for uncosted cuts in maternity and orthopaedic services to help save £22 million.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member take an intervention?

Cathy Jamieson: No—but I will come to Ms Sturgeon in a moment.

NHS Highland has said that efficiency savings alone will not address its £36 million deficit and that it is now considering

“issues that were previously thought to be scary or untouchable”.

I would like to hear what the cabinet secretary has to say about all that.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will Cathy Jamieson comment on the fact that, since the Government took office in May 2007, 5,000 more people are working in the NHS? She is talking nonsense, but in light of that nonsense will she join me in opposing the £500 million of cuts, which would cost 5,000 nurses in the NHS?

Cathy Jamieson: I am interested in Nicola Sturgeon's comment that health boards are talking nonsense—my points came from the considerations of health boards throughout Scotland.

I will come to jobs. The SNP expects health boards to meet the on-going costs of new policy commitments without providing additional resources. As Johann Lamont said, we have the return of bedblocking and, this week, the news that SNP-controlled Stirling Council is to shut two old people's homes to cut costs. That is the latest in a series of local and national cuts. In total, 170 posts are going in Stirling Council and about 50 administration posts are going as part of the package. The Scottish Government and Nicola Sturgeon are failing to protect jobs at a time when that protection is needed the most.

Nicola Sturgeon has also failed to address the concerns about NHS estate management that were highlighted in an Audit Scotland report. In December, it was reported that patients at Glasgow's Southern general hospital had to be given—*[Interruption.]* There is no point in Nicola Sturgeon saying, “Oh, here we go,” because that is no comfort to the patients who have to be given extra blankets to keep warm because the surgical block in the Southern general is regularly left without heating. That situation is not acceptable, and the cabinet secretary should concentrate on dealing with it. Surely a reliable heating system—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order. I am sorry to interrupt, Ms Jamieson.

I have already commented on the unnecessary nature of some of the exchanges that are taking place. I would be grateful if that ruling was observed.

Cathy Jamieson: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

A reliable heating system is surely not too much to ask for. It is one of the most basic requirements in any hospital, and I hope that the cabinet secretary will turn her attentions to that.

Earlier this week, the British Medical Association published a consultation on the future of general practice, which highlighted the association's concern that investment in premises has stalled. I call on the cabinet secretary to accept that the

Scottish Futures Trust is simply redundant and to consider alternative funding mechanisms to ensure that the hospital estate is improved and maintained. We need real investment in the much-needed community health facilities that our communities hope to have.

As has been said, the promised support for kinship carers simply has not materialised. It was highlighted in December last year that the Scottish councils are simply not delivering the promised package of support, and many carers groups rightly feel that they have been abandoned by the SNP Administration. The UK Government has sought, through a £340 million package, to provide the support that carers need, but the Scottish Government cannot find it in its heart to guarantee that the £34 million that it will receive will be passed on to those in need.

The Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution (Michael Russell): If the member can tell me one thing that she did to help kinship carers in the eight years in which Labour was in power, I will be immensely surprised. The Scottish Government introduced the policy and is delivering; the frustration has come largely from the Labour Party and Labour councillors.

Cathy Jamieson: I refer Michael Russell to all the work that was done as part of "Hidden Harm—responding to the needs of children of problem drug users". The problem is that the policy is not being implemented. Despite the rhetoric from the SNP, the reality is that kinship carers throughout Scotland are not getting the cash.

The Scottish Government must consider the rhetoric and the reality in relation to sport. The SNP's 2007 Holyrood election manifesto pledged free access to council swimming pools but, of 32 councils, only two—Labour-run Glasgow City Council and Inverclyde Council—provide free year-round access to swimming pools for children under 16. The residents of Girvan in my constituency were dismayed to find that their swimming pool had been abandoned by South Ayrshire Council last month after SNP councillors voted to back the closure of several activity centres and other facilities.

Nicola Sturgeon suggested that Labour had made no constructive contribution. I refer her to our 15-point action plan to tackle hospital-associated infections. I know that she has already begun to consider some of the issues, but I press her to take account of the plan and to act on the recommendations, which have been backed by experts, to ensure that patients in hospitals are given the care and protection that they need.

10:00

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): This somewhat sterile debate started with a dreary droning diatribe from Johann Lamont. From what we have just heard from Cathy Jamieson, it seems as though it will not get much better from the Labour benches.

I turn to the smaller parties first. It is a wee bit rich of Murdo Fraser to talk about broken promises. I remember the first devolution referendum in 1979, when the proposal was passed by a small majority but defeated because of Labour's infamous 40 per cent rule. The Tory party promised to introduce a better devolution bill, but it completely reneged on that and, as a result, we had to wait 20 years for the establishment of the Parliament, which the Tories fought against. If we are talking about broken promises, that is a biggie.

In the 18 years in which Murdo Fraser's party was in power, it de-industrialised the country. I worked in the steel industry, and when Labour came to power in 1974 there were 27,000 steel workers. By the time the Tories came in, the figure was down to 11,000, and by the time they left office, it was in the hundreds.

George Foulkes: Will Kenneth Gibson take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser *rose*—

Kenneth Gibson: The last time I took an intervention from Lord Foulkes, he did not return the compliment when he spoke immediately after me, so I will certainly not take any interventions from him. I will take one from Mr Fraser.

Murdo Fraser: Does Mr Gibson accept that, in 1997, when the Conservative Government of glorious memory left office, Scottish manufacturing exports were at an all-time high and that, since then, they have been in decline?

Kenneth Gibson: We have a Labour Government in power in the UK. As we know, every Labour Government in history has increased unemployment and debt. It looks as though Gordon Brown's Government will follow the Labour tradition.

If we wanted to consider what the Liberal Democrats have done in power—I mean real power, not jumping on Labour's coat tails, as they did for eight years—I am afraid that we would have to go back to the days of Lloyd George and Asquith. I do not want to go back that far.

It is appalling for Cathy Jamieson to talk about the health service. She ignored the fact that, in Ayrshire, a £53 million hospital is to be built in Irvine to deliver new mental health services and that the budget is increasing from £497 million

when Labour was in power to £564.5 million. By my arithmetic, that is a 13 per cent increase in two years. Cathy Jamieson should also recall that Labour promised to spend any additional money on education, not on health, so she does not seem to know the content of her party's manifesto.

The SNP will deliver 30 per cent higher expenditure on the central heating programme by the beginning of the next financial year and more than 400 extra police officers. Police officers in my area tell me that, when Labour left office, the training centre at Tulliallan was so run down that people could not get into it. It took some time to build it up again, but a couple of weeks ago about 70 probationers came out to my constituency to ride shotgun on the buses with senior officers because Tulliallan was packed with the number of trainees that we are putting through it. We will reach our target of 1,000 extra police officers.

Members mentioned what Stirling Council and other councils are doing. We abolished ring fencing so that local councils can take their own decisions and, frankly, if Cathy Jamieson is unhappy with what local councils are doing, she should take that up with those councils. We have not introduced the proposal made by her party under its previous leader for a 3 per cent year-on-year cut in local government budgets; instead, we have allowed councils to reinvest savings. If anyone talks about the paucity of the settlement that the Scottish Government has delivered, they should think about what has come from Westminster.

Let us consider how Labour did, not in the first two years of its term in office, but in four years. *The Sunday Times* published an analysis of Labour's broken promises in its first four years. The pledge to provide a nursery school place for all three and four-year olds and the promise to promote intervention on early years education to improve literacy and numeracy were not delivered. The recruitment of 1,000 additional teachers was not delivered. Every child in Scotland was to have access to an after-school club, but after four years fewer than one in 10 children could access a club.

Labour was to halve the number of deaths from coronary heart disease and cut deaths from cancer by 20 per cent—again, that was not delivered. There was a promise to set and monitor targets to speed up treatment and shorten waiting times, but the waiting list increased by 10,000 and waiting times increased by 30 to 35 days. Labour pledged to free 60,000 children from poverty in its first term in office, but child poverty actually increased over the period to 310,000 children.

Members will love this next broken promise as it is a classic: a continued fall in council taxes coupled with high standards of service. What actually happened, of course, was a 42 per cent

increase in four years. Labour promised to speed up the operation of the courts system, but the number of crimes and offences soared by 38,000 and the number of convictions plummeted by 29,000. Of course, we have all seen the chaos that has been delivered by the UK Government in the past couple of years as a result of the global recession that the UK played a major part in creating.

I want to talk about the referendum. The Liberal Democrats want us to break a manifesto pledge on holding a referendum, which is an ironic call to make in a debate that is allegedly about breaking manifesto pledges. How bizarre is that? We all know about John Farquhar Munro's position on a referendum but, according to Richard Cook, the Tory candidate for the Westminster seat of East Renfrewshire, five Tory MSPs also support a referendum. Perhaps Murdo Fraser should take the shackles off those colleagues of his.

We should have a referendum on independence—there is no reason why we cannot have one. Yesterday, we found time to debate the 200th anniversary of Louis Braille—and why not? Yesterday also saw the Tories lodge a motion about a driving centre in Wishaw and Labour lodge one about raising money for sick kids in Edinburgh. Those are laudable topics, and we have plenty of time to debate them and similar issues, with a focus on the recession. There is no reason why we cannot have an independence referendum in order to deliver a better future for Scotland through its re-emergence as an independent sovereign state.

10:06

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this debate. We are coming to the halfway point of the SNP Administration's time in office, and we need to hold it accountable for the promises that it made at the election and examine the extent to which they have been delivered.

As the motion in Johann Lamont's name correctly points out, members on the Scottish Government benches like to focus much of their attention on powers that they do not have rather than on those that they do. This week, SNP MSPs have lodged motions on subjects ranging from the abolition of NATO to arms embargoes and fiscal autonomy. The fact is that SNP members want to talk about anything but their record in office.

It is no coincidence that, in her speech, Nicola Sturgeon did not mention schools once. Furthermore, there is not one education minister in the chamber. That great work of fiction, the 2007 SNP election manifesto, made around 30 policy commitments on education and children. Tempting

though it is, time constraints make it impossible for me to go through every promise, but they are divided into two broad categories: the clear policy commitments, which have not been kept; and motherhood-and-apple-pie platitudes, which cannot be effectively measured.

It is no coincidence that the SNP's list of supposed achievements in its amendment does not include one promise delivered on schools. Labour has a proud history of investing in our children and our schools, and it is frustrating to see the progress that we made in the first eight years of devolution being squandered by an Administration that does not share our values. While we want to give people opportunities to make the most of their lives, the SNP devotes its time to seeking opportunities to remove Scotland from the UK.

When the First Minister is forced onto the back foot, he is fond of quoting the Burns line:

"facts are chieils that winna ding."

Let us therefore have some hard facts about four key areas in which the SNP is simply failing to deliver.

On early years, the SNP pledged to

"increase the provision of free nursery education for 3 and 4 year olds by 50 per cent"

and deliver access to

"a fully qualified nursery teacher for every nursery age child".

We might expect that such promises would be delivered by an increase in the number of qualified nursery teachers. Indeed, the First Minister said on 25 September that the number of nursery teachers was increasing substantially under the SNP Government, but sadly that was another example of his all-too-familiar bluster and spin. The number of whole-time equivalent nursery teachers has fallen, not risen, on his watch. That is what the statistics say, and all of the sleight of hand and spin that the SNP machine can muster will not change that. I ask Mr Russell to tell us how that 50 per cent increase in nursery provision and improved access to nursery teachers will possibly be achieved against a backdrop of falling numbers of nursery teachers.

On physical education, the SNP manifesto was explicit:

"we will ensure that every pupil has 2 hours of quality PE each week delivered by specialist PE teachers."

Depending on whether we listen to the former Minister for Schools and Skills, who had the temerity to tell the truth on the issue, or the SNP's spin doctor, we hear that those two hours of quality PE either include time spent walking to school or will not be delivered by specialist PE

teachers. If the SNP's own ministers do not know the party's policy on PE, what hope is there for the rest of us to get to the bottom of this complete shambles? Will Mr Russell confirm in his winding-up speech whether the SNP manifesto commitment stands?

On class sizes, the SNP said:

"We will reduce class sizes in Primary 1, 2 and 3 to eighteen pupils or less".

Later, the First Minister added for good measure—in this very chamber—that that commitment would be met in this parliamentary session. At the halfway point in the session, only 13 per cent of children in primaries 1 to 3 are in classes of 18 pupils or less. Further, as was pointed out last week, at the current rate of progress, the SNP's commitment will be met not by 2011 but by 2095, give or take a year. We should also recognise that the policy is forcing up class sizes in the later years of primary school.

Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP): I would like to remind Rhona Brankin of three facts about class sizes. The proportion of classes with more than 25 pupils is now down from 38 per cent to 23 per cent. Will she congratulate the SNP-led West Lothian Council, which has more than doubled the number of children in primaries 1 to 3 who are in classes of 13 children or less from 10 per cent to just under 25 per cent? Will she—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Ms Constance, order.

Angela Constance: Does the member accept that Labour did not keep any of its class size commitments?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. Interventions should be brief, not mini-speeches.

Rhona Brankin: That was a classic case of the use of selective information. Is the member seriously telling me that class sizes are going down in all West Lothian schools? That is absolute rubbish, and I will not take any lessons from Angela Constance.

In a masterful piece of understatement, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning described the class size figures as "disappointing". They are more than that: I hope that Mr Russell or Ms Sturgeon will take the message back to Fiona Hyslop that they are a massive and embarrassing failure on the part of this Government. I say to Nicola Sturgeon that they are not something to smirk at.

There is utter confusion on the policy in the SNP ranks. The First Minister said that the promise would be delivered by 2011, but he seems to have been overruled by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities SNP education spokesperson,

who insists that there is no target for local councils, merely a vague and open-ended commitment to making progress.

On our school estate, the SNP pledged to match Labour's school-building programme "brick for brick". The same paragraph said that the Scottish Futures Trust would

"release more money to invest in the frontline".

Two years on, what progress has been made? The much-hyped Scottish Futures Trust still has not delivered a pizza, to use Alex Salmond's phrase. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has opened plenty of schools, but they were all planned and delivered by the previous Labour-led Administration. In a recent written answer, the Scottish Government claimed to have built or substantially refurbished 152 schools since May 2007, but, funnily enough, the Government was strangely coy when it came to revealing when those schools were commissioned.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member should wind up.

Rhona Brankin: I do not have time to go into the SNP's broken promise on dumping student debt, and the grotesque waste of talent that is represented by the increasing number of newly qualified teachers who are on the dole. As with so many important areas, the reality does not match the rhetoric.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must close now.

Rhona Brankin: The SNP was willing to say absolutely anything to get elected. I urge members to support the motion in Johann Lamont's name.

10:14

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): The only thing that is missing from Labour's motion is an assertion that the evil SNP Government drowns little puppy dogs.

This is the second time Parliament has had such a debate from Labour. The first took place after the Scottish Government's first six months in office. We might think that, after two years, Labour would have come to terms with the fact that it did not win the Scottish Parliament or council elections. Instead, however, it tries to suggest that the Scottish people were deluded into voting SNP. Not a bit of it—Labour is as negative now as it was during the election campaign, and that negativity explains why it did not win the Scottish Parliament election. Labour defines itself by what it is against, rather than what it stands for—first and foremost, Labour is against the SNP.

My father was in the Labour Party for most of his life. He let me stay up to watch Harold Wilson win the 1964 general election. What struck me about my dad was his deeply held belief about what Labour was for. He believed for a long time that Labour would be there for him and for the community in which we lived. I cannot remember my dad ever talking about what Labour was against—he talked about what Labour was for, and what he thought a Labour Government would do when it came to power.

Labour forgets that the votes in debates such as this do not matter that much. It matters that Labour voted down our budget, and it matters what people in our communities think about the progress that the Scottish Government has made.

George Foulkes: Will the member give way on that specific point?

Tricia Marwick: I will not take an intervention from Lord Foulkes, whether he is standing up or sitting down shouting.

It is clear that, whatever happens at 5 o'clock tonight, the people out there know that the SNP Government is delivering for them, despite the fact that it is a minority Government and the fact that the Labour Party prefers to play games and to have juvenile student-union debates instead of making the contribution that it should make in the chamber.

Today is the 25th anniversary of the start of the miners' strike. The communities in which I grew up and the communities that I have the honour of representing in the Parliament are still suffering from the effects of a Tory Government that created a scorched earth policy. When Labour came to power in 1997, it promised to end child poverty, and to reduce it by 2010. The Labour Party was in power in this Parliament for eight years, yet the levels of poverty in Levenmouth, Kennoway and parts of Glenrothes are among the highest in the country.

Gordon Brown was Chancellor of the Exchequer for much of that time, and now he is Prime Minister, striding across the world stage like the bit player he is. The man who promised to halve child poverty by next year is failing even to make a dent. The recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation states that on current estimates, the UK Government will fail to meet its target by 2010, and that to meet that target, the UK

"would have to invest an estimated £4.2 billion a year".

We have a Prime Minister who fiddled the books, and a Labour Government that could never find the money to tackle poverty, but which bailed out the banks to stop them failing. The same Labour Government has failed the one in four children in Scotland who is still living in poverty.

Scotland's children are twice as likely to be poor as those who live in Scandinavian countries.

The SNP Government has met 50 per cent of its manifesto commitments after two years. I am proud of a Government that has delivered the removal of the tolls from the Forth and Tay bridges, which was opposed by Labour and the Liberal Democrats in office; that has frozen council tax for the past two years, in comparison with a 60 per cent increase under the Labour and Liberal Democrat Administration; and which has introduced free school meals for all primary 1 to primary 3 children in Scotland, which the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats also opposed in office.

I am proud of an SNP Government that is reducing prescription charges and will abolish them, which should be compared with the increase that the UK Government announced today for charges in England; that has put the highest number of police on the streets, in comparison with the abandonment of our communities to the criminals by the Labour and Liberal Democrats; and which has abolished the graduate endowment, which Labour and the Liberal Democrats introduced.

I turn to the Liberals, who want the Government to concentrate on the economy rather than on the constitution. That is from a party that voted against an SNP Government, and then voted for it when the First Minister wrote to the Calman commission. That is hardly putting the economy first. Harriet Harman spoke recently about the court of public opinion, but in the Scottish Parliament, the unionist parties want to deny the court of public opinion—the people of Scotland—the chance to vote in a referendum on their own future.

The people voted for an SNP Government because we offered vision and hope—and we have delivered—rather than the negativity of the Labour Party. Labour has learned nothing, and as a result it will be in Opposition in the UK and in Scotland for a very long time.

10:20

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): Normally, the failures and broken promises of an incoming Government are to be condemned or regretted by Opposition parties and the general body of electors. However, in the case of the SNP Administration, we Conservatives positively welcome and commend many of the broken promises and U-turns that we have witnessed in just two years.

However, a failure being welcome or a promise being broken is no reason to ignore it; that is why, in the interests of the public record, those are duly noted in the motion. We should note the failures of

the SNP Government, because they are a testament to the fraudulent prospectus that is otherwise known as the SNP election manifesto. That document is regarded by many as being about as financially sound as the prospectus for the recent Royal Bank of Scotland rights issue—although we must remember that it was signed off by a former Royal Bank economist.

Accordingly, we must note the fact that £2 billion is not being spent on dumping student debt, which is one of the most dishonest election promises ever made by a political party in this country. It contravened every single principle of moral hazard, and if the policy had been implemented, it would have had a devastating effect on funding for other aspects of higher education. We must also note the failure to implement grants for first-time home buyers. That was another ludicrous, ill-judged and dishonest promise that was never going to see the light of day, and it was duly killed off in barely half a sentence by Nicola Sturgeon in her statement to Parliament on housing in June last year.

We particularly note—and enthusiastically welcome—the abandonment of the local income tax. Contrary to the Government's assertions, that had nothing to do with the parliamentary arithmetic which, on the local income tax issue, demonstrates that one motion was passed and another was lost. The proposal hung in the balance, and in terms of the parliamentary arithmetic, there was all to play for. In reality, the abandonment of local income tax had nothing to do with arithmetic, and everything to do with the fact that the policy was legally incompetent, fiscally illiterate and financially inept. The basic sums simply did not add up, and they never did, either before or since the current financial crisis began. The policy was condemned by every single business organisation in Scotland as well as by many others who responded to the consultation document.

If the Scottish Government gives up the fight on local income tax at the first whiff of grapeshot, with a parliamentary vote so delicately balanced, we should perhaps expect total capitulation in the face of the parliamentary vote tonight, when the Parliament will decisively reject the SNP's referendum bill proposal. Perhaps, however, the situation will be one in which arithmetic will provide the flimsiest of excuses for a retreat on one policy but will be ignored in favour of a wasteful, kamikaze divisive approach to another.

On "The Politics Show" on Sunday, Michael Russell said that the issue should be taken to a vote in the Parliament. We will not disappoint him—we will have a vote tonight. The real issue is whether he will pay any attention to the result and drop the proposal for a referendum bill, so that we

can get on with the compelling and overriding priority for Scotland: tackling the effects and consequences of the recession.

I have already commented on the ill-fated first-time buyer grants policy, which bit the dust so unceremoniously, but there are other aspects of housing policy on which the Government's attitude and approach is perverse, to say the least. Earlier this week, a Scottish Government press release stated that Nicola Sturgeon had written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer,

"urging him to take 'radical steps' and deliver new housing investment through the 2009 Budget."

She said that the UK Government must inject at least £500 million to invigorate Scotland's house building industry, and she claimed that

"Within our limited powers, the Scottish Government is doing all it can to build more homes, support the construction industry and keep the economy moving."

However, the short answer is that the Government is certainly not doing all that is within its powers to increase investment in housing. As we pointed out—not for the first time—in a debate last month, the Government is wilfully turning a blind eye to the £2 billion that Her Majesty's Treasury has put on the table to wipe out our councils' accumulated housing debt in return for their transferring—with the consent and approval of their tenants—their stock to community-based housing associations. That would facilitate a level of new investment in affordable housing in Scotland that would more than match the £500 million that Nicola Sturgeon is demanding.

Frankly, given her Government's pathetically passive, if not downright hostile, approach to stock transfer, she has a cheek to demand more money from the Treasury. There is more money on offer from the Treasury, but the Government wilfully refuses to accept it. As we know, however, brass neck has never been in short supply in the SNP. For that reason, I support the motion and the Liberal Democrat amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Elizabeth Smith, to be followed by Paul Martin.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): When it comes to election manifesto commitments on schools—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am very sorry. I got my Smiths mixed up. I call Margaret Smith.

10:26

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): How could you, Presiding Officer?

I welcome the opportunity to speak—more than I did 20 seconds ago—and to reflect on the Government's performance as we approach the

halfway mark in this session. Mr Gibson challenged our record in Government, but Liberal Democrats are happy to stand on our record of scrapping tuition fees, introducing proportional representation for local government and investing in schools and the police throughout Scotland—not to mention the record of a previous Liberal UK Government, which introduced the old-age pension. I am sure that everybody in the chamber welcomes that.

We will work with the Government on a programme of economic recovery. We proved that in the recent budget discussions. We will support the Government when it brings forward the right policies for Scotland, be it scrapping the graduate endowment or revisiting the legislation on additional support for learning, as we did in a consensual debate yesterday. I say that just to remind people that we can be consensual.

We accept that there are ways in which the constitutional situation can be changed to help our constituents directly, which is why we set up the Calman commission and encouraged the Government to engage with it so that we can work together to secure borrowing powers and more. This is why we want more powers for the Parliament—so that we can make a difference for our constituents. This is not the time to focus on a referendum, which would further destabilise Scotland and the United Kingdom at a critical time.

In the chamber three weeks ago, the First Minister claimed that the SNP had achieved almost half its headline manifesto commitments, yet to my knowledge no list has been provided. I am sure that the Government would provide such a list if it could back up its claim. Evidence of the commitments that it has failed to achieve or abandoned altogether is much more forthcoming.

Education has been one of the most disappointing areas for Government U-turns. This week, it was the legislative presumption against rural school closures that got the heave. [*Interruption.*] That is not to say that we did not welcome that. Early in the Government's term, the flagship education policy of dumping student debt was unceremoniously dumped. It was abandoned by the SNP without any attempt to build support in Parliament or to bring the matter to the chamber. That pattern has been repeated over and over again. Key election commitments have been dropped without a fight, including the local income tax and the £2,000 that the SNP promised to first-time buyers.

We are living with a minority Government that governs by assertion. No wonder it is now trying to pretend that it never made the debt pledge to students in the first place. In March 2008, Fiona Hyslop told "Politics Now" that the SNP never promised to write off student debt. Does she really

expect students to forget that “Dump the debt” was emblazoned on every leaflet and badge across every campus in the country? Scotland’s students remember that, and they know a U-turn when they see one. Unfortunately, many of them failed to recognise an undeliverable election bribe when they saw it.

During the election, the SNP also clearly promised class sizes of 18 in primaries 1 to 3 by 2011, but it is now clear that there is no obligation on councils to deliver that, and we now hear that only 13 per cent of pupils in P1 to P3 are being taught in classes of 18 or fewer. Surely the Government has to admit that it has, to all intents and purposes, abandoned that commitment as well.

What about the commitment to match brick for brick the previous Executive’s school-building programme, which led to improvements throughout Scotland? In government, the SNP has allowed building projects that were started under the previous Executive to continue while allowing new projects to stall due to delays and uncertainties because of the disaster and failure that is the Scottish Futures Trust. Only after budget negotiations with the Liberal Democrats did the Government decide to provide a funding stream to allow new school-building programmes to begin. Let me make our position crystal clear: we want the capital infrastructure that will revitalise our economy, deliver better services and guarantee work for our construction industry to be built. At present, we are able to take advantage of affordable land and homes. Edinburgh alone needs 12,000 homes in the next 10 years. There are opportunities, but the Government is failing to grasp them.

That lack of vision is part of my particular criticism of the Government. At every turn, it seems to be prepared to compromise and settle for the adequate. It said no to a direct rail link to Edinburgh airport, no to a multimodal crossing of the Forth, and no to the investment that is required to meet Edinburgh’s need for affordable housing. The Government grabs the easy option—the populist trinkets and baubles that will sparkle for a moment in a press release, but which will ultimately fade. It grabs the easy option with an unquenchable ability to blame others for its failures, whether they are local authorities, the Opposition, “spivs and speculators” or, more usually, the UK Government. However, time and again it is the Government’s own promises that are discarded—for example, on kinship care allowances or the provision of nursery teachers. Time and again, it lets us down.

The SNP inherited record numbers of police officers, but it is now clear that it will not meet its manifesto commitment to have 1,000 extra police

officers. It has been rehashing, rephrasing and recalculating that pledge since it got into office, but the bottom line is that it promised 1,000 extra police officers by 2011. If there are not 17,265 police officers on the streets of Scotland by May 2011, ministers will have failed. We know it, and the people know it. It is only the SNP that thinks that Scots cannot count.

The SNP may say that it has had to abandon some of its policies because there has been no majority for them in the Parliament, but if that were true, surely it would have abandoned its plans for independence and a referendum. There is certainly no majority in the Parliament—or in Scotland, for that matter—for a referendum. Members of the Parliament from the Liberal Democrat, Conservative and Labour parties stood on manifesto commitments against independence and against referendums. That is the majority that was elected to this place. Not for the first time, the SNP Government has managed to forget that point, but it is not the majority. It does not have some God-given right to expect something different from those of us who were elected on a commitment not to have a referendum on independence. That is indeed what we will vote for in the Parliament.

Now is not the time to waste efforts on a referendum bill. People throughout Scotland badly need Government support and realistic policies that will make a difference. The Government has dropped the local income tax proposal and the student debt pledge. Only one flagship policy remains, and it is time to drop that, too. The Government should drop its referendum bill. I urge members throughout the Parliament to vote for the Liberal Democrat amendment, which proposes that the Government do just that.

10:33

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): Many of the 1.2 million people who voted SNP during the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections marked their crosses on the ballot paper in the belief that the SNP Government would deliver 1,000 more police officers in addition to the 16,265 it inherited from the previous Government, but it is becoming clear that the SNP Government will fail to deliver on its promise.

Michael Russell: Will the member take an intervention?

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Will the member take an intervention?

Paul Martin: I will give way in a moment.

Let us be fair in this respect. Many of us on the Labour seats are fair and reasonable individuals—Margaret Curran, Johann Lamont and Hugh

Henry, among others. We can be reasonable, and we accept that the Government faces many challenges in delivering its manifesto commitments. The SNP Government has created a niche market in blaming the Opposition when the going gets tough. Let us be clear—we do not oppose the Government's plan to deliver 1,000 more police officers than it inherited, but what we need from the Government is for it to show humility, and not the projection study that Nicola Sturgeon mentioned.

Michael Russell: In the spirit of fairness—although I would not be entirely convinced by the members whom Paul Martin cited as evidence of that—does he accept that the projection study that the cabinet secretary mentioned today will give us the answer once and for all? I am sure that the member will be glad that we will all know the answer.

Paul Martin: I will not take lectures from Mike Russell on fairness.

Today's debate gives the SNP Government the opportunity to say to the Scottish people that it is sorry for its broken promises, including the failure to deliver an increase in the number of police officers to 17,265 by 2011. I sense that some SNP members are perplexed by my comments, but they have this opportunity to rebut what I have said. I see that both Kenny Gibson, who is an ambitious back bencher, and Nigel Don, who is a veteran member of the Justice Committee, are in the chamber. They have this opportunity to rebut my comments by confirming that the Government will have 17,265 police officers in place as per the SNP's manifesto commitment. I will welcome a rebuttal from Kenny Gibson on that point.

Kenneth Gibson: We said that we would deliver 1,000 extra police officers by the end of the parliamentary session and I expect us to do that. We have delivered 441 additional officers in less than two years, so there is no reason why we cannot reach 1,000. I am sure that the projection will show that we are on course to do that.

Paul Martin: I welcome that point from the ambitious back bencher, Kenny Gibson. I wonder what that commitment will do to his career. We can watch with interest.

SNP members also have the opportunity to correct me if I am wrong in saying that, of the 441 police officers to whom Kenny Gibson referred, 197 were recruited by money that was provided by local authorities. In press reports earlier this week, rather than express his thanks to local authorities for making sacrifices in their budgets to bail him out, Mr MacAskill sought to put the SNP's spin on the very little progress that has been made and on the budgetary commitments that the Government has failed to make. As I have said on many

previous occasions, it is unacceptable that the SNP Government should claim that its interventions have made a difference to police numbers. I have a restricted document with me today that confirms that, despite the SNP Government's conditioning of the public message, the SNP's interventions have not made a difference on police numbers. The document shows that many of our police authorities intended to review their recruitment levels regardless of the Government's intervention.

On previous occasions, many members have asked why the Labour Party did not promise to deliver 1,000 extra police officers, so I remind them that making the promise is easy, but delivering on the promise is the challenge. The people will judge the Government not on the promises that it made but on the broken promises on which it has not delivered. I remind Tricia Marwick that, although that might be what the SNP Government stands for, that is not what the Labour Party stands for. We stand for honesty and for giving the people of Scotland manifesto commitments on which we will deliver.

On tackling alcohol abuse, there can be no doubt that the Scottish Government—through the offices of Kenny MacAskill—has grabbed many of the headlines. One of those has been that the polluter should pay. In August 2007, Mr MacAskill said:

"The effects of alcohol on our city and town centres is not cost free and those who profit from it must contribute to addressing it. It's not right that taxpayers pick up the whole of the bill, licensees should pay their way too."

Such a "get tough" message on alcohol abuse from the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has received support on previous occasions from those of us on the Labour benches. During the passage of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005, I lodged an amendment that would have allowed us to ensure that the polluter pays, but my amendment was opposed by Fergus Ewing and Bruce Crawford. Because of their opposition, we were unable to introduce that polluter-pays principle. Mike Rumbles—whom I see on the other side of the chamber—will recall that amendment. The polluter-pays principle is not accepted by all members of the Scottish Government, which is divided on the issue. I remind the Government that opposition to the polluter-pays principle came not from the Labour benches but from the SNP benches.

In conclusion, I call on the Parliament to support the motion in the name of Johann Lamont.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I definitely call Elizabeth Smith.

10:39

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I think that voters look for three things in election manifesto commitments on schools: they want our children to be able to read, write and count properly; they want good classroom discipline; and they want our children to have a well-rounded education, which goes well beyond what happens inside the classroom.

What is the reality of the SNP's school report card? Remarkably, the SNP's manifesto made no mention of the words "literacy" and "numeracy". Notwithstanding that glaring omission, we have been reassured in Parliament on countless occasions that improving literacy and numeracy is at the heart of the Government's schools strategy. So it should be, not least because of the vast number of academic studies that have identified that Scotland should be doing so much better, especially in the later years of primary school. That point was clearly agreed in our very first debate of 2009, when the Parliament unanimously supported a Conservative amendment

"to ensure that pupils in Scotland are properly schooled and tested in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy by the end of primary 7".

After that debate, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning said that she was particularly pleased by the consensus that had been demonstrated throughout the debate about the need to maintain a strong focus on improving literacy and numeracy skills from the early years. Good. However, as a result of Parliament's resolution, the cabinet secretary has an obligation to take action on testing literacy and numeracy by the end of primary 7. We do not need more testing in terms of quantity: we need more rigorous testing that cannot be misinterpreted, held back, pushed forward or diluted as the political mood suits.

Margo MacDonald: I agree thoroughly with Elizabeth Smith, but can she outline how she would deal with pupils who fall below the qualifying standards?

Elizabeth Smith: I can provide Margo MacDonald with an article that I wrote for *The Times Educational Supplement*, in which I deal with that matter.

On school discipline, the SNP said clearly that it did not believe that Labour had tackled the issue effectively. In opposition, Fiona Hyslop made strong pleas for regular publication of statistics showing the levels of serious indiscipline in schools, but in government she will not hear of that because, she claims, it is far too difficult to get comparable statistics.

Well let me give the SNP some comparable statistics: physical assaults with a weapon increased from 286 in 2006-07 to 366 in 2007-08; physical and verbal assaults on school staff rose from 6,398 in 2006 to 9,121 in 2007; 126,000 school days have been lost to exclusions and, in a staggering 85 per cent of cases, it seems that no other educational provision is made. However, there has still been no SNP-led Parliament debate on school discipline. Despite the fact that discipline issues are at the very top of the agenda for teachers and teaching unions, nothing has been done to tackle the problem. "Never mind," says the SNP, "because smaller class sizes will be a far more effective way of addressing both the 3Rs and discipline issues." This is the SNP's great flagship policy:

"We will reduce class sizes in Primary 1, 2 and 3 to eighteen pupils or less"—

although I think that it meant to say "or fewer".

What happened? Only four local authorities said that they could deliver the policy with existing resources. The Association of Directors of Education in Scotland said that the policy, which the SNP costed at £40 million, would cost more like £422 million. In 15 of the 32 single outcome agreements, no mention is made of class size policy. Worse, this week it was revealed that the rate of progress was precisely 0.9 per cent, at which rate the policy would take 22 parliamentary sessions to be delivered. That makes a complete mockery of the SNP's policy and its concordat.

If that is not enough, there are similar stories to tell about failures to deliver on crumbling school buildings, teacher employment numbers, school meals, physical education—which I see is being called "motivation" this morning—and access to a full-time nursery teacher. That is a shameful record, for which the Scottish Government should apologise unreservedly to parents, pupils and teachers.

10:44

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland)
(SNP): First, I thank Margaret Smith for reminding us that the Liberals were once in government somewhere. She has made me feel younger than I have ever felt before.

I know that Opposition members need to do something with their debating time, but to set aside a whole morning's debate on our alleged failures, when we would need—and I am being kind—debate after debate after debate to examine their failures, is a waste of our time. I refer to the eight unimaginably dull years of Labour's marriage of convenience with the Liberal Democrats. We are having this debate against the background of 13 years of Labour mismanagement from

Westminster, where, as we all know, the real power lies—as the current depression demonstrates. We have had 13 years—unlucky for the Scottish people. Let us hope that Gordon “Blunder” Brown, who is clinging to hopes of redemption by shamelessly fawning at the feet of Barack Obama and cooing up to Congress, calls a general election soon.

It is unfortunate that Johann Lamont is not here. In her heroic and desperate spin on Labour failure she tried to body-swerve the economic disaster of that financial guru and saviour of the financial world, hapless Gordon. Unfortunately for Gordon, he is at odds once again with Alistair Darling, who knows blame when he sees it, unlike Gordon or Harriet Harman, who, trapped like a rabbit in the media headlights, said blindly that Sir Fred Goodwin—who was knighted by Labour for services to banking—will not receive his pension because Gordon says so. That is okay then. I look forward to the Sir Fred Goodwin stripped of his pension retrospectively bill being introduced soon at Westminster.

As Gordon Brown swans around the States desperate to look relevant, Scotland's economy and jobs crash. Without real financial powers in Scotland, we are fire fighting. As jobs are lost and marriages end under the burden of debt, this Government has to pick up the pieces for people who are made homeless and whose health, happiness and future crack under the strain. It is our health service that will pick up the pieces.

What a bare-faced cheek to turn on this Government, which faces a further £500 million Westminster cut in its budget. That is completely the wrong way forward.

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Christine Grahame: I will let in the rising star.

David Whitton: Dear me. Compliments from the SNP—I should be worried. What does Mrs Grahame say about the 25,000 jobs that have been lost as a result of the failure to introduce the Scottish Futures Trust?

Christine Grahame: Mr Whitton should look at the crash of jobs that will take place week after week in Scotland. What he has just said is a prime example of his failure to recognise that the problems for Scotland start with London control.

Just for the record, Andy Kerr told me that Mr Whitton was a rising star.

The economy needs stimulating through infrastructure investment and there are strains and stresses in our rented sector, housing and the NHS.

When it was in power, Labour failed to get attendance allowance back when Scotland introduced free personal care—that is £40 million down the tubes. We would not even get our council tax benefit back if we introduced local income tax—another £450 million down the tubes.

It is unfortunate that David McLetchie is not in the chamber. He moaned about housing, but £500 million went on the trams in Edinburgh, which are absolutely hated. It is as rare as hen's teeth to find somebody living in the capital city who wants the trams—and the cost is rising.

Margo MacDonald: The member has just met someone living in the capital city who has the vision to see why we should have a proper tram system and who looks to this Government for enough money to provide it.

Christine Grahame: As members know, I am very friendly with Margo MacDonald, but I have not checked her teeth recently. People in the capital city who support the trams project know that it is turning into a fiasco.

We must not forget the Borders railway. Mike Rumbles, who listed all the transport projects, would not let me intervene. For 30 years, David Steel—from boy to Lord Steel of Aikwood—did not deliver a railway in the Borders—that is the Liberal Democrat legacy. This Government put money into the structures that are being put in place.

The Liberal Democrats have been exposed as anything but the party of democracy. John Farquhar Munro has been sent into exile—perhaps to bury the metaphorical cow, we shall never know—but he is not allowed here today to speak freely for the party of democracy.

Even Tavish Scott said, of the constitutional future of Scotland, in *The Scotsman* on 27 August 2008:

“I am not intuitively against making sure that people have a choice and an opportunity to cast a vote on these things.”

Where is Tavish Scott today? What do the Liberals believe in? We do not know.

Another figure has been banished from the chamber. Where is Wendy Alexander now?

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

Christine Grahame: I beg her pardon. She has arrived. I am delighted to take an intervention from the not-forgotten Wendy Alexander, who said, “Bring it on.” The Labour Party is not saying that anymore; it is supporting all the other unionists.

Ms Alexander: Why did the SNP not take the opportunity when it was given it?

Christine Grahame: We are taking it. Wendy Alexander can vote with us tonight and reject her

party's motion. She should join us—we are on her side.

10:50

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Had my amendment been selected, I would have tried to persuade my friends and acquaintances, and others in the Government, that when they are in a hole they really should stop digging. The referendum was proposed about a decade ago, when the SNP was not cutting too much mustard. It was a bad idea then to try to short-circuit an honest campaign of information about the merits of independence and it is an even worse idea now, given current global political and economic affairs.

Had my amendment been selected, I would also have tried to appeal to my friends and opponents in the Opposition parties in the Parliament. I would have asked them to admit that the political landscape has changed dramatically since they first pounced on the SNP's ill-thought-out tactic—the referendum is a tactic, not a policy or a strategy—as a convenient stick with which to beat it. The Opposition parties also owe it to Scots to probe fundamentally many of the assumptions that marked the previous demarcation line between nationalists and unionists.

Ever since the Parliament was established, the certainty felt by many—perhaps most—members in the pro-union parties that Westminster was Scotland's best shield against comparative poverty, aggressive attack and anonymity on the world stage must have been shaken, if not shattered, by the proof of Westminster's inability to shelter us from economic storms now or in the future.

Let us have a national catch-up campaign to work out where stands Scotland in what might be a brave, and is certainly a new world order, instead of the tired old reprise of the old arguments and politicians singing the same old songs at each other.

I have always believed that we can achieve the optimum benefit for all the people who live in Scotland only if we stretch ourselves to the limit, exercise full sovereign powers, rely on our determination and imagination and accept responsibility for the effect of our actions on people outwith our borders. That is how we will grow as a community and a nation. That is what I have always wanted for Scotland, and since I have been in this Parliament that belief has grown.

How we express our unique contribution to the global economy and to internationalism must change with the times. To pick up on what Mr Rumbles said, this Parliament requires the sovereignty, or independence, to order its own priorities, whether in defence, foreign relations or

social policies. The dominance of London, which was the centre of perhaps the greatest empire that the world has ever seen, lives on in folk memory and in its assumptions about how it relates to the rest of the country. We must establish equality in the union.

In the other union of which we are a part, times are a changing—perhaps we should think about changing, too. Following enlargement, countries in the European Union with a common interest are forming groups such as the Mediterranean group and the Baltic group. That is probably inevitable. Should not the offshore grouping of islands presently encompassed in the British-Irish Council respond to EU and global realpolitik by developing co-operation in policies and operations and a social union among the peoples of these islands?

If we establish sovereignty for Scotland and Wales, if that is what the Welsh want, what is to hinder the formation of a new union among the nations and regions of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland—or a united Ireland, if that is what the communities there want—the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands? Perhaps there can even be a new style of autonomy for our island groups in the north, if that is what they want. I suggested that such co-operation could be referred to as a new union, but it would be a union of the spirit, not of the institutions and fixed furniture of Government. The latter can be overtaken by events, as we have just seen. That is one element of the educative and informative debate that the Parliament should be encouraging, in addition to the SNP Government—along with the other political parties—running a programme of information explaining the differences between devolved and sovereign powers and the impact on the work of the Parliament.

I urge my fellow MSPs not to put the cart before the horse. A referendum is a mechanism, not a holy grail or sacred flame, which, to hear some Nationalists talk these days, one would think that it was.

We need first to think about the new possibilities. When our fellow citizens have had a chance to reflect on the choices that are open to them, the time might be right to talk about having a test of opinion and a referendum.

10:56

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): Yesterday, the Local Government and Communities Committee had the pleasure of hearing the new Minister for Housing and Communities set out his hopes for housing in Scotland. However, not even Mr Neil's dulcet tones could disguise the failures of this SNP minority Government on housing.

As we have heard, the first promise to bite the dust was that of giving all first-time home buyers a £2,000 grant. I must confess something: the SNP was right to drop that promise. The scheme was never going to work. It would have risked distorting the market and it would not have been a cost-effective use of public money. That said, I must put the question: was the SNP incompetent, or worse, in making the promise?

The biggest challenge for home owners at the moment is the risk of repossession. At best, the SNP Government has been complacent in its response to repossessions. When urged by my colleague Cathy Jamieson and other MSPs such as Ross Finnie, Margo MacDonald and Patrick Harvie to introduce the same court protections that people in England and Wales enjoy, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing said that she knew best. Despite people in England and Wales having a court protocol that ensures that repossession is a last resort and an automatic right to legal aid, Ms Sturgeon has done nothing. The Minister for Housing and Communities has now arranged to meet Mike Dailly of Govan Law Centre to discuss such issues. We can only hope that, although the cabinet secretary was not prepared to listen and act, the minister will be.

The Scottish Government might try to defend its record by claiming that the examples that I have quoted thus far relate to the private sector, over which it has no control and therefore for which it cannot be held responsible. However, it has no such defence when it comes to its record on public house building. It has caused problems for housing associations, including in terms of their development programmes.

We heard earlier from the cabinet secretary—I am sorry that she is not now in the chamber—that she is a huge and passionate supporter of the housing association movement. Despite that, she has cut the grant funding to housing associations. Individual housing associations are now having to find an average of £10,000 additional funding per unit for their development programmes. Having to find that additional money has meant that they have had to reduce the number of houses that they propose to build.

Even after hearing all the evidence in which people said that the policy was the wrong policy at the wrong time, the cabinet secretary's response was only partially to reduce the cut. The announcement in February that half the cut was to be reinstated was too little, too late. We will see the effect on completion rates in future.

Last week, the Scottish Government published figures for housing starts and completions. We all expected to see a reduction in the figures for the private sector, but the most damning figures were those for the public sector starts and completions

for which this Government is responsible. In the second quarter of 2007, housing association starts were 550, and yet, by the second quarter of 2008, the figure had fallen to 320—a reduction of 230.

The figures for completion—possibly the most important figures, as they relate to houses that are ready for people to live in—also show a fall. In the first three quarters of 2007, 2,881 houses were completed and yet, in the first three quarters of 2008, the figure had fallen to 2,041—a reduction of 840, or 29 per cent. How can this Government possibly justify such a reduction, particularly as demand for housing is increasing? New build housing is important because of the increased demand for affordable housing. If we are to meet the 2012 homelessness targets, the Scottish Government needs to increase the number of new builds, not let the figure decrease.

Tricia Marwick: I am interested in what the member says about the homelessness target. Does she agree with Iain Gray that the Labour Government introduced the best homelessness legislation in Scotland and then did not fund it?

Mary Mulligan: Clearly, Ms Marwick did not listen to Iain Gray. The previous Executive built over 31,000 affordable homes.

Tricia Marwick: That is not—

Mary Mulligan: Perhaps Ms Marwick would like to listen to what the likes of Shelter Scotland, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, the Scottish Council for Single Homeless and the local authorities have to say. They have been warning that the 2012 target will not be reached. We are talking not about a target, but real homes for real people.

We know that one of the best ways in which to tackle homelessness is through prevention. Shelter tells us that calls to its helpline have increased by 130 per cent and yet cuts are being made to its budgets, such as to its family project in Edinburgh. What is the Scottish Government doing about that? Nothing.

In the debate, we have heard anger and frustration at the Scottish Government's lack of direction and—crucially—action. At a time of increased demand for housing, we are seeing a reduction in housing starts and completions. At a time when construction jobs are plummeting, the SNP Government has cut housing association grant funding, an action that has led to fewer jobs being available.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): You should be finishing now, Ms Mulligan.

The Scottish Government needs to build more houses, provide more jobs, deal with repossessions and homelessness, and reinstate

all the cuts that it has made to the housing association grant. This time, it has to take action and not just make empty promises.

11:02

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): In May 2007, many hoped for a new era in Scottish politics. People hoped that a minority Government would lead to a more mature, positive and constructive approach to politics in Scotland. What a small hope that was. Bizarrely, within five months, new Labour lodged a motion in which it condemned Government failures. Again, before the Government has even completed its second term, new Labour has brought forward another debate on the same issue.

So desperate is new Labour that, when the SNP Government announced that Scotland now had 440 new police officers, its spokespersons did not welcome that—oh no, they did not—but condemned it as a failure. Only new Labour could condemn a Government for achieving the halfway point in a programme prior to—not after, but prior to—it reaching the halfway point of its term in office.

Rhona Brankin: Will the member give way?

Bill Wilson: No, thank you.

The only failure is the collective failure of common sense on new Labour benches. Have Labour members never heard of the boy who cried wolf? Is the last speaker not a member of the party that increased homelessness by 50 per cent during its rule?

However, I will, in the spirit of reasonable and positive co-operation, consider Government failures. Can I think of one? It is true to say that the Government has failed on one issue: it failed to protect the Post Office from the wholesale destruction that new Labour visited upon it. The Scottish Government could not stop new Labour from stripping from the functions of the Post Office the payment of road tax, television licences and the direct payment of pensions—that list merely scratches the surface.

Members should not take my word for that. In *The Guardian* of 24 February, the former Labour minister, Peter Hain, said that under

“a ludicrous and unfair system of promoting competition, which I’m afraid our Government”—

that is Labour, by the way—

“has been responsible for, private operators were able to provide the profitable mail services while the Royal Mail had to provide the expensive ones”.

That is what a former Labour minister said about his party’s policies in systematically weakening the Post Office.

Just as new Labour salami sliced the services at the Vale of Leven hospital, so too has it salami sliced the services that the Post Office provides. In both cases, the aim is the same: the destruction of a formerly effective public service. It is also true to say that the Scottish Government could not stop the new Labour initiated post office consultation, which delivered savage cuts to post offices throughout Scotland. As yet, the Scottish Government has not stopped new Labour, under the leadership of the not once but twice disgraced Lord Mandelson, privatising the Post Office—a privatisation based on spurious justifications that have been demolished by the Communication Workers Union.

We now have the bizarre example of Hugh Henry calling for the Post Office to become a people’s bank while simultaneously supporting a Labour Government that is hell-bent on destroying that very organisation.

The new Labour motion condemns the Scottish Government’s pursuit of the policy of independence, as if pursuit of independence is separate from the Scottish Government’s commitment to seek not only to build a fairer Scotland but to contribute towards building a fairer planet.

A brief look at the foreign policy of the United Kingdom, with particular attention to the unethical policies of new Labour, clearly reveals why, if Scotland wishes to contribute to a better world, it must do so outwith, and disassociated from, the brutal foreign policies of Westminster. In Indonesia, the UK helped Suharto in his coup and the UK provided the weapons to attack East Timor. More than 1 million Indonesians and East Timorese died, with new Labour fully complicit in their murder. For seven years, the UK has been fighting in Afghanistan. The justifications that new Labour provides for that are remarkably similar to those provided by the Soviets. New Labour cannot claim that it is fighting for democracy in Afghanistan while it backs the most brutal and vicious of warlords. In respect of equality, it is now more dangerous to be a woman in Afghanistan than it was under the Taliban.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Bill Wilson: No. Sorry, but I am short of time.

In Diego Garcia, the native people were ethnically cleansed from the island by new Labour and those people are still dying in exile in Mauritius. [*Laughter.*] I do not think that that is a cause for laughter. I point out to Labour members that their Government cleared those people from the island and left them to die in exile.

In Iraq, new Labour supported US sanctions. More than 1 million died, including at least

500,000 children under the age of five—Halliday and other senior United Nations officials were unequivocal that it was genocide. New Labour then started a war—another million dead and 2 million fled. New Labour can claim no moral superiority over Saddam: 2 million dead and 2 million fled.

Murdo Fraser: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: One moment, please, Mr Wilson. I have had a good look at the motion and the amendment and I am slightly concerned about the way in which you have moved away from what we are supposed to be discussing. It would be helpful if you could consider that and come back to the motion and the SNP's amendment—

Bill Wilson: Presiding Officer—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If you continue along these lines, I may have to consider ruling you out of order, and please do not speak while I am speaking. Thank you.

Murdo Fraser: Thank you, Presiding Officer. That addresses my point of order.

Bill Wilson: Presiding Officer, the motion and the SNP's amendment both clearly mention independence. Given that, it is right and proper that I mention the struggle for independence and discuss why it is necessary.

What reasonable person can object to the fundamental principle that the people of a nation have the right to determine its destiny in a referendum? As for unreasonable persons, there are, of course, the Liberal Democrats. They are liberal, so long as people agree with them, and they are democratic, as long as they decide what goes. Has a party ever been so inappropriately named?

Margaret Smith: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Wilson should be finishing now, thank you.

Bill Wilson: The Scottish Government has reintroduced free education—a Government success—against new Labour opposition.

The Scottish Government's refusal to bow to new Labour's agenda of privatisation, its rejection of new Labour's unethical foreign policies and its insistence on the democratic rights of the Scots are no failure. Rather, they are a resounding success.

11:09

David Whittton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): What a shame it is that Bill Wilson did not get elected to the leadership of the SNP.

Throughout the morning, we have heard about the many areas in which the SNP minority Government is failing the people of Scotland. I will focus my brief remarks on what is probably the greatest failure of all—the utter failure of the SNP to tackle the problems facing the Scottish economy.

According to the First Minister, Alex Salmond, "Scotland's greatest asset is our people",

yet the organisation tasked with delivering training for the people, Skills Development Scotland, is in turmoil, having declared that it will have to make 160 of its staff redundant. You could not make it up. The SNP Government will have to put a PACE team into the organisation that runs the PACE teams to see whether it can find alternative jobs for the jobseekers.

Elsewhere, Scottish Enterprise has been neutered and the business gateway service is in a mess. It takes some doing to get the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the Institute of Directors to combine, with many other organisations reflecting Scottish opinion, in opposing the SNP Government's flagship policy of local income tax. Despite repeated warnings that it would not work and a universal monsterring in the court of public opinion, which is so favoured by Tricia Marwick, Mr Swinney ploughed on. Even as late as 2 January, he was saying:

"The Government is working towards bringing forward a bill in 2009 to abolish the unfair council tax and replace it with a fairer system of local income tax."

Last month, Mr Swinney finally bowed to the inevitable and announced that he was abandoning SNP plans to introduce local income tax—that is another broken promise.

Both Mr Swinney and Mr Salmond repeatedly talk of planned reductions in public spending that are due to be introduced next year. The truth is that the Scottish budget will increase in real terms over the next three years; the Scottish Government will have £100 billion to spend in that period, but we do not hear about that.

The Scottish Government does not have much to say about its Scottish Futures Trust, either; a scheme so good that no one would use anything else to fund public procurement—the SNP even said that it would pay for the new Forth bridge. Fourteen months later Scotland is still waiting for the SFT. Meanwhile, the pipeline of construction projects has dried up and 25,000 jobs—yes, 25,000, Christine Grahame—have been lost.

What we have in the current SNP economic policy is an SNP-started, Swinney-supported, Sturgeon-sanctioned, Salmond slump that has cost Scotland dear in jobs lost and missed investment opportunities; it is a massive failure in

economic policy. Each P45 received by a Scottish worker has “delivered by the SNP” stamped on it.

Labour produced a 15-point plan to stimulate the Scottish economy. It was so good that Mr Swinney plagiarised most of it, but he has not implemented all of it. There is more to do and he should be doing it. Only yesterday, the Treasury and the Scotland Office pointed the way for the SNP Government to pay for the new Forth crossing—once again, devolution is delivering.

The true test of the SNP's economic policy is whether the SNP means what it says about the people of Scotland being the country's greatest asset and delivering for them.

If everything is so wonderful in the SNP's la-la land and Labour is so unpopular, how does Tricia Marwick explain the Labour victory in the Glenrothes by-election, in the heart of her constituency? The good people of Fife know when they have been conned, and the people of Scotland know it too. Their verdict on the SNP council and the SNP Government is that it has failed.

11:13

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): There is no doubt that many people voted for the SNP in the 2007 election on the basis of a series of high-profile and clear policies. It was not a groundswell for independence. People were more concerned about education and their children's schools, policing in their communities and the fairness of local taxation. [*Interruption.*] Mr Gibson, who is already intervening from a sedentary position, et al on the SNP benches cited the support for a referendum of my friend John Farquhar Munro, Lord Ashdown, Lord Forsyth and Wendy Alexander but, as Margo MacDonald reminded us, we should not conflate a tactic with a belief in independence. We could equally look at what Michael Russell, who is summing up in the debate, said about the SNP's European policy in 2004. He said:

“at the time of independence, we should have a referendum on continued membership, fairly argued and with equal resources on both sides. Then Scotland will decide.”

Does the Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution still agree with the member who was standing for the leadership of his party? A free vote in the SNP on that issue may well be his next call, and I am glad to see that the debate on NATO has resumed on the SNP back benches.

If there were a parliamentary majority in this place for such measures, the debate would be different, but there is not—as will be amply demonstrated at decision time. All that we ask is

that the SNP uses the same arguments that it has used for student debt and for local income tax when it comes to the tactic of a referendum.

At a time when gross domestic product figures are telling us that the recession will be longer and deeper in Scotland than it will be in any other part of the UK, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government must stand up, listen and act strongly. A separation debate is not the response to a long and deep recession in Scotland. We should be looking more to Catalonia than to Quebec for an international example.

The SNP amendment calls for the “lively” continuation of the national conversation, but the ministerial blogs that were so frequent in 2007 are rather quieter in 2009. Through a freedom of information request, we found out that, before the collapse of the Icelandic economy, more than 100 references to Iceland were made in internal Scottish Government documents; in the three months that followed the collapse, there was only one such reference. In Norway, income tax on middle-income earners is 15 per cent higher than it is in Scotland. In Ireland, a crisis budget has been put forward.

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Jeremy Purvis: I will give way to Professor Harvie later, if I have time.

Are Norway and Ireland the models for us to follow? The Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution said in the foreword to his book “Grasping the Thistle”:

“becoming independent is very different now for Scotland than it was, for example, a century ago for Norway or Ireland.”

Perhaps his co-author wrote that part. The minister suggested on Sunday that his co-author wrote most of the dangerous parts of the book.

Nicola Sturgeon said that Scotland needs sovereignty over fiscal power. However, the SNP Government would keep the pound sterling before entering the euro zone. The cabinet secretary said that Scotland should have sovereignty over all economic policy, but the SNP would keep the Bank of England and British interest rates.

Margo MacDonald: The member has just illustrated the point that I wanted to make. Those arguments stopped when chaos hit the international money markets. We do not need to have those arguments any more; we have moved on.

Jeremy Purvis: It is unfortunate, but 47 members of the Parliament are not listening to Ms MacDonald. There might well be an opportunity for people whose approach is more gradualist to

engage in a proper debate, and the route for that might well be through the Calman process, into which the SNP has been dragged kicking and screaming. We do not know whether Margo MacDonald is joining the Liberal benches as a new federalist. The question is how we take forward the Scottish economy in a recession that will be longer and deeper here than it will be in other parts of the UK. The situation is not helped by the grinding to a halt of infrastructure projects under the current Administration, which happened before the recession started.

The SNP Government does not acknowledge its responsibility. It blames councils if they do not do what it wants them to do, and it blames the UK Government at all other times. The SNP will never say that it has received a sufficient budget from Westminster. Westminster was being blamed even when Alex Salmond was praising the management of HBOS in September and committing £100 billion that he did not have from a Scottish central bank that it was not his policy to establish. The credibility of a key plank of the SNP's argument has gone.

Local income tax was supposed to be a talisman that would create the kind of society that the SNP wanted. Clear promises were made to students to dump their debt. The Forth replacement crossing was to be paid for by patriotic Scottish families, who would buy patriotic Scottish bonds through the Scottish Futures Trust. All those policies, which were critical to the Government's core programme, are in shreds—and I have not mentioned class sizes and other policies.

We will work with the Government on areas on which there is common ground. However, our minority Government has a majority ego, which at times is hard to stomach. The SNP cannot call for greater sovereignty over Scottish affairs if it will not take responsibility for decisions that are within its power.

11:19

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): What has been described as stage 1 of the referendum (Scotland) bill is drawing to an end. It was predictable that the debate would generate more heat than light, but the debate has had the remarkable effect of uniting in a common purpose members of greatly contrasting views. Who would have thought that we would find united under one banner Murdo Fraser and Johann Lamont, David McLetchie and Mike Rumbles, and me and Margaret Curran? That is a situation that I think will make Margaret Curran even more uncomfortable than it makes me.

Members on the Conservative benches are fair. As Murdo Fraser said, it has not all been failure. I

am quite sincere when I say that progress has been made towards a replacement Forth crossing; the burden of business rates for small businesses has been alleviated; a new drugs policy is being introduced; and there is a £60 million commitment to a town centre regeneration scheme.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member give way?

Bill Aitken: No. I am short of time.

Mike Rumbles: On police numbers?

Bill Aitken: I am coming to that.

However, a review of the Government's record, under almost any heading, is a depressing exercise. Many sections of Scottish society will be bitterly disillusioned, including students, teachers, parents and victims of crime. The SNP's culpability lies not in its inability to fulfil its promises but in the making of those promises in the first place, when there was not a scintilla of hope of their being fulfilled. In economic and financial terms, some of the promises that the SNP made were abject nonsense. The SNP's failure has been brought about not by the lack of a parliamentary majority but by promising policies that were never going to work. That lesson must be brought home to the SNP.

On education, the SNP has left a string of broken promises on class sizes, teacher numbers and student debt. The SNP said in its manifesto:

"it's time to dump student debt."

That commitment was dumped. The SNP said:

"We will reduce class sizes in Primary 1, 2 and 3 to eighteen pupils".

There has been little progress on that, and the SNP's failure to make a legislative commitment to the policy indicates that it ain't going to happen.

The SNP's promise to maintain teacher numbers despite falling school rolls is inconsistent with a situation in which one in five student teachers cannot find a job, as we heard as recently as December.

On justice, there has been scant regard for the victims of crime. I concede that there has been progress on police numbers, given the number of officers who are coming out of Tulliallan, but the SNP had to be dragged kicking and screaming to agree in last year's budget to increase the 2007 figure by 1,000. How the SNP achieves that is for the SNP, but the money has been allocated for that purpose and the increase simply must be achieved.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member give way?

Bill Aitken: I am sorry. I am short of time.

The SNP, with its soft-touch-Scotland approach, has failed to appreciate the difficulties that victims

of crime experience. The irresponsible use of home detention curfew to reduce prison numbers is shocking. Tomorrow, we will learn the precise terms of the criminal justice and licensing bill, which I suspect will resemble a neds' charter in many respects. The SNP has floated unrealistic proposals on licensing, which will not find a majority in the Parliament and would not help to address the problem that they are intended to address, which is tragic.

Government is about priorities. Surely, a major priority was the SNP's commitment to first-time home buyers. What happened to that? It was binned, because it was never practically possible. The commitment to local income tax was binned, because in financial terms it was arrant nonsense.

There is no demand for independence. At a time of acute financial difficulty, the like of which the country has never experienced, the SNP is going off on a frolic of its own. I have seen no credible canvass of public opinion that suggests that there is more than 25 per cent support for independence.

Kenneth Gibson: Will the member give way?

Bill Aitken: It is too late.

The SNP won the 2007 election—just—and I concede that it had a spectacular result in the by-election for the Glasgow East Westminster constituency, but those results were more a commentary on the unpopularity of the Labour Government than an indication of a popular wish for independence.

We may have differing ideas around the chamber as to how to sort out the economic problems that we face. Whose fault the problems are can perhaps be debated another day, but they cannot wait for us to address them. Mr Russell in particular should apply his undoubted energies and abilities not to this frolic of his own but to introducing, in conjunction with his colleagues, cogent plans for improving Scotland's economy.

11:25

The Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution (Michael Russell): As this is my first opportunity to talk about my future frolic, I look forward to it very much indeed. I do not know what it will do for me, but it is certainly making a great deal of money for my publishers. I know that they are profoundly grateful.

I have a certain sense of déjà vu this morning, because we have had so many of these debates in the past. To be entirely fair, we had them when the SNP was in opposition and now we have them when Labour is in opposition. However, perhaps none has been as gloomy as this one, which was led, of course, by the rainmaker of Scottish

politics, Johann Lamont, a woman who can conjure up the blackest of clouds out of the bluest of skies. I have to say that I was beginning to lose the will to live after about a minute and a half of that.

However, a shaft of light came eventually from an unlikely source: Mary Mulligan. She talked about the debate being the result of pent-up "anger and frustration." Indeed, that is true and it shows up, I am afraid, the rather nasty side of what used to be called the people's party. The pent-up anger and frustration are not in the Scottish people, as Mary Mulligan indicated, but in the 46 Labour MSPs, whose sense of historic inevitability about their right to rule was shattered in May 2007. Until they recognise what they have done wrong, they will be unable to do anything right—I give them that useful contribution.

I have long believed that what people in Scotland want is a positive approach to politics. They want ambition in Scotland. They do not want to be talked down to; they want to be talked up. What we have heard from every Labour speaker today, alas, is simply a talking down. It is frustration that they are not sitting in the Government seats in the chamber. However, the reason why they are not sitting in these seats is that they did so little so badly when they were here.

I will devote most of my attention to the issue of the referendum. The Liberal Democrat amendment is a dangerous and worrying one that needs to be tackled seriously, so I will tackle it very seriously indeed. Before I do so, let me just say a word or two about infrastructure. We could talk about a range of other things, but nothing that we have heard about specific policies is true, so let us put that to one side.

Rhona Brankin: Can the Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution list the SNP Government's achievements on its promises on schools?

Michael Russell: Well, £2 billion-worth of investment is where we start, but I would ask Rhona Brankin to look in the mirror, view the achievements of a Government of which she was a member and then have a period of silence—something that Ms Brankin is not good at but from which she would learn.

Before we come to the issue of basic democracy, let me just touch on the issue of infrastructure. I was very interested to see that both the opening and closing Liberal Democrat speakers talked about the need to drive forward infrastructure and the terrible delays in the system that were being caused by the Government. That is certainly one of the things that we read about in Scottish local papers. For example, there have

been calls for work on, to name but a few, a Nairn bypass; the Laurencekirk junction; accelerating the Aberdeen bypass; an Elgin bypass; the A9, A96 and A82; dualling the A9 north of Inverness; the Leadburn junction in Peeblesshire; and a Selkirk bypass on the A7 from Ladylands to Bridgeheugh. How exactly all that equates with the views of Nick Clegg, who said that the Liberal Democrats would pay for £20 billion of cuts by cutting major road projects by 90 per cent, does not appear easily understandable. Nor does it fit well with the views of Tavish Scott, who believes that the Scottish Government is being far too conservative in looking for savings in infrastructure projects. I am afraid that, on this matter as on many others, the Lib Dems appear to say one thing in the pages of "Focus" and quite another when they speak in Parliament.

The real worry about the Lib Dem amendment, however, is contained in a single sentence that Mike Rumbles used earlier. He said that it was a "betrayal of democracy" to allow people to vote. What a curious view to have.

Mike Rumbles: I said no such thing. If the minister checks the *Official Report* when it is published, he will find that I said no such thing. We live in a representative parliamentary democracy. We are the representatives of the people.

Michael Russell: Well, I think that my ears did not deceive me. We shall find out, but I hope that I am correct. However, even if Mike Rumbles's words were not exactly as I said, the implication was there that it was a betrayal of democracy to allow people to vote.

Mike Rumbles: That is disgraceful.

Michael Russell: I believe that it is a disgrace. I am glad that Mr Rumbles agrees. Self-censorship is a wonderful thing. Now he will be able to look back.

It is 10 years since the Parliament came into being. We all remember those words of Donald Dewar when the Parliament opened:

"There shall be a Scottish Parliament"—I like that."

Everybody at the Parliament's opening accepted that we were involved in a process, not an event. Over 10 years, the Parliament has learned a lot. Devolution has had its ups and downs—not the nonsense of today's debate but the real ups and downs of dealing with the governance of Scotland. After a decade, it is entirely legitimate to ask what should be next. Indeed, I remember the Liberal Democrats and others saying that there should be a time to consider how the Parliament works, then we should look forward. The period that they set for doing that was a decade. We have had that decade, and now we take things forward.

Mike Rumbles: Calman!

Michael Russell: From a sedentary position, Mr Rumbles shouts, "Calman!" Let me say that there is a range of views. A real democrat, let alone a real liberal, would encourage a range of views to come forward.

I want the people of Scotland to be given the facts. Knowing those facts, they can then choose how they want to go forward.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the minister give way?

Michael Russell: No, I am sorry, but I must make progress.

It is far from a betrayal of democracy to allow people to vote on the facts. It is, indeed, the triumph of democracy to ensure that people are given the facts and then go forward.

Margaret Smith: Will the minister take an intervention?

Michael Russell: No, I am sorry, but I will not.

I go further and say that it is our duty as elected representatives to do exactly as I described, particularly when times are hard. Indeed, the history of constitutional change shows that, when times are hard, people need to look for the weapons that they need to argue for their future, to defend themselves in the international world and to ensure that they have the economic powers that can help them to survive. Those are the things that the Parliament needs and the issues that we need to discuss. The facts about that are what we need to put to the Scottish people.

That is the job that I intend to do because it is about empowerment. It is about empowering the Scottish people and extending Scottish democracy. The Parliament's job is not to spend time on political navel-gazing that is born of resentment and bitterness, which is what we have seen. That is an irrelevance to the Scottish people. What we need to do is raise the ambitions and expectations of the Scottish people. We do that by telling them the truth about where we will go.

The Lib Dem amendment is an insidious thing. We see in the Labour motion the usual girth and complaint. Labour has nothing to contribute to Scotland's future. However, if the Lib Dem amendment is really the will of the Parliament, it is an insidious attack on democracy. It is tacit support for Labour cuts and an undermining of the prospects of the Scottish people for their entire future. I will not be complicit in that. I came into politics to help the Scottish people and I will continue to do so.

11:34

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): I, too, came into politics to help the Scottish people. I say to members that if that is what we

are getting from Mike Russell, the Scottish people still need a lot of help.

Substantial comments have been made about the Government during the debate. I say to Mike Russell, who is a man in the SNP for whom I have some respect, that for him to dismiss in such a disgraceful manner the substantial points that elected members of Parliament have made about health, education and housing is a denial of his office.

I had hoped, perhaps vainly, that the Government would pay attention to some of the serious issues that Scotland faces. Let us cast our minds back to the election of 2007. The Government and the First Minister promised that they would seek to work with Parliament, but we have seen no evidence of that today. *[Interruption.]* I hope that I will not be interrupted by sedentary comments throughout my speech—such comments are another illustration of the SNP's dismissal of Parliament.

The Government promised that it would be willing to listen to evidence and to address concerns that were put to it, and that it would always pursue the national interest, but what do we have? For a Government that seeks to extend the powers of the Scottish Parliament, it seems very reluctant to use the powers that it already has. There is a minute legislative programme and policies are announced to the press before they are announced to Parliament. First Minister's questions are appropriately named, because they are definitely not First Minister's answers.

We now have enough experience of the SNP in government to know that it is prepared to ignore the will of Parliament when that suits it—for example, on a public inquiry into the terrible events at the Vale of Leven hospital. In defiance of the clear facts, it dismisses every concern about cuts as scaremongering, denying the reality that thousands of Scots experience. We have seen that clearly from both Mike Russell and Nicola Sturgeon in today's debate. Members who have come here to represent their constituents' interests have just been cast aside by the Government. That is not the job of Government, and the SNP should not do it.

Perhaps worst of all, during this global financial crisis the Government has been posted missing. That is our charge against the SNP this morning. It has made a mockery of its manifesto and its election pledges. In the debate, we have heard a litany of deceit on student debt, first-time buyers, promises on drugs and mental health funding, and local income tax. The Scottish Futures Trust is also appropriately named; presumably, it is meant to work only in the future, because it can never work in the present. I noticed that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning

nodded assiduously when she was challenged on matching brick for brick Labour's record on primary schools. I look forward to the SNP matching the promise and commitment that we delivered. Off the top of my head, I can name seven new schools that were built in my constituency. I will be after the SNP on when we will get the next seven new schools from it.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way?

Margaret Curran: No, I will not.

The SNP's gall is breathtaking. Mike Russell thinks that all the main parties should agree to a free vote on an independence referendum. That is not in our manifesto, but we are supposed to bail out the SNP. It is not an issue of conscience—*[Interruption.]* Hang on—I will address the issue of a free vote.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

Margaret Curran: The SNP says that we should bail out its manifesto commitment on independence when it has shown absolutely no commitment to the rest of its manifesto commitments.

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret Curran: I was just about to mention Christina McKelvie. If she waits, I will come back to her in a second.

Is it not interesting what issues the SNP prioritises for a free vote? How about a free vote on a public inquiry into the C difficile outbreak at the Vale of Leven hospital? At a meeting of the Public Petitions Committee, John Wilson and Christina McKelvie voted for such an inquiry.

Christina McKelvie *rose—*

Margaret Curran: Will Christina McKelvie support a free vote on the matter now?

Christina McKelvie *rose—*

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, Ms Curran, but we are tight for time and you cannot take any interventions.

Margaret Curran: What a shame—perhaps Christina McKelvie can explain another time why she buckled under instruction from Nicola Sturgeon. When it comes to honouring pledges, the SNP speaks with no credibility.

The fundamental point today is for us to recognise the changed economic circumstances in which we live. We have witnessed an SNP that wants to play at being a Government but, when times are hard, fails to raise its game to meet the demands that we face. We know that Alex Salmond used to work for the Royal Bank of

Scotland, but is a man who short-sells for a living, who uses a tax haven to protect his profits and who recruited, mentored and set the tone for Fred Goodwin the right person to chair the Council of Economic Advisers? Let us not forget Alex Salmond's stunning intervention earlier in the crisis, when he said that he would have organised a £100 billion liquidity bail-out of the banks, without any consequence for the rest of us. This is the man who told us that Ireland and Iceland were the two great models for Scotland. Is it not time that the SNP acknowledged the failure of that argument?

Paul Martin was right. It is time for the SNP to say sorry—sorry for the promises that have been broken and for its presentation to the Scottish people of a list of inflated proposals that were unworkable, uncosted or undeliverable. Let us use this debate to send a clear message to the Scottish Government. Now is the time to focus on the issues that are uppermost in the minds of Scottish families. I say to Mike Russell that those issues are jobs, not an SNP referendum; public services, not SNP projection studies; investment, not SNP housing cuts; and substance, not SNP spin. These are serious times, and it is time for some honesty and proper action from the SNP Government.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

11:41

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

International Children's Games

2. Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what importance it attaches to the 2011 international children's games being hosted by South Lanarkshire and North Lanarkshire Councils. (S3O-6135)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The international children's games will be an important stepping stone to the Commonwealth games in 2014 and will help us all to realise our ambition to be a healthier and more active nation. That is why the Government considers the games to be very important and why the First Minister has given his personal backing to them. The games have also been supported by EventScotland.

Aileen Campbell: Can investment that is being made in the run-up to the Commonwealth games also be made to benefit the international children's games? Is the minister willing to meet me and relevant local councillors in the near future to discuss some of the issues?

Nicola Sturgeon: The international children's games will be an important part of preparations for the Commonwealth games. Aileen Campbell will be aware that locations in Lanarkshire will be used to host some of the 2014 events, so the experience and investment associated with the international children's games will be invaluable as part of that. We should view the 2011 international children's games, the 2014 Commonwealth games and the 2014 Ryder cup as part of a package of sporting events that demonstrate our ambition as a sporting nation.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Get on with it.

Nicola Sturgeon: I agree with Aileen Campbell that we must ensure that we reap the benefits of the international children's games and that they stand us in good stead for 2014. I am sure that the new Minister for Public Health and Sport, Shona Robison, will be delighted to meet Aileen Campbell and her constituents to discuss matters further.

The Presiding Officer: Before we move to the next question, I advise George Foulkes that I have had enough of his sedentary interventions today. If they continue, I will have no option other than to take steps that I do not wish to take.

George Foulkes: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Would it not be in order for you to instruct cabinet secretaries to give short, sharp replies? Answers are taking up far too much time, and back benchers are unable to ask questions as a result.

The Presiding Officer: That is entirely for me to judge. In my opinion, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing was answering the question that was put to her.

Property Developers (Delays)

3. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it has taken to investigate the severity of financial problems caused to individuals who have paid deposits for new-build houses by property developers failing to deliver on time. (S3O-6087)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): The Scottish Government has discussed the issue of moving-in delays with Homes for Scotland and has provided input to the Office of Fair Trading report on house building. The OFT report calls for consumer protection issues, including moving-in delays, to be addressed through the new code of conduct that the house building industry is developing. We are pressing for quick and effective implementation of the new code.

Helen Eadie: The minister may or may not be aware of the fact that I have met representatives of the Office of Fair Trading. The code of conduct to which he refers will be voluntary. For 10 years, the Law Society of Scotland and well-known professors from across Scotland have argued that there should be legislation on the matter. Only last week, one of Roseanna Cunningham's constituents had to pay £10,000 to a developer, through no fault of their own. Someone in Aberdeen now faces £100,000 of penalties. Someone in the Borders paid a deposit of £10,000 on a house more than two years ago, but the house is still not ready for them. Such people are being left to languish on the beaches without homes.

The Presiding Officer: Question, please.

Helen Eadie: What will the minister do to address the situation? Legislation is required, because in Scotland there is more protection for people who buy a packet of crisps than there is for people who buy a house.

Alex Neil: I share the member's concerns. Following the OFT's report, we are working intensively with the OFT, the UK Government and the house building industry in Scotland—in particular, Homes for Scotland—to make progress on the issue. I hope that the code of conduct will be put in place before we consider legislation. We would have to wait until we could pass legislation, which would take time. The situation is urgent.

Scots

4. Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the recently published "Audit of Current Scots Language Provision in Scotland" and my survey of local education authorities, which identified the benefits of teaching Scots in schools, and anecdotal evidence suggesting that the expansion of such provision is constrained by a lack of qualified teachers, what steps it will consider to remedy the situation. (S3O-6158)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government considers Scots to be an important part of Scotland's distinctive linguistic and cultural heritage. The audit of current provision provides baseline data and is the basis for consideration of the provision of and planning for the Scots language in public life across Scotland.

The curriculum for excellence experiences and outcomes encourage appropriate emphasis on Scotland's literature and the languages of Scotland. The curriculum for excellence offers teachers the flexibility to respond innovatively to the needs and interests of their pupils.

Bill Wilson: According to Katrina MacLeod of the Scots Language Centre and Perth and Kinross Council library service, the demand for Scots language teaching resources significantly outstrips supply. In this year of homecoming, will the Government take action to ensure that supply meets demand?

Fiona Hyslop: Learning and Teaching Scotland already provides examples of good practice and materials that can be used to address the shortages and the demand that Bill Wilson has identified. In the year of homecoming, I have already seen excellent practice in the Scots language. Dunning primary school, which is in the Perth and Kinross Council area, has an excellent homecoming project, and Scots language provision is part and parcel of that experience.

United States of America (Co-operation)

5. Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether any new initiatives for co-operation between Scotland and the United States of America are being

considered as a result of the Scottish Government's recent discussions with the US Secretary of State. (S3O-6144)

The Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution (Michael Russell): The First Minister's recent meeting with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton marked the deepening friendship between our two nations. It provided a good basis for on-going dialogue in important areas of mutual interest, such as climate change and Scotland's renewable energy potential.

Christopher Harvie: In view of the likelihood of President Obama unveiling new proposals for co-operation with Africa, does the minister think that, in the light of Scotland's commitments and programmes in that area, such as the initiatives of David Steel in Kenya and Jack McConnell in Malawi, we can offer specific assistance?

Michael Russell: Scotland has a strong record of engaging with our counterparts in Africa, from the early work of the Scottish missionaries, who worked tirelessly across many parts of the continent, to more recent developments, such as the co-operation agreement with the Government of Malawi, which was instigated by the previous First Minister. Professor Harvie is right to draw our attention to the distinguished work of former and present members of the Parliament in that regard.

The relationship between Scotland and Malawi enjoys strong cross-party support, and has benefited from the direct involvement of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in this Parliament. I hope to support that work visibly and practically. Scotland has much to offer and much to learn, and we are happy to share our experiences.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Before we come up with any new initiatives for co-operation with the USA, has there been enough consideration of the benefits of the tartan week celebrations? I seem to recall that the committee that looked into the matter was told that we would receive a breakdown of the various achievements over the years, but I cannot remember having received it.

Michael Russell: Mr Brocklebank will be aware that the classic definition of conservatism is not to do anything new, but to keep asking about things in the past. However, I am quite happy to ensure that as much information as possible is provided. In addition, I will be part of the ministerial group that will attend Scotland week this year and will make it my purpose to enquire about what has taken place in the past and to bring back to the Parliament up-to-date information so that we can benefit from an initiative that is strong, important and beneficial to both sides.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Will the minister give us a pledge that the Government will not resort to the unctuous and pretentious posture struck by the Prime Minister in America? We do not want to be seen in that way. In addition, will he moderate claims about sharing great friendship and understanding with America? Tartan week has not built on that, and we have much to do in that regard before we go bigger.

Michael Russell: I had hoped to give a one-word answer, had the member restrained herself to one question. The answer to the first question is yes. The answer to the second is that we will build on our experiences in an effort to reinforce mutual friendship. If Margo MacDonald were to play a part in that process, people could only feel warmly towards us.

National Conversation

6. Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how many responses it has received to the national conversation. (S3O-6143) [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Someone has a mobile or a BlackBerry on—can everyone please check?

The Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution (Michael Russell): I should probably ask for other offences to be taken into consideration.

Since the launch of the national conversation, there have been 470,000 hits on the national conversation website and more than 36,000 people have read copies of "Choosing Scotland's Future" online. Over the past year, more than 2,500 people have attended events organised as part of the national conversation. We will build on that success and will ensure that the people of Scotland are well placed to make an informed decision, based on the facts, in the referendum in 2010.

Christine Grahame: Is the minister monitoring the submissions that have been made to the union-centric Calman commission? I draw his attention to the submission of Shetland Islands Council, the local authority for Tavish Scott's constituency, which makes the highly reasonable and welcome call for control of North Sea oil and gas to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. What steps is the Government taking to connect with local representatives, who are clearly more open and positive about giving the people of Scotland a say in their future than are their representatives in the Scottish Parliament?

Michael Russell: Christine Grahame makes a telling point, which gives the lie to the view that there is no connection between the national conversation, constitutional change and economic benefit. It is clear that such a connection is at the

centre of thinking in Shetland. I pay tribute to the council's far-seeing convener, Sandy Cluness, and the other councillors who share that view.

I keep a close eye on all material that is produced on the subject of what Scotland's future should be and listen carefully to what is said. The whole purpose of the national conversation is to show that all points of view are heard. If only other parties in the Parliament were as open.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Will the minister confirm that the national conversation is the only Government consultation in which full name and address are not required from people who make submissions to it? The fact that only a nickname and a general area are sufficient means that the national conversation is being flooded by cyber-nats and is therefore totally discredited.

Michael Russell: My colleague Dr Allan has made the point that it is better than Daleks.

I am sorry that the noble lord is not familiar with the conventions of social networking or, indeed, of working online, even if people who work for him are, I believe, fluent in all such matters and often appear on such sites. The reality of the situation is that the Data Protection Act 1998 does not allow us to release the full names and addresses of the people concerned, even if they were given. I would like to see a full and open debate involving lots of people. If Lord Foulkes chooses to contribute to the website, I am sure that we will read what he says with great interest.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I can assist the minister and Lord Foulkes with regard to the entry by Sir Sean Connery, who neither was asked for nor volunteered an address. I am not sure whether Spanish addresses are covered by the Scottish national conversation.

Given that comments on the national conversation website are moderated, can the minister say how many comments have not been published? Does the Government have any plans to draw the national conversation to a close?

Michael Russell: In response to the latter question, I will just say—if I am allowed to, Presiding Officer—that you ain't seen nothing yet. We will build on the success of the national conversation to ensure that the people of Scotland are fully informed.

I do not frequent the jeremypurvis.org website, so I do not know whether contributions to it are moderated. It is never the practice to publish moderated comments: that would be quite contrary to the whole idea of moderation. Perhaps Mr Purvis needs to catch up with the reality of how such things work.

Patient Records

7. Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what guidance it has issued on the length of time that hospitals are required to keep patient records. (S3O-6149)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): In July 2008, the Government published a code of practice for the national health service on records management, which sets out the recommended minimum periods for retention of NHS personal health records. The code provides a guide to the required standards of practice in records management for those who work in or under contract to NHS organisations in Scotland and it is based on current legal requirements and best practice.

Ian McKee: In view of advances in medicine and changes in the medico-legal climate that mean, for example, that a blood transfusion or other more general treatment that was given many years ago might have clinical or legal significance today, is the cabinet secretary still happy that hospital notes on adults may be destroyed a mere six years after the last entry or three years after death?

Nicola Sturgeon: As I said in my initial response, the code of practice takes account of legal requirements—that is important. Ian McKee knows that no single standard or minimum retention period applies. The standard or minimum retention periods for notes on different groups of patients, for different specialties and for different types of health record are laid out in annex D to the code of practice. Boards have an obligation to produce retention schedules, but they cannot set shorter retention periods than those that are specified in the code. It is open to boards to keep records for longer but, if they decide to do so, they must be able to justify that under data protection legislation. The arrangements that are in place are sound and robust. If Ian McKee has issues or concerns—they might arise from his constituency work—I am, of course, more than happy to discuss them with him.

Scottish Commission for Human Rights (Meetings)

8. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when ministers last met representatives of the Scottish Commission for Human Rights and what issues were discussed. (S3O-6097)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The most recent meeting between ministers and representatives of the Scottish Human Rights Commission took place between me and the commission's chair, Professor Alan

Miller, on 22 December last year. We discussed a range of issues at the meeting, including Professor Miller's update on the commission's activities since it became operational.

Johann Lamont: I will suggest an issue that the cabinet secretary might wish to raise with Alan Miller, whom I will meet on Monday as a consequence of discussions with kinship carers in Glasgow. They feel that the debate on kinship carer support should be placed in the context of the rights of children. As one grandparent said to me, their grandchildren have often—sadly—undergone all too damaging experiences that are similar to those of children who are looked after by foster carers, yet the support for kinship carers is not the same. Is the cabinet secretary or one of his colleagues willing to meet kinship carers in Glasgow to discuss that and their concern that the Scottish Government's definition of kinship carers might have damaging and unfair consequences for the children for whom they care?

Kenny MacAskill: If the appropriate request is made to the relevant minister, I have no doubt that it will be considered. I can comment only in the terms that my colleague Mr Russell used in an intervention earlier today. The Government is delivering for kinship carers, which contrasts with the lack of action between 1999 and 2007.

Affordable Housing (Edinburgh)

9. Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what action is being taken to increase the availability of affordable housing in Edinburgh. (S3O-6154)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): The Scottish Government is committed to increasing the availability of affordable housing in Edinburgh. That commitment is demonstrated by the Scottish Government's investment of £46 million this financial year in a range of affordable housing mechanisms. In the next financial year—2009-10—the Government's affordable housing programme throughout Scotland will amount to a record £644 million, which represents an increase of £113 million or 21 per cent on this year's budget.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Is the minister aware that 45p of every pound of rental income in Edinburgh goes towards debt repayment? In these extraordinary times, when billions are found to bail out the banks, does he agree that it is time for the chancellor to write off that debt, which would ease the burden on the poorest in the city and let the City of Edinburgh Council lever in much-needed funds for affordable housing?

Alex Neil: I agree entirely with Shirley-Anne Somerville. The UK Treasury should write off the £2 billion of debt without strings in the same way

as, only yesterday, it gave £2 billion to failed private finance initiative projects south of the border. If the Treasury can do that for failed PFI projects south of the border, it should be able to invest money in housing north of the border.

The Presiding Officer: I am afraid that we are out of time and must move to the next item of business.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-1500)

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

Iain Gray: Will the First Minister remind us why he decided to drop his bill to introduce a local income tax?

The First Minister: There were two significant reasons: one was the indication that I could not persuade the Labour Party, the Conservative party and, probably, the Scottish Green Party to back a sensible measure on behalf of the Scottish people; the second was the looming budget cuts of £500 million that the Westminster Government was threatening. Under those circumstances, we reluctantly had to accept that it was not the time to introduce a fair, representative tax that was well supported by the people of Scotland.

Iain Gray: The financial reason that the First Minister gave is now his single transferable excuse for every failure on his Government's part. Let us return to the other reason, which the Scottish National Party made clear when it ditched the local income tax. Mr Swinney said,

"we cannot put together a stable majority ... to steer"

the plans through the Parliament. He continued:

"Indeed, Parliaments vote in December last year made it clear that"—[*Official Report*, 11 February 2009; c 14896.]

the Parliament does not support the local income tax. Tonight, the Parliament will reject the First Minister's referendum bill in exactly the same way. Will he respect the will of the Parliament again and kill the referendum bill too?

The First Minister: Iain Gray will not be able to slip away from the £500 million of looming Labour Party budget cuts because, day after day, as Labour members call for increased public spending on every item under the sun, it will be explained to him what the consequences are.

We live in hope that the Labour Party will see the sense and logic of giving the people of Scotland the right to choose their own future. Indeed, it is less than a year since the Labour group united behind a rallying call for a referendum for the people of Scotland. That was when Wendy Alexander was in charge, but I have discovered that Iain Gray was giving her his complete backing, as his interview with

"Newsnight Scotland" on 7 May 2008 shows. Gordon Brewer said, "Whenever the SNP brings forward a bill, you'll have to vote for it." Iain Gray responded, "Well, we've said—and Wendy Alexander has made clear—that we won't stand in the way of the people having a say."

I am confident that Iain Gray will realise the electoral repercussions of trying to deny the Scottish people the right of self-determination and, when the bill is introduced, go back to his position of May last year.

Iain Gray: The First Minister is absolutely right: in May last year, Labour offered him a chance to hold his referendum, fair and square. He lost his nerve and slipped away from that opportunity. When the chance was offered, he was found wanting; the chance has gone.

I believe that, right now, Scotland wants us all to concentrate all our efforts on protecting jobs and supporting Scottish families and communities through the global economic downturn. Does the First Minister really think that his referendum bill is a good idea during that downturn?

The First Minister: I remind Iain Gray of his answer to the question that he was asked last May, which was whether he would support a referendum whenever the SNP brought forward a bill. He answered in the affirmative, which was a bit like the declaration the previous day from Duncan McNeil, who said, "Our position is clear. We're not against a referendum bill in principle." Therefore, in principle, the Labour group is in favour of a referendum bill.

Iain Gray should better understand the clear connection. Obviously, we do everything within our existing powers to heed the Scottish economy and stimulate its recovery from this deep recession. There are 50 measures in the six-point plan, all of which are designed to give Scottish businesses and families the maximum help at this difficult time, such as the acceleration of public investment, which will guarantee 5,000 jobs in Scotland over the coming year.

Anyone with a semblance of understanding of the Scottish economy will understand that if we are to reflate the Scottish economy, using the same approach to the current recession as every single Government in the western world, we need borrowing powers and the ability to increase aggregate demand and confidence. That is the connection between the powers of this Parliament and the ability to deliver for the Scottish people.

Iain Gray: I remind the First Minister of his answer to our offer a year ago of a referendum, fair and square. His answer was no. He always puts narrow party politics ahead of what is best for Scotland, and never more so than in these times. He has failed on so many issues: local income tax;

the Scottish Futures Trust; class sizes; police numbers; house building—the list goes on. On this issue, however, he will not accept his failure, and so diverts the energies of his Government away from the real concerns of Scots, who worry about their jobs, their mortgages and their children's future.

Right now, Scotland needs the referendum bill like it needs a hole in the head. I ask the First Minister again whether he really thinks that a referendum bill is a good idea during these times. If he does not, will he put Scotland first for once, and drop the bill?

The First Minister: I will try to give Iain Gray some advice. Consistency on the referendum is not his strongest suit. I have seen many remarkable statements in politics, but as an extravagant claim in politics, yesterday's quotation to the Press Association from a Labour spokesman—presumably nobody wanted to put their name to it—takes some beating. They said:

"We've been clear all along when it comes to a referendum."

On the Government's programme and manifesto, as Iain Gray well understands, we have taken forward 46 of our 94 manifesto commitments in the first two years of government. Obviously, the Presiding Officer will not allow me to go through all 46—

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Go on!

The First Minister: I am encouraged by Mr Rumbles's anxiety to hear them.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): You were right the first time, First Minister.

The First Minister: Let us try the top 10. We have abolished rates for tens of thousands of small businesses; restored free education by scrapping the graduate endowment; abolished tolls on the Forth and Tay bridges; funded an additional 1,000 police recruits—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister:—started a phased abolition of prescription charges; saved the accident and emergency departments at Ayr and Monklands; increased payments for free personal care for the first time; introduced a world-leading climate change bill; doubled Scotland's international aid budget; and frozen the council tax for two successive years. Not bad for the first two years; for the next two years, let's bring it on.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S3F-1501)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I hope to meet the secretary of state next week, along with the Confederation of British Industry Scotland and the Scottish Trades Union Congress, to discuss the challenges facing the Scottish economy.

Annabel Goldie: The appalling case of little Brandon Muir is a tragic exposure of Scotland's broken society. One alarming estimate today is that 50,000 similar children could be at risk, living in households that are riddled with addiction, poverty and despair. Does the First Minister have any idea of the true extent of that horrific problem? What is he doing to find out? Does he have any clue? If not, why not?

The First Minister: We have estimates of the number of children at risk from drug-abusing parents. Annabel Goldie quoted figures for the number of children affected. Different statistics exist for the number of children who are still with parents who have a problem with drug addiction, and the figures are between 10,000 and 20,000. The estimates of the numbers of children whose parents have an alcohol addiction are even greater—they are substantially greater.

In a case such as this one, in which a young child has died in desperate and painful circumstances, one thing that we have to do as a Parliament and as a society—and I appreciate the way in which Annabel Goldie has been addressing the issue—is to ensure that we are doing everything that we can within our terms and responsibilities to meet the challenges that we face. That applies to all of us: it applies to this Parliament; it applies to the Government; and it applies to social work departments and local government. It is our obligation and responsibility.

One thing I would say is this: the culpability and guilt lie with the person who perpetrated the crime, and not with the social work department or the police. They and we have a responsibility to make society as safe as we can for every young child, but the guilt and culpability lie with the person who perpetrated the crime.

Annabel Goldie: I do not doubt the First Minister's sincerity, but it is deeply alarming that the Scottish Government clearly does not know the full extent of the problem. Unless one knows the extent of a problem, one cannot start to find a solution. We have found that out with the issue of drug abuse.

Will the First Minister pledge, as a matter of urgency, to get hold of that information? Brandon Muir's death needs to be a wake-up call to us all. We need to stop family breakdown; we need to tackle the scourge of drugs; and we need to fix Scotland's broken society for the sake of our children.

The First Minister: Together we have embarked on a new drugs strategy. We are aware of the extent of the problem.

People in the chamber should be aware of one of the benefits that we have in Scotland: we have a robust system for child care and social work inspection. That has been carried through by Her Majesty's inspectorate over the past couple of years. We know exactly which councils are performing superbly in this area—and there are some—and we know where services need to be improved. We know which councils are required to take strong action. In the three councils where such a requirement has been identified to date, strong action is taking place.

An enormous amount of work is being done to try to secure the safety of every child in Scotland. Yes, we know the extent of the problem. We know how many children are looked after, we know how many are with foster carers, and we know how many are in children's homes or residential schools.

However, Annabel Goldie is right to point out that, however exact our efforts in social work and in local and central Government, there is a real risk to many thousands of children in Scotland. Therefore, we are pursuing the policies that we are pursuing not just to help protect each individual child but to help attack some of the underlying causes. In this particular case, the underlying cause was clearly the blight of drug addiction throughout Scotland. The policies are the right way for Government and society to approach such issues.

In relation to a case south of the border, there was an exchange during Prime Minister's question time that I think neither the Prime Minister nor the leader of the Opposition felt, in retrospect, did them credit. The right way for us to approach the issue is the way in which Parliament and Government are approaching it. We are attempting to make each child safe, but also to tackle the underlying problems that create the danger in the first place.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at next week's meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-1502)

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

Tavish Scott: I broadly agree with Annabel Goldie's line of questioning, and I want to ask the First Minister a couple of different questions in relation to that dreadful incident.

There is no shortage of separate reviews and studies in response to the tragic case of Brandon Muir. However, the case is surely serious enough for a minister to be put in charge to pull all the investigations together. Social work, criminal justice and health are all involved; there is only one way to bring them together and that is through Government. Will the First Minister name a minister—one of his colleagues—who will have a direct leadership role in responding to this tragedy?

The First Minister: A minister has direct responsibility: Adam Ingram has direct responsibility in this area.

Inquiries are taking place, and I have every confidence in Peter Wilson, the former chief constable of Fife, who will conduct a rapid and independent interagency inquiry. I am sure that that inquiry will tell us what needs to be done. If there are legislative gaps, they will be filled. If action has to be taken, action will have to be taken.

We should be confident that the people who are conducting the inquiries will tell us everything about the case and will also indicate wider lessons to be applied across society.

Tavish Scott: I welcome the First Minister's clear commitment to have a minister in charge of what has emerged.

This morning's *Daily Record* newspaper carries the shocking views of Brandon Muir's mother that it was the social workers' job to tell her that Cunningham was evil. Does that not show that she was incapable of judgments that would keep her child safe? I cannot be the only person who thinks that that should have added to the evidence that the authorities should intervene to keep the little boy safe, as the grandparents warned that they needed to.

As the First Minister says, it is right that we debate the balance of risks and try to get the balance right between families and social work. However, the debate must lead to strengthened services and changed practices. According to the Government's figures, about 50,000 children in Scotland live with drug-abusing parents. How many of those children are currently being reviewed, given Brandon Muir's dreadful murder?

The First Minister: Let us be clear that that statistic is the number of children who might be affected by parental drug misuse. We estimate that between 10,000 and 20,000 children might still be living with a parent who misuses drugs.

On the detail of the individual case, we should allow the independent inquiries that are being carried out by people of high calibre to take place before we draw any conclusions. The contrast

between the case that we are discussing and other well-publicised cases is that the young child had very recently entered into circumstances of danger—those circumstances were not long standing. I am sure that, right now, people in the social work department in Dundee will be agonising about what action they might have taken slightly earlier than the programmed action. We should allow the independent inquiries to give us their insight before we start drawing conclusions as to who might be to blame.

The final point that I will make to the Parliament on the issue is that we have not only a robust system of inspection in Scotland—of which we should be proud as it identifies problems before individual tragedies happen—but many thousands of social workers on the front line who deal with agonising decisions and difficult circumstances on a daily basis. Whatever faults there might be in the Brandon Muir case or any other case, it would be difficult and extremely damaging for any member of the Parliament to allocate blame to social work as a profession—certainly, nobody in the Government would do that. We should all remember that, in the vast and overwhelming majority of cases, the people who take those agonising and difficult decisions are doing their best for society and for the children who are under their care.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The First Minister will be aware that, this week, the Kinross-shire cashmere mill, which is a vital employer in the area, has been forced to introduce a four-day week for its 205-strong workforce. What action will the Scottish Government take to help the textile industry throughout Scotland?

The First Minister: The Government is making a range of interventions to assist and help the Scottish economy. On our manufacturing sector, as the member knows, the Scottish manufacturing advisory service has been doubled in strength, precisely to give the maximum assistance to our manufacturing industry at this difficult time.

Alcohol

4. Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what progress the Scottish Government is making in reducing the impact of overconsumption of alcohol. (S3F-1515)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We have already taken action to reduce alcohol overconsumption in Scotland. The record investment of more than £120 million over three years will make a difference to thousands of Scots through improved prevention, treatment and support services. The scale of the problem requires us to do more. That is why, this week, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing and

the Cabinet Secretary for Justice published our response to the consultation on alcohol misuse and outlined our next steps. “Changing Scotland’s Relationship with Alcohol: A Framework for Action” outlines proposals for specific legislation that is designed to effect change in the short term, as well as measures that will help to create a change in cultural attitudes in the long term.

Nigel Don: If I may, I will quote:

“Alcohol has cost Scotland dearly. Through its significant contribution to violence, it has placed an immense financial burden on this country. ... Fundamentally, if you want to reduce violence then you need to reduce access to alcohol. We know that the group most at risk from violence is young males aged 10-29, so if you limit access to alcohol in certain areas then it can only be a good thing, especially as it is done with local agreement and is locally relevant.”

Those are the words of Detective Chief Superintendent John Carnochan, the head of the violence reduction unit. Does the First Minister agree with that view?

The First Minister: I certainly think that we would do well to listen carefully to the experience of serving police officers. We should also reflect on experience in the pilot areas, where restrictions on sales at weekends and sometimes more generally have been tried over the past year or so, which gives us strong indications. In Stenhousemuir, there was a 40 per cent reduction in breach of the peace offences; in the first week of the Cupar pilot, there was a drop of 60 per cent in calls to the police relating to antisocial behaviour; and, during the Armadale pilot, there was a reduction in the number of calls about youth disorder and vandalism. We should listen carefully to the experience of the professionals who are working in this field. We should listen also to Nigel Don, who makes the point in exactly the right way when he says that those who are most at risk are young people themselves.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Why did the First Minister say last week that mandatory challenge 21 schemes and alcohol treatment and testing orders are in place when they are not? I ask that not to debate veracity in the chamber; I ask him to agree that all parties wish to tackle alcohol abuse, that sensible proposals from all sides should be seriously considered and that the final decision on major policy changes in this area must be for the whole Parliament.

The First Minister: I said that they were coming in in September, and tried to inform and help Richard Baker along those lines. He would do well not to assume that everyone, including ministers, is always trying to put a trick over on him.

I have to warn Richard Baker that I think that he is heading for a substantial fall on the issue of police numbers. I give him that cautionary piece of

advice on that matter, because I know that, if he proves to be wrong on that issue, he will be the first to come to the chamber to apologise.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I think that the First Minister agrees that legislation is not a cure-all, and that educating our young people plays an important part in the matter that we are discussing. In that context, I suggest that either he or his ministers should visit Peebles high school to meet the members of the up to you group, who go to the feeder primaries to talk about the consequences of alcohol consumption. That is a very successful project for the primary pupils and the secondary pupils.

The First Minister: The framework for action indicates a number of ways in which we intend to take forward our work to support young people to make more informed choices about alcohol. Officials have already visited the project that Christine Grahame has mentioned, and we find it extremely interesting. Of course, local authorities have to determine how best to deploy resources for education, including substance misuse education. Within the hugely expanded budget in this area, there will be many projects that point the way to a better future for the young people of Scotland, and the project that Christine Grahame mentions is an extremely interesting example of that work.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The First Minister is fond of trumpeting his support for the Scotch whisky industry. However, on Monday, Gavin Hewitt, the chief executive of the Scotch Whisky Association, said of the Government's minimum-pricing proposals:

"It is hard to believe any Scottish Government would bring forward proposals that are likely to be both illegal in international trade law and risk damaging the whisky industry. Regrettably, minimum pricing achieves both and undermines our success in breaking down illegal discrimination against Scotch Whisky around the world."

Why is the First Minister determined to press ahead with those unworkable proposals when they will so damage the industry that he claims to support?

The First Minister: We are confident of the legal position of our proposals.

I could answer Murdo Fraser's question by giving him a range of quotations from people who support the Government's proposals, including people in the licensed trade and the drinks industry. However, there is a position of greater principle. Scotch whisky's huge success in the international marketplace is based on the concept of its being a premium drink of exceptionally high quality. Even a casual observation of our proposals—I know that Murdo Fraser will have examined them—will show that they are directed

at the low-quality, high-strength drinks that are causing enormous damage to Scottish society.

Last week, I attended a meeting of the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States at which the president of the association commenced his speech by speaking about Scotch whisky's profile in the international marketplace as a high-quality, premium drink that is marketed with a socially responsible attitude. That is exactly what the future success of Scottish whisky should be based on.

Class Sizes

5. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the First Minister, in light of the recently published pupil census in Scotland statistics, whether the Scottish Government remains confident of fulfilling its pledge to reduce class sizes in primaries 1, 2 and 3 to 18 pupils or less. (S3F-1523)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Under the terms of the concordat, local government agreed to make year-on-year progress in reducing primary 1 to primary 3 classes to a maximum of 18. Some authorities are making faster progress than others, but we will continue to work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to deliver on the terms of the concordat.

Ken Macintosh: As with the First Minister's response to Iain Gray's questions, I hesitate over whether to admire his chutzpah or worry at his capacity for self-delusion.

Can the First Minister confirm that the proportion of pupils who are in classes that meet his class size target rose this year from 12 per cent to a staggering 13 per cent? Does he believe that that is someone else's fault or his own responsibility?

The First Minister: I always find that when a back bencher has to praise his leader retrospectively, it usually means that his leader is in deep trouble. If I was Iain Gray, I would watch out on matters such as that. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: I am always glad— [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: I am always glad to have the support of Mr Rumbles when I make such comments. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order in the chamber.

The First Minister: With regard to class size reductions, it is clear that there is a huge indication of discrepancies throughout Scotland—in the context, of course, of record figures for the number of classes that contain 18 pupils or less. All local authorities can take some pleasure and pride in

the achievement of a situation in which the highest number of pupils in a class is declining dramatically. There has been a 15 per cent drop in the number of primary 1 to primary 3 pupils who are taught in classes of more than 25. That should be of some interest, because I do not think that any member in the chamber would agree with Labour ministers south of the border that class sizes of 50 and above do not really matter, as it was put. We believe that low class sizes matter, do we not?

The context is also one in which some councils—West Lothian Council, to take a random example—are achieving a 14.8 per cent increase in the number of their pupils who are in classes of 18 or fewer. In case people think that I am making a political point about a Scottish National Party-controlled council, I note that substantial increases in the number of classes that contain less than 18 pupils have been achieved by Midlothian Council, which is controlled by Labour; Dumfries and Galloway council, which is controlled by the Conservatives and the Scottish Liberal Democrats; West Dunbartonshire Council, which is controlled by the SNP with independent support; and Scottish Borders Council, which is controlled by a coalition of independents, Conservatives and SLDs.

The people who live in those council areas would be entitled—in addition to complimenting the councils that are making that progress—to ask Glasgow City Council, for example, why, if progress is possible in those councils, it is not possible throughout Scotland.

VisitScotland

6. John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire)

(Con): To ask the First Minister what discussions the Scottish Government has had about the future of VisitScotland following the withdrawal of funding by the City of Edinburgh Council. (S3F-1521)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): On 2 March, the day after it was reported that the City of Edinburgh Council would withdraw funding, the convener of the council's economic development committee said:

"We will still be buying services from VisitScotland".

The Government and VisitScotland share the key aim of doing what is best for Scotland and all its constituent cities and regions by maximising the attraction of visitors during the year of homecoming and beyond.

John Lamont: There is a widespread sense of disengagement from and unease with VisitScotland among many councils and tourism providers, following the abolition of the old tourist boards by the previous Labour-Liberal Administration. Does the First Minister accept that

a situation could shortly arise in which councils such as Scottish Borders Council will effectively be subsidising the promotion of tourism in Glasgow and Edinburgh by VisitScotland, while those cities' own councils might not be paying anything towards that?

The First Minister: It is not enormously helpful to look at things in that way. I have just read out a quotation from the relevant councillor in Edinburgh that points out that the council is still contracting VisitScotland's services. VisitScotland has service level agreements with 30 out of 32 councils in Scotland. I know that the homecoming campaign is enthusiastically supported by members on all sides of the chamber, and I am delighted to say that all 32 local authorities in Scotland are enthusiastically signed up to that great campaign.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The changes that the Scottish Government made in the autumn of 2007 to dilute the local area boards—changes that were supported by the Conservatives—have caused particular concern in rural areas. Can the First Minister guarantee that no council will withdraw core funding? Under the single outcome agreements, will councils continue to fund tourist information centres in rural parts of Scotland? If they do not, that will cause concern about support for our local tourism sector.

The First Minister: I see that the Tories and the Liberal party want to blame each other for this, that and the next thing. It would be helpful for the Parliament to remember that some 8 per cent of VisitScotland's total funding comes from local authorities. I have just pointed out that VisitScotland has service level agreements with 30 of the 32 councils and that all 32 are signed up to the homecoming campaign.

Under the Government's budget plans, we are about to reach a significant milestone. In 2010-11, VisitScotland's budget will exceed that of VisitBritain—it will be £46 million compared with £40 million. That substantial budget is well justified and merited. It can bring substantial economic benefits for Scotland. Rather than quibble and quarrel about who was responsible for what in the past, why cannot we get behind the efforts of our national tourism agency and the local authorities, who are doing their best for the area? We should take that great industry in Scotland forward with maximum political support.

Richard Baker: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I apologise for giving you no notice, but I seek your guidance on whether the answer that I received from the First Minister was in line with standing orders on courtesy to other members, particularly as, unlike the First Minister, I was careful not to deviate from the serious subject matter of Nigel Don's question. Is that an issue on

which you can rule, or is it only a matter for the ministerial code, in relation to which the First Minister himself makes judgments?

The Presiding Officer: As I have repeated many times in the chamber, ministers are responsible for the content of their answers. There is no other answer that I can give you.

12:32

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Finance and Sustainable Growth

Water Testing (Church and Community Halls)

1. Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what advice it has given to local authorities regarding water testing in church and community halls. (S3O-6066)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): General guidance on the strengthened legislative framework for private water supplies was issued to local authorities in 2006. It contains nothing specific about church and community halls, but supplies to such places should be treated in the same way as other large private supplies.

Elizabeth Smith: I thank the minister for his encouraging answer. I have no doubt that he is aware that many rural church and community halls throughout Scotland with private water sources will face annual water testing by local authorities, which will add to their limited budgets a considerable burden that many of them cannot afford. Will he investigate the situation and consider what support the Scottish Government and local authorities can give Scotland's church and community halls?

Stewart Stevenson: The charge for such testing is, of course, capped. I understand that reaching the cap of £600-plus is relatively uncommon. The rates for such properties are significantly reduced in return for their providing their own water, but I am conscious of the issue and of its importance to churches and community associations. Elizabeth Smith recently wrote to me about a community association in her region and I will reply to her in early course.

Local Government Finance

2. Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it agrees with the comment of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities president Pat Watters that this year's local government finance settlement "will be a standstill at best." (S3O-6093)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): We are providing local government with record levels of funding, but we are aware of the significant spending pressures that local government faces. That is why we continue to have regular meetings

with COSLA to consider the best use of the available resources.

Hugh Henry: If—as the cabinet secretary suggests—local government is receiving record levels of investment, will he explain why Renfrewshire Council is cutting its education budget by £2.5 million and why it is to axe 81 posts, including 28 teachers, eight classroom assistants, seven foreign language assistants and 10 school secretaries?

John Swinney: Renfrewshire Council has benefited from a financial settlement that protects it by the application of the floor mechanism in local government finance. As Mr Henry knows, the floor mechanism ensures that local authorities are given an increase that protects them from changes in their financial situation. Renfrewshire Council has decided to reconfigure its outstanding debt profile, which has put it in a position to benefit from the floor. The council's spending on core services such as front-line education services will increase by 7.2 per cent in the coming year, which is significantly more than the equivalent Scotland figure of 4.7 per cent, and is higher than that in any of its neighbouring authorities. Decisions on individual public services in Renfrewshire are—properly—for the council, which has received a strong settlement from the Scottish Government.

Scottish Futures Trust

3. Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive on what date the Scottish Futures Trust will publish a detailed business plan. (S3O-6119)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Futures Trust will publish a detailed business plan in the near future.

Ross Finnie: It is always difficult to compose a supplementary question when one receives such an informative answer from the cabinet secretary.

In answers to various parliamentary questions, the cabinet secretary has made it clear that the Scottish Futures Trust is in regular contact with and has worked closely with the Government and local authorities—for example, it worked with Aberdeen City Council on its three Rs schools project. Can he confirm that all information relating to discussions of that nature would be disclosed under a freedom of information request?

John Swinney: As Mr Finnie will be aware, many considerations apply in ensuring that disclosure of information is consistent with the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, which he supported and which was passed by Parliament during his term in office as a minister. Clearly, the legislation must be properly applied to ensure that all relevant information that should be

disclosed is disclosed, but exemptions in the legislation—of which there are many—should be applied. Clearly, if freedom of information requests have been responded to, they will have been responded to in a way that is consistent with the existing freedom of information legislation.

Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): Given the Confederation of British Industry Scotland's positive belief that

“Everyone ... has a stake in ensuring ... the best possible public infrastructure ... at the best price for the taxpayer”,

and given its stated wish to ensure a successful Scottish Futures Trust that creates essential infrastructure projects during the present recession, does the cabinet secretary welcome the 12 recommendations for the Scottish Futures Trust that have been made by CBI Scotland?

John Swinney: I saw at the weekend the material that CBI Scotland released and I welcome that positive contribution to the discussion on how we take forward capital expenditure. The Scottish Futures Trust's chairman, Sir Angus Grossart, has been in dialogue with CBI Scotland to explain his approach in advancing the agenda for the trust. I welcome the constructive engagement that CBI Scotland has applied to the discussions.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): Of course, the CBI Scotland commentary recognises that the Scottish Futures Trust is in fact the public-private partnership model with a fairly low-level lick of paint, but let me bring another commentary into the debate. Is the cabinet secretary aware of the work of the University of Edinburgh's Mark Hellowell—his word was gospel prior to 2007 when he was often quoted by the SNP, so let us see whether his word is still gospel these days—on the Government's non-profit-distributing model? Does he share Mark Hellowell's view that the Government's proposal is more expensive than the public-private partnership model, that it is in fact the public-private partnership by another name and that it is certainly not a not-for-profit model? I refer the cabinet secretary to page 19 of the SNP manifesto, which stated that the SNP would form a “not-for-profit” arrangement for procurement of public infrastructure. Would the First Minister—sorry, I mean the cabinet secretary—care to respond to those points?

John Swinney: That was reckless language of promotion from Mr Kerr. I would not make such an accusation against him at any stage in his life.

Clearly, the Government has taken forward its agenda in setting up the Scottish Futures Trust, which we established back in September. Good work is being undertaken in dialogue with various parties around the country to advance the capital investment agenda through the work of the Scottish Futures Trust. Of course, that

complements the £3.5 billion capital investment programme that the Government continues to take forward in investing in many construction projects around the country.

Much comment has been made on our work on the Scottish Futures Trust. I read it all—I read too much, unfortunately, for Mr Kerr—but let me say that the SFT is just one element of the Government's capital investment activity, which is being progressed effectively. The SFT will deliver—as I have said it would—the work that the Government has set for it to do. In the course of this year, the Scottish Futures Trust will commission its first school, as we promised.

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): How can the cabinet secretary say with any credibility that the SFT will achieve £160 million-worth of savings a year when it does not actually have a business plan?

John Swinney: Mr Brown will be familiar with the outline business case that was put forward by the Government as part of the establishment of the Scottish Futures Trust. That work, which was informed by detailed preparatory work within Government and which was advised on by other external parties, has provided the basis for how we could deliver greater value in the Government's procurement budget, particularly on capital investment. That is the basis of the calculation of an expectation of savings, and that is the focus of the work of the Scottish Futures Trust, which is to deliver on the expectations that were set out clearly in the outline business case that was published in May last year.

Orkney Islands Council (Meetings)

4. Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met representatives of Orkney Islands Council to discuss funding for council services. (S3O-6121)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Scottish Government officials meet representatives of the council from time to time to discuss issues related to funding.

Liam McArthur: The cabinet secretary will, from representations he has received from me and from Orkney Islands Council in recent months, be aware of our concern that the current funding formula does not, in its assessment of need, adequately reflect rurality. I welcome the on-going review of the formula and hope that it will address the issue of rurality.

In that context, does the cabinet secretary acknowledge that there are particular pressures in provision of community social services in my constituency? Is he aware, for example, of the problems that exist with regard to direct payments,

given that achieving cost savings and efficiencies to fund direct payments is extremely difficult in a council the size of Orkney Islands Council? Will he undertake to ensure that direct payments will be addressed in any Government response to the review?

John Swinney: There are a couple of different issues in Mr McArthur's question. The first is the general issue about levels of funding and application of the funding formula, and the extent to which it properly reflects sparsity of population and, as in the case of Orkney, island status. All those factors are taken into account in the current formula, which we inherited from the previous Administration. The big question is about the weighting that is applied to those factors. The weighting will be part of the on-going review of the local government distribution formula, which is being taken forward by the Government in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I assure the member that the issues that he has raised will be reflected upon by the Government, as part of that process.

The second issue that Mr McArthur raises is slightly different: it is about the ability of a council such as Orkney Islands Council to deploy direct payments. I would prefer to consider that matter separately because it raises questions about the degree of access to direct payments that may be appropriate in individual council areas, and about the ability of individuals to purchase services as a consequence of having access to direct payments. I will look into those points in more detail, and if there is further comment that I can make on that, I will write to Mr McArthur in normal course.

Town Centre Regeneration Fund

5. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will announce how the £60 million town centre regeneration fund will be allocated. (S3O-6128)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): As the Minister for Housing and Communities stated here last week, full details of the town centre regeneration fund will be announced by the end of March 2009.

Iain Smith: So far, the only regeneration that we have seen is the regeneration of press releases from Scottish National Party and Tory MSPs, urging communities to bid for the as yet non-existent funds. Is not there a danger that that will raise expectations that cannot be met? Would it not be better if the minister were to say now how the money will be allocated, and where and what will be eligible for funding, so that towns such as Cupar, St Andrews, Newport and Pittenweem in my constituency can realistically assess whether they have any chance of making successful bids?

John Swinney: I would be interested to understand the subtle difference between raising expectations in some parts of the country and not raising them in Pittenweem, Cupar and the other important towns of North East Fife that Mr Smith mentioned.

Mr Neil reported to Parliament last week that the Government is working on the basis of establishing for the town centre regeneration fund the criteria that will be applied, the type of projects that will be supported and the areas where projects will take place. We are engaged in discussions about that, and Parliament will be kept advised of developments. The details will be published by the end of this month.

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): The cabinet secretary might be aware of the situation in Cumbernauld and other new towns, where the town centres are essentially owned by private companies. The compartmentalised ownership of those town centres gives rise to problems in regeneration initiatives. Will the cabinet secretary explain how the town centre regeneration fund might benefit Cumbernauld town centre and other similar town centres?

John Swinney: The establishment of the town centre regeneration fund offers a clear opportunity—especially at this point in the economic cycle. It is a difficult time in the market, and public sector investment is making up a large proportion of the private sector investment vacancy that has been left. We seek to find the most important criteria for making judgments on deployment of the fund. Clearly, no commitments can be given about individual towns at this stage, but I assure Mr Hepburn that great energy will be put into ensuring that the right criteria are selected for judging which projects should be taken up. Broad considerations will be taken into account in our discussions on the allocation of resources from the fund.

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): I am rather disappointed to hear that no commitments can be made to particular towns. People in Kirkintilloch in my constituency eagerly await the arrival of Mr Mather in May, when he is coming to have a meeting with us. I was rather hoping that he would be able to furnish us with some details of the town centre fund, but now we find that the issue does not come within his remit but within the remit of the bold Mr Alex Neil, who is not here to answer any questions.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Would you ask a question please?

David Whitton: Perhaps the cabinet secretary could explain why the decision was made in that way?

John Swinney: I am afraid that I am not the person who judges what questions are allowed to be asked in Parliament. As I should, I respectfully leave that to the Presiding Officer. I am merely here as a functionary to answer questions on behalf of the Government—questions that have been selected by our distinguished Presiding Officer. It is absolutely not my responsibility to choose the questions to be answered; I just give the quality answers on behalf of the Government.

The policy responsibility for the town centre regeneration fund clearly lies with the minister who is responsible for regeneration activities. Mr Neil carries that responsibility. Mr Mather is the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism, in which he does a fantastic job. When Mr Mather goes to Kirkintilloch—which is a town I know well—I am sure that he will be able to convey many messages on a broad range of Government responsibilities. However, decisions on the town centre regeneration fund are properly for the Minister for Housing and Communities—my colleague, Mr Neil.

Local Government (Executive Pay)

6. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has had, or plans to have, discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities or the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers on the issue of executive pay in local government. (S3O-6068)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Executive pay in local government is a matter for local authorities themselves, as independent corporate bodies. We have no plans to discuss this with COSLA or SOLACE.

John Wilson: According to *The Herald* on 26 February 2009, taxpayers were paying £20 million in salaries to chief executives and senior directors of local authorities in Scotland. Is the cabinet secretary prepared to consider the continued practice of performance-related pay being received by local authority chief executives and senior directors?

John Swinney: Mr Wilson's point is significant, because the scrutiny that is applied to decisions that are made in the public sector will become ever more intense in the current economic climate. The public sector will have to be able to explain all the bases on which we offer remuneration.

I have been clear in my evidence to the Finance Committee that performance-related payments should be made only for absolutely exceptional performance and not for routine performance. The Scottish Government applies rules to the bodies

over which it has control, and those rules make that point abundantly clear.

As I said in answer to Mr Wilson's original question, executive pay in local government is properly a matter for local authorities themselves. It will be for them to judge the points that have been raised during these questions. They know the resources that are available to them overall and must make the management choices.

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary agree that, when populations in many local authority areas are falling, it is astonishing that some local authorities have chosen to increase the salaries of chief executives and senior officers not only beyond the rate of inflation, but beyond the agreed pay rises? Renfrewshire Council has awarded more than £350,000 per year, every year, to the chief executive and senior directors at a time when the population is falling. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that is unacceptable?

John Swinney: Mr Henry will understand that I cannot, as I said in my original answer to Mr Wilson, comment on individual decisions by local authorities. However, to reiterate what I said to Mr Wilson, in the present economic climate and given all the issues with which we have to wrestle in handling the public purse, it is absolutely fundamental that all public authorities, including Government, local authorities and executive agencies, take due account of the challenging economic climate and the link with remuneration. All authorities must deal with that effectively, to guarantee that they deliver appropriate remuneration packages in the context of the economic climate.

There has been a great deal of speculation in the past few weeks about the numbers of local authorities, directors of various services and chief executives. The Government has made it clear that it will not carry out a local government reorganisation because we think that that would be disruptive in the current situation. However, it is important that authorities consider their management structures and the number of senior personnel they require, and that they make appropriate judgments in the context of the issues with which we all wrestle today.

Carbon Savings (Reporting)

7. Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive, when a householder receives advice from an energy saving Scotland advice centre, funded from the Scottish Government's energy budget, and subsequently takes steps that produce a carbon saving, by whom that carbon saving is reported. (S3O-6102)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The energy saving Scotland advice centres are managed on our behalf by the Energy Saving Trust. The Energy Saving Trust employs an independent team to evaluate continually the advice that the centres give. That is then reported to the Scottish Government in quarterly and annual reports.

Lewis Macdonald: The minister will understand the importance of clarity in carbon accounting in the context of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill. When measures are taken under a Scottish Government-funded programme, are the savings reported by that programme? Similarly, when measures are taken by a power company under the carbon emissions reduction target, are the savings reported by that company? In either case, does an insulation or heating installer deduct from any carbon savings that are reported an amount that is equal to the savings that the Energy Saving Trust reports to the minister in respect of advice that has been given?

Jim Mather: I share the member's interest in achieving a true and fair view and an objective and accurate assessment so that we can monitor progress. The process is robust. As I mentioned, the carbon savings are evaluated through quarterly surveys. A carbon saving is attributed to the Energy Saving Trust or the advice centres only when a householder confirms that the advice that was provided influenced or stimulated the action. In addition, the Energy Saving Trust has an independent internal audit committee that is made up not only of Energy Saving Trust employees, but of external bodies such as the energy companies EDF Energy and Scottish Power, environmental agencies and BP.

The energy company that installs the measures takes the credit. It reports its activities to the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, which monitors that against the overall carbon reductions. Double counting is an important issue. Although the Energy Saving Trust reports CERT activity it has, in order to ensure that there is absolutely no double counting, facilitated with the Scottish Government a system in which we treat separately that which occurs in Scotland from work with the United Kingdom Government.

Local Authority Funding (Roads)

8. Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it intends to review the formula for the allocation of funds to local authorities for the upkeep of roads. (S3O-6100)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): As I said a moment ago in answer to Mr McArthur, a joint review with the Convention of Scottish Local

Authorities is under way. The review will be concluded in time to inform the allocation of funding to local government from 2011-12, following the next spending review. The current system uses a needs-based formula that we inherited from the previous Administration.

Mr McAveety: The cabinet secretary is aware that the formula is predicated largely on the length of road and not the volume of usage. A recent article in the *Glasgow Evening Times* indicated that Glasgow roads have 20 times the number of vehicles as the equivalent roads in rural Scotland have. I know that the minister understands that concern, because we spent the summer months pounding the pavements of some of those roads in the east end of Glasgow. Amidst the clamour of Tollcross Road, as we were desperately seeking to persuade the electorate, we recognised that traffic has quite an impact on places such as Glasgow.

Does the minister accept that road length and road usage are not comparable? Will he, therefore, listen to representations from my constituents about how we can find ways to influence the review that is under way?

John Swinney: As Mr McAveety knows, from his time as a minister and from the time that we spent together on the Finance Committee, the allocation formula is needs based, but requires the use of considerable judgment with regard to the relevant factors and criteria.

I will certainly be happy to receive representations on the questions that Mr McAveety raises with regard to roads in Glasgow. Those points can be considered as part of the review of the distribution formula.

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I want to alert the cabinet secretary to the dire state of the roads in Clydesdale, in the South of Scotland region. Does he agree that, to stimulate economic growth during a time of recession, everything must be done to ensure that the infrastructure of rural areas is improved? Does he also agree that South Lanarkshire Council should do all that it can to maintain the roads in Clydesdale?

John Swinney: Clearly, local authorities must wrestle with many competing priorities. I acknowledge the issues that Aileen Campbell raises. The Government puts in place the resources for local authorities, and it is for local authorities to judge how they deploy those resources. Obviously, decisions can be made to use part of that funding to take the appropriate steps to maintain the road network in the South of Scotland and Clydesdale.

Manufacturing Sector

9. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment it has made of the impact on Scotland's manufacturing sector of the United Kingdom Government's announcement of £2.3 billion in loan guarantees for the car industry. (S3O-6136)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The demand for new cars has dropped dramatically recently because of issues around consumer credit and confidence. In Scotland, the effects of that are being felt by our car retail industry and the wide range of companies that support car manufacturing and retail.

Temporary support measures were approved by the European Commission on 27 February. However, we note the different strategies that have been adopted in Germany and France and are benefiting sales, and we will monitor the situation closely.

Willie Coffey: Is the minister aware of the concern of the manufacturing sector in my constituency about the lack of progress with Westminster's scheme and the desperate prospects for employment as a result? Is he also aware that, in Germany, as he just mentioned, domestic car sales are on the increase due to the introduction of a subsidy to scrap old cars and purchase new ones? Will the minister draw that contrast to the attention of Scotland's Council of Economic Advisers and ask the Westminster Government to get a move on with its loan guarantee plan and to consider introducing a scheme that is similar to the one that is working in Germany?

Jim Mather: We are aware of the German scheme and will draw it to the attention of the Council of Economic Advisers and Westminster, although I am sure that they are already aware of it.

Germany's domestic car sales are increasing due to the cash bonus for scrapping cars that the member mentioned. Although there were huge sales in February, we should wait to see whether there is a beneficial long-term effect. As we monitor that situation, I am keen that we encourage automotive companies in Scotland to register with the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform scheme, so that they will be in the best position to gain whatever advantage they can from it in the short to medium term.

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The minister is aware that the manufacturing sector is playing a growing role in Scotland's economy. Many workers are still working in that sector.

Concerns have been expressed to me over a number of months about what is happening in the manufacturing sector. Would the minister consider convening a summit of key stakeholders, including trade unions, employers and the Government, to discuss the future of Scottish manufacturing?

Jim Mather: The answer is an absolute affirmative. That would be the second such meeting that we would have had. We have also had meetings with the engineering sector—twice—and with the aerospace, marine and defence sectors; the meeting that Mr Park proposes would be part of that continuity. Widening the stakeholder base and getting as many voices in the room as possible would be helpful, and I will liaise with the member to ensure that that happens.

Scottish Futures Trust

10. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what projects the Scottish Futures Trust plans to deliver in 2009. (S3O-6078)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Details of the Scottish Futures Trust's work plan for the 2009-10 financial year will be published in its business plan in the near future. We have made clear that the SFT will commission its first new school project this year and will be involved in the next part of our schools investment programme, which will involve working with local authorities. In addition, the SFT is now leading the hub initiative and managing the process that will lead to the establishment of the two community hub pathfinders in the south-east and the north of Scotland.

Jackie Baillie: The cabinet secretary has, of course, benefited from a series of pipeline projects involving schools, roads and rail links that were left for him by the previous Administration. Can he confirm that not one project has been approved, nor has one contract been signed, since February 2008? That is more than a year of inertia. Exactly how much longer will it be before projects—such as a replacement Dumbarton academy—start to flow again?

John Swinney: Jackie Baillie casually slips past the decision that was taken in February 2008 for the M74 completion contract, which is worth £445 million, and which her Administration spectacularly, in all its years in office, never got going.

I have heard Jackie Baillie ask the same question about 20 times in various interventions.

Jackie Baillie: And I have yet to get an answer.

John Swinney: Presiding Officer, the member's behaviour is somewhat indelicate.

The Presiding Officer: I will decide that.

John Swinney: In January 2009, the Government let the contract—worth £320 million—for the M80 Steps to Haggs road improvement. That, in addition to all the school building that is going on in other parts of the country, means that the entire premise of Jackie Baillie's question is, as usual, totally without foundation—and thank goodness for that.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): The cabinet secretary is aware that, in Glasgow, there is huge controversy over the council's proposals to close and merge a number of primary schools. I draw his attention to the fact that the closures include Wyndford and St Gregory's primary schools, which are side by side and provide an excellent example of a joint school campus.

Is the cabinet secretary aware that the council's ability to produce a solution that retains a community element at the heart of Wyndford in the form of a school is handicapped by the lack of access to funding for refurbishment, not least of the school roof? Can he promise a capital funding stream to Glasgow City Council—under the Scottish Futures Trust or otherwise—that will aid in the retention of a school for the Wyndford community?

John Swinney: I do not have in front of me the figure for the part of Glasgow City Council's capital budget that is funded by the Scottish Government, but if my memory serves me right, it is of the order of £100 million per year. Mr Brown cannot tell me that that type of resource cannot be deployed effectively to support the schools infrastructure in the city of Glasgow. I imagine that it would be perfectly possible for that work to be undertaken.

Town Centre Regeneration Fund

11. John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive when communities in the Scottish Borders will be able to apply for money from the town centre regeneration fund. (S3O-6070)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): As the Minister for Housing and Communities reported in the chamber last week, the town centre regeneration fund will be available in 2009-10 to support our town centres and local high streets. We are working on the details of the fund, and those will be announced by the end of March 2009.

John Lamont: I acknowledge that the exact details will not be announced for several weeks. However, I am sure that the cabinet secretary is aware that many council officials throughout Scotland are drawing up elaborate plans for how they want to spend that new fund. Will the cabinet

secretary reassure me that bids that come directly from local communities and groups will be considered, and that councils will not be given complete control over those funds?

John Swinney: The details of the arrangements for distribution of the funding and for judging individual projects will be set out by Alex Neil, the Minister for Housing and Communities, later this month. I am certain that, as part of that process, the questions that Mr Lamont raises will be properly and fully answered.

National Planning Framework (Consultation)

12. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that the consultation carried out on the national planning framework for Scotland 2 was adequate. (S3O-6064)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): We believe that a very full consultation was carried out. We complied fully with the commitments in the statutory participation statement, which was the first of its kind in Scotland. Planning Aid for Scotland commented:

“the methods used to raise awareness and seek comments have been wide-ranging and have incorporated a variety of consultation methods including targeted engagement, a website, a helpline, seminars, events and leaflets.”

Mary Scanlon: I thank the minister for that most helpful answer. Although the development at Tornagrain on the A96 is not designated as a national project, it is mentioned in paragraph 272 of the NPF 2 document. Given its inclusion, some of my constituents are concerned that the development has been approved. Will the minister clarify that planning permission has still to be granted for the Tornagrain development and that a local consultation on the application will take place in the normal manner?

Stewart Stevenson: Yes.

The Presiding Officer: We have a debate on the national planning framework later, so I will move on.

Bus Services

13. Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to give communities a greater say in the provision of local bus services. (S3O-6082)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): As part of our work on the bus action plan, the Scottish Government has encouraged the establishment of bus forums by local authorities. Bus forums are a way in which bus users can voice their concerns

about local bus services directly to bus operators and local authorities. In “Buses for Scotland—Progress Through Partnership: A Guide for Local Authorities, Regional Transport Partnerships and Bus Operators”, we have provided best practice guidance on how to establish bus forums.

Rhona Brankin: I thank the minister for that reply, although I think that my constituents will find it rather disappointing; in particular, I refer to the thousands of bus users in Gorebridge, Newtongrange, Rosewell and Eskbank, who have been told by First that more than 700 bus journeys between Midlothian and Edinburgh will be withdrawn in April. Does the minister share my concern that such cuts can be made without consultation of the affected communities? Does he agree that such service reductions do nothing to promote the use of public transport? Will he be brave enough to stand up to Brian Souter by backing my colleague Charlie Gordon’s proposals for bus re-regulation? Will he put the interests of Scotland’s bus passengers before the SNP’s coffers?

Stewart Stevenson: I realise that the member arrived in time to participate only from question 5 onwards. If she had listened to some of the earlier answers, she would know that the Government is engaged in a wide range of issues of interest to people throughout Scotland.

Like Rhona Brankin, I find it disappointing to hear of a reduction in bus services in any part of Scotland. There is a wide range of ways in which local authorities, who are primarily involved in overseeing local services, can support the interests of the people for whom they work. The creation of statutory partnerships is one approach that is yet to be used. We are anxious to promote and support any action that is taken in that regard and to work with local authorities that want to introduce such partnerships to ensure that we get the benefits of that work without the heavy-handed regulation of everything that happens regarding buses.

Partnerships are the best way in which to proceed. I had the great pleasure of being in Dundee recently to launch a punctuality improvement partnership, which I believe will deliver significant benefits. I say that in the context of Dundee City Council being a council in which I have no political interest.

The Presiding Officer: Briefly please, minister.

Stewart Stevenson: We are heavily promoting the range of options that we inherited from our predecessor Administration to ensure that the bus services that are required throughout Scotland are actually delivered.

The Presiding Officer: Question 14 has been withdrawn.

Borrowing Powers

15. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what it considers the advantages would be of the acquisition of borrowing powers. (S3O-6118)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The opportunity to borrow in a responsible manner would give the Scottish Government greater flexibility in budgetary management and in our ability to manage expenditure in the best interests of the people of Scotland and the Scottish economy. It would create opportunities to address Scotland's clear infrastructure needs more quickly by phasing funding in a way that is sensible, efficient and wholly appropriate to Scotland's circumstances. It would also increase the range of policy levers that are available to help to stimulate the economy during times of economic need.

Robert Brown: Does the cabinet secretary agree that one of the advantages of the Scottish Government having borrowing powers would be an end to the kind of whingeing that we heard on television last night from the SNP Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, whose position appeared to be that the taxpayers of England and the rest of the United Kingdom should bail out the Scottish Government over its troubles in respect of the new Forth bridge? Does the cabinet secretary agree that that sort of attitude is both unseemly and unsuitable and that it would be far better if the Parliament and the Government were able to plan their capital programme properly over a longer period, with the ability to fund the necessary repayments?

John Swinney: Mr Brown might have a point if there were any substance to what he has said. I saw Mr Stevenson's interview last night, and I must have been watching a different channel from the one that Mr Brown was watching. We are asking, legitimately, for the ability sensibly to plan over a longer period of time projects that have an extraordinary cost within the routine of public expenditure. During the budget process, I negotiated with the Liberal Democrats a common purpose approach to the question. I am surprised that the member and I are at odds with each other so quickly, when we were so united only a short time ago.

National Planning Framework

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-3584, in the name of Duncan McNeil, on behalf of the Local Government and Communities Committee, on "National Planning Framework for Scotland 2: Proposed Framework". The debate is fully subscribed and there is no spare time, so I will stop members at the end of their allotted time.

14:56

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): I am pleased to open today's debate. This is the first time that a proposed national planning framework has been subject to scrutiny by the Parliament and its committees.

The Local Government and Communities Committee welcomes the opportunity that it has had to debate a significant document and to contribute to the process. I thank the committee clerks and Scottish Parliament information centre researchers for the help that they have given to the committee. I also thank the other two committees that have contributed to the debate through their reports—the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee and the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee—and all those who made written submissions or gave oral evidence.

The Local Government and Communities Committee recognises that the proposed national planning framework is an evolving document and will be subject to further scrutiny and monitoring through continuing dialogue between the committee and the Scottish Government. It is clear from our report that the committee is generally positive about NPF 2, but we believe that lessons can be learned for the future.

The first lesson relates to accessibility. We know that planning is a complex subject, and we welcome the efforts that the Scottish Government has made to make the document more user friendly and accessible, but it appears that even experts have found it difficult to wade through. For example, Bob Stewart of the Scottish Society of Directors of Planning said:

"it is not an easy read, even for a professional with some 42 years' experience. It will be refined as we go through the process, and as we do so it would be helpful if it was improved and simplified."—[*Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee*, 14 January 2009; c 1551.]

Planning is an extremely important subject. In order to be as accessible as possible to as many people as possible, future NPF documents should use clear, jargon-free language to ensure that the

public are well informed about the key issues and feel able to engage in the consultation process. Although I am sure that the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change had his tongue firmly in his cheek when he described the document to the committee as “a rattling good read”, he did say that he would be happy to consider comments about language and presentation and to learn from them.

We also believe that there are lessons to be learned on the consultation process. We acknowledge the Scottish Government's efforts to engage with stakeholders and the general public through an extensive consultation programme, but community groups that responded to the committee's consultation raised concerns about the level of consultation locally. As some of the impacts of NPF 2 are likely to be felt most at that level, it is vital that local communities are engaged in the consultation process. We therefore recommend that the Scottish Government consider ways of further improving the consultation process so that local communities can be more effectively engaged in the future. We suggest that local authorities could have a role to play in maximising awareness at a local level, and we encourage the Government to look at that possibility.

One of the more contentious aspects of NPF 2 is the list of projects that are to be designated as national developments. The committee's focus was primarily on process issues, not on the merits or otherwise of the national developments—other committees have considered them—and we have commented on the consultation. A number of concerns were raised in evidence about the lack of consultation on the revised list of national developments. In particular, people were not clear about how the list was developed and revised and why some projects had been included and others had not. That complaint was not limited to local community groups; again, I quote Bob Stewart of the Scottish Society of Directors of Planning:

“local authorities and others made a considerable number of suggestions about alternative national projects. The process of sifting those projects has not been transparent and it is not clear how we arrived at the projects that are listed in the NPF.”—[*Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee*, 14 January 2009; c 1547.]

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Duncan McNeil: No. I will plough on because I have limited time; I am sure that Patrick Harvie will get another opportunity.

We know that the Scottish Government carried out a strategic environmental assessment of all the national developments and that there was consultation on that assessment, but we do not

think that it was clear to the wider public that that was an opportunity to comment on the revised list of national developments. We therefore believe that there should have been a separate consultation on the revised list. We also think that the Scottish Government should have been clearer about why suggestions for national developments were accepted or rejected and that individuals whose suggestions were rejected should have been properly debriefed.

My final point on the process is to reinforce the committee's plea for more notice to be given of the laying of the next NPF so that committees can properly plan a programme of scrutiny and engagement. Sixty days is extremely tight, and the more notice that we are given, the better.

Turning to the substantive issues in the document itself, we focused on the flexibility of the framework, its impact on the planning system and the funding, timetabling and delivery of national developments. Given the current economic climate, we believe that it is essential that the framework is flexible enough to respond to ever-changing circumstances, and we welcome the Government's assurance that the document is not a fixed blueprint.

The construction industry in particular has been badly hit by the current economic situation. The committee heard evidence from the industry that it is crying out for infrastructure projects to be brought forward to stimulate the industry and the economy and to help keep capacity. Michael Levack of the Scottish Building Federation told us:

“we are losing capacity in a serious way—by the day. It is very difficult to predict what the next six months or year will hold. I am always surprised when people speculate that there will be some recovery in the economy during 2009. Personally, without wishing to wear the black hat and sound a note of doom and gloom, I think that it will be 2011 before we see any improvement in the situation. That is why we are constantly calling for some infrastructure projects to be brought forward, to allow us to retain capacity in the industry.”—[*Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee*, 14 January 2009; c 1540.]

The Scottish Government said to us in evidence that it will bring forward construction projects in which it has control over the timetable, and it cited the Forth crossing and strategic rail enhancements as two examples. The committee believes that, given the current economic situation, the Scottish Government should consider opportunities to bring forward projects that are publicly funded. We recognise that some projects are either wholly or partly funded by the private sector, and for that reason we also recommend that the Scottish Government engage with the private sector to consider the opportunities of bringing forward further projects. The issue is an important one for many people, and we would welcome

reassurances from the Government that it will pursue those discussions.

The Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006 requires ministers to set out in the framework a statement of need for any development that it designates as a national development. Although that does not automatically remove the need for planning permission or other consents to be obtained for a development, it means that a planning authority cannot reject an application for a national development that is listed in NPF 2 on the ground of need. Parliament needs to be clear about the significance of NPF 2 in that regard.

The committee believes that the Government needs to provide further clarity on the funding and delivery of national developments to ensure that they are not simply aspirational but firm commitments to build. I have mentioned the effect of the economic climate on the construction industry. If no clarity is given on the timetabling of the national developments and associated infrastructure, the Government will simply add to the uncertainty and leave the industry and others unable to plan ahead and make projections. There will also be an effect on local communities: people need to know when a national development is likely to come on stream locally.

The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee expressed concern about the delivery and funding of the national developments. The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change also said that

"The framework does not represent ... a single penny of public funding".—[*Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee*, 21 January 2009; c 1579.]

On that basis, the committee struggled to see how the national developments in the NPF, which is essentially a planning document, link to the Scottish Government's future expenditure proposals. We seek clarity from ministers on the funding of national developments in relation to those expenditure plans: we have agreed to take further evidence from the Government on that, but some clarity today would be very welcome.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but I must stop you there, Mr McNeil.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government and Communities Committee's 5th Report, 2009 (Session 3): *National Planning Framework for Scotland 2: Proposed Framework* (SP Paper 218), together with the *Official Report* of the Parliament's debate on the report, should form the Parliament's response to the Scottish Government on the Proposed Framework.—[*Duncan McNeil*.]

15:08

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I welcome today's debate on the national

planning framework. When Labour was in government, we recognised that Scotland's future economic success depends on coherent policies and the early identification of projects that are of strategic national significance.

The need for crucial developments should not have to be argued over repeatedly at successive stages in the planning process—that way lie expensive and unnecessary delays. We introduced the first national planning framework and the subsequent planning legislation that enabled a revised framework to be placed on a statutory basis. We welcome the opportunity that the debate has given the Parliament to comment on the revised document, which is now informed by strategic environmental assessments of the various projects.

As Duncan McNeil stated, we have heard criticism that the consultation process was geared towards statutory bodies and larger organisations and not to the wider public. Some people fear that the national planning framework could fast-track controversial decisions without proper scrutiny—I refer in particular to airport expansion. Labour does not support such a move.

Little feedback has been given to people in various parts of Scotland who made unsuccessful bids for projects to be included. The Local Government and Communities Committee heard about the lack of timescales, prioritisation and information about financing—complaints that will be familiar to members from the debate in December on the strategic transport projects review. I hope that the Government will take on board those process criticisms. It is important to highlight any deficiencies that we have found in the framework document, given that this debate is the only chance that members have to influence its content.

Too much of the document is taken up with listing the challenges that Scotland needs to address—contextualisation and not evidence-driven policy consideration. For example, paragraph 52 sets out the main elements of the Government's spatial strategy to 2030, but they are expressed only as intentions. That is worthy enough, but it is lacking in detail.

It seems remarkable that urban design should feature hardly at all in the Government's development strategy and that tackling poverty and disadvantage, especially in local authority areas with high concentrations of deprivation, is not given greater prominence. I hope that those omissions can be corrected.

The real meat of the document is the annex of designated national developments. Labour's amendment, which we hope will be supported throughout the chamber, adds the high-speed rail

link between Scotland and London to the list. That takes forward the unanimous recommendation in the report that the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee published last Friday. The evidence taken by the committee showed that huge economic and climate change benefits could be gained from a high-speed rail link between Scotland and London—and beyond, since there is already a high-speed link to the Channel.

I am aware that the Scottish ministers have been in discussions with Lord Adonis, the UK rail minister, about high-speed rail; indeed, Lord Adonis will speak to members of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee next week. It is important that all parties in Scotland signal our commitment to such a link by supporting the inclusion of high-speed rail in the national planning framework. We are a long way from working out the details of a scheme, identifying a route or estimating the costs but, if our amendment is accepted at decision time, I hope that the minister will soon be in a position to put forward a statement of need and that a high-speed rail link between Scotland and London can be added to the list of designated national developments.

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I welcome the change in mood music with the appointment of Andrew Adonis as my opposite number at Westminster, and I look forward to working with him on this important subject, on which I think there is at last a sense of common purpose, although considerable detail has to be worked out.

Des McNulty: That is a welcome comment.

Labour believes that NPF project 10, entitled “Improved Rail Connectivity in the West of Scotland”, which is one of only two projects from the strategic transport projects review that are also in NPF 2, should incorporate terminal capacity for high-speed rail as well as for Glasgow crossrail and that those rail improvements should be prioritised.

Edinburgh to Glasgow rail improvements feature in the strategic transport projects review, as does new track between Inverkeithing and Halbeath, which is vital in speeding up rail services between Edinburgh and the north and north-east of Scotland. We believe that those two projects should be brought forward as quickly as possible, and we would welcome an indication from the minister of the timetable for delivery.

Our amendment recommends that both interim and long-term targets for reducing emissions are fully taken into account in land use and energy policies. If we want to reach the 80 per cent target and, in particular, if we want to adopt an interim

target that delivers vital early action on emissions, that must be fully reflected in the list of strategic priorities. Given the urgency of the need to reduce carbon, it is disappointing that practical steps aimed at securing the behavioural changes needed to deliver a step change in energy efficiency in homes and workplaces are not given designated project status in the annex alongside energy generation projects—instead, they are confined to the body of the document. Substantial gains are to be made from energy efficiency measures for buildings. Gathering what the Royal Society of Edinburgh described as “low-hanging fruit” must be a strategic priority if we are to maximise our opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions during this planning period.

On generation and transmission, project 8 is a new clean coal power station and transshipment facility at Hunterston, and project 9 is new non-nuclear base-load capacity at existing power stations. The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee argued that technology-specific references should be removed from those project descriptions. Labour would be strongly opposed to any new coal-fired station at Hunterston or anywhere else that did not incorporate effective deployment of carbon sequestration measures from the outset, but low-carbon technologies should not be excluded from the planning framework, especially if we end up relying instead on unproven clean coal technology.

Other countries have greatly expanded their provision of segregated urban walking and cycling routes, and many European cities are consequently much safer for walkers and cyclists than our towns and cities. Active travel, whether for commuting or leisure, must have a much more prominent place in our thinking, whether in urban design, allocation of road space or planning requirements for housing, retail and workplace developments. I am not sure whether that is best done by including a Scotland-wide designated project, by creating incentives or through better regulation in the planning system, but we must consider carefully how we promote carbon neutrality, whether in transport, urban design, housing or microgeneration—all of which could help us to address climate change.

In the time available I have not been able to speak about all the development projects and policy issues in the framework. I have sympathy with the comments that Patrick Harvie has made about the lack of opportunity to amend the document, which deserved much more debating time than was allocated to it. We should ensure that nothing is read into the inclusion of projects in the framework that short-circuits the debates in committee and the chamber that will be necessary when decisions on implementation are made.

I hope that members will agree to the proposal to include high-speed rail links in the list of national developments and to the other proposals in the amendment in my name.

I move amendment S3M-3584.2, to insert at end:

"supports the inclusion of the high-speed rail link between Scotland and London on the list of designated national developments; recommends that the Scottish Government ensures that both interim and long-term targets for reducing emissions are fully taken into account in land use and energy policies, and considers that local and national land use planning must facilitate walking and cycling in urban as well as rural areas."

15:15

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): This is an important debate, although the motion is framed in neutral terms. It simply draws attention to the report of a parliamentary committee and suggests that that report and the *Official Report* of today's debate should form the Parliament's response to the national planning framework consultation document.

Such a response is not sufficient given the importance of the national planning framework and, in particular, the designation of national developments. The importance that is attached to the designation should not be underestimated, as the Local Government and Communities Committee emphasised in its report. I was pleased that Duncan McNeil underscored that point.

Designation enables ministers to intervene at any stage of the consideration of a relevant planning application to expedite the decision-making process. Moreover, designation is the means by which the principle of the need for a development is established. As a consequence, subsequent consideration of detailed planning applications for national developments will be concerned only with matters such as siting, design and the mitigation of environmental impacts, and will not be concerned with the principle of the need for the development. That consequence of designation merits far more than a bland motion of referral.

It is right and proper that the Parliament should debate the principle of proposed national developments; it is equally right and proper that the final framework that the Government publishes should reflect Parliament's decisions in that regard. Some organisations that made representations to the committee, such as Friends of the Earth Scotland and the John Muir Trust, expressed concern that the public might take objection to the exclusion of full scrutiny of the need for a particular development when a planning application is lodged. I do not agree. It is entirely appropriate that our national Parliament should

approve what is or is not a national development and that the Parliament should decide the issue of need after extensive and genuine public consultation. However, we can do that only if we debate and decide on issues of need and matters of controversy and principle. Last week, Patrick Harvie made that point, with which I very much agree, even though he and I disagree on the specifics.

On the specifics, I turn to the excellent recommendation of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, which said:

"the Committee believes that it is too early ... to be technology specific in the case of candidate national developments N° 8 and 9",

which relate, respectively, to a new power station and transshipment hub at Hunterston and to new base-load generating capacity at other existing power station sites. In essence, the committee said that it is not appropriate in the national planning framework to rule out a nuclear option, for example, as part of the diversity of energy mix in electricity generation, which is essential if we are to sustain security of supply.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I will cover that issue in detail in my speech, but I point out now that the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee did not make such a recommendation. The member should refer to the whole recommendation in paragraph 71 of the committee's report and not just select a bit of it.

David McLetchie: I was quoting from paragraph 71, and I was pleased that the member endorsed the recommendation. I note that at least one member of his party dissents from his belated interpretation of the plain English in paragraph 71, but we will hear more later of the member's rather muddled thinking, which is emerging in the light of the whipping from the rest of his colleagues in the Liberal Democrat group, to which he might have paid a bit more attention at the outset.

The committee's sensible approach was echoed in a report by the First Minister's Scottish Council of Economic Advisers, which said that there should be an independent assessment of the full economic costs and carbon emissions abatement potential of the various energy options open to Scotland—an assessment to which the Scottish Government is now committed. It is clear that the finalisation of NPF 2 will predate the publication of that independent assessment so, if the independent assessment is to be truly independent, it is reasonable at least to concede the possibility that it might recommend the construction of a new nuclear power station in order to generate essential base-load capacity.

That being the case, logic dictates that NPF 2 should not be technology specific, so that the

issue of need is dealt with irrespective of the technology or technologies that are recommended as a result of the Government's independent assessment. It is regrettable that that simple, elementary logic is beyond the wit of the present Scottish Government, which has an overweening and wholly unjustified confidence that the independent assessment will conclude that it is right. That reflects a rather dogmatic attitude that NPF 2 should reflect only the Government's policy and not the decisions of the Parliament. I do not accept that: this Parliament should decide what is or is not a national development.

The Parliament should approve the national planning framework, which is why I lodged my amendment. I was going to congratulate Iain Smith on his good sense in putting his name to the recommendation of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, even though his party has reservations about nuclear power, but it is now clearly historical good sense.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the member's time is up.

Amendment S3M-3584.1 moved,

"As an amendment to motion (S3M-3584) in the name of Duncan McNeil, insert at end 'and endorses the recommendation of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee that the Scottish Government removes any technology-specific references from candidate national developments 8 and 9, and calls on the Scottish Government to amend the descriptions of these national developments to reflect this in the final version of the National Planning Framework for Scotland 2.'"—[David McLetchie.]

15:21.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I thank the Local Government and Communities Committee for its report and the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee and the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee for the useful commentary that they have added.

As other members have said, the statutory national planning framework includes national projects for the first time, but its significance goes way beyond the identification of a clutch of national projects. The framework will be judged to be successful if it brings about change in communities throughout Scotland, protects and enhances the quality of the natural and built environments and helps to build safer, stronger and healthier communities.

When people think about planning, they focus too often on the local, tangible parts of it and miss the bigger picture. For me, the bigger picture is the role that inspirational planning can play in creating a healthier and happier society. I expect much of today's debate to focus on infrastructure, but we should not forget the importance of place making

or designing with nature. We can learn much from the past. For example, we can look to Patrick Geddes, the garden cities movement or the great social reformers who knew how the environment impacted on the health of our communities.

Today, our communities face many threats that planning could help to address. Harry Burns, Scotland's chief medical officer, has pointed out that the health benefits of good planning are often not taken into account because they are difficult to quantify. Those benefits can include personal fitness, good mental health and shorter hospital stays—a range of benefits that would save society money in service costs, sickness benefits and the like, as well as create a happier community.

There might not be disease from poor sanitation and overcrowding these days, but what about our epidemics of heart disease, obesity and alcohol abuse or the growth of asthma? What can the planning system do to tackle those things? It can do a great deal more than it has done to date, and I hope that NPF 2 will encourage a greater focus on the spaces that we create, the quality of the built environment and the links to the natural environment.

I turn to the detail of NPF 2. It is commendable that the Government has not succumbed to pressure to identify scores of national projects—subsidiarity is important in planning, and it would be entirely wrong to develop a heavy-handed, top-down approach—but I would have been happier if there had been a clearer process for consultation on the selection of national projects. Six of the 14 recommendations of the lead committee relate to consultation and engagement.

Improving the level and quality of public participation in planning has been one theme of the planning modernisation process. Reconciling development and local sensitivities is always difficult, but a much greater role for community involvement in the planning process is key to the reforms that have been working their way through the system for some time.

Greater community engagement earlier in the planning cycle requires much greater public awareness of why planning matters, but it also requires standards to be set to ensure that the quality of engagement in the planning system can command trust and commitment. The shortcoming that the committees identified must not be repeated. I urge the Government to accept that and to make a commitment that any future iterations of the framework will involve meaningful engagement.

As the document represents the Government's vision for Scotland's development to 2030, it is legitimate to ask how it helps to deliver other policy imperatives, such as a reduction in carbon

emissions. It is also pertinent to check whether the investment plan and the STPR are in step and will make the vision a reality. Some witnesses told our committee that there was an inherent tension between the development objectives in NPF 2 and its climate change objectives. The Sustainable Development Commission said:

"Our particular concern is that the document will lock us into a higher carbon future, which will mean that in other aspects of policy we will have to make even more radical cuts in emissions".—[*Official Report, Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee*, 6 January 2009; c 1222.]

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency suggested that a step change in policy would be required and said:

"it would be desirable to see Government at least aspire to stabilise road traffic growth as a complementary measure to support land based transport emission reductions via improved accessibility and modal shift."

Sustrans and Transport Scotland drew attention to the framework's deficiencies on cycling and walking, which Des McNulty pointed out. Safe and attractive walking and cycling routes ought to be an integral part of all development proposals; the framework should recognise that and give clear guidance to local authorities to develop active travel strategies in local plans. High-speed rail, on which the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee has just concluded an inquiry, must be a higher priority, too. I support Des McNulty's amendment, which addresses those two points.

The public transportation elements of the new Forth crossing are of fundamental importance, and I agree that NPF 2 should make specific reference to the multimodal corridor.

I turn to the energy proposals. The use of the phrase "carbon capture ready" is meaningless and could allow the construction of new, unabated coal-fired power stations, which would add significantly to carbon dioxide emissions. That must not happen. The costs of development of carbon capture technology will be great and, as ever, some certainty in the market would help. The Government must reflect on how it could best harness the knowledge and expertise in Scotland—particularly in the north-east, with its geologists and subsea experts—to accelerate the development of such technology.

It is worth considering the merits of establishing the principle of a strictly enforceable emissions performance standard for new combustion plant. An EPS would set the maximum allowable level of CO₂ emissions per unit of electricity or heat generated by new fossil-fuelled plant.

David McLetchie: Will the member give way?

Alison McInnes: I have only half a minute left.

David McLetchie: I know. I just want to ask—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. The member is not giving way.

Alison McInnes: Such a standard would help us to deliver our climate change targets and would ensure that Scotland took a genuine lead in the global development of carbon capture and storage in the coming decade.

Let us be clear: any discussion of new nuclear power stations distracts from the need to invest in renewable solutions for Scotland. I want a green future for my country, and my colleague Iain Smith will develop that argument.

I move amendment S3M-3584.1.1, to insert at end

"and reaffirms that in accordance with paragraph 152 of the National Planning Framework for Scotland 2 proposed framework document it does not support the construction of new nuclear power stations in Scotland."

15:27

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Government's bringing forward—[*Interruption*]—amidst the squabbling that is going on to my right of the proposed national planning framework is entirely consistent with the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006. NPF 2 was laid before Parliament on 12 December for a period of consideration of 60 days. It builds on the first framework, which was published in 2004. Its preparation has involved an extensive programme of participation, involving members of the public, communities and a wide range of stakeholders in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The proposed framework takes forward the spatial aspects of the Government's economic strategy and will form a key part of the modernised planning system. It will provide a national policy context for development plans and planning decisions, and will inform the continuing programmes of Government, public agencies and local authorities. Its preparation has run alongside the preparation of the strategic transport projects review, to ensure that there is consistency in the overall framework of future planning.

I would like to thank the Local Government and Communities Committee, the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee and the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee for their careful consideration of the proposed framework, and I welcome their broad support for the strategy. The Government will reflect on a number of the points that they made.

I will begin by addressing participation. A number of the people who participated in the preparation of the framework have expressed

dissatisfaction with aspects of the approach to engagement. I can assure Parliament that engagement with the public and local communities has played a vital part in the development of the framework, in accordance with the statutory participation statement, which is the first of its kind in Scotland. The Scottish Government made every effort to ensure that the participation arrangements made participation accessible to all interested parties.

We have consulted widely in the past two years, which is reflected in the proposed framework that has been laid before Parliament. Two rounds of engagement took place—one before and one after publication of the discussion draft—in addition to the consultation on the framework. The public have also been involved in the strategic environmental assessment at several stages.

I hope that, on reflection, members will appreciate that a vast amount of consultation has taken place. We all accept that more consultation could always happen on all issues, but we must reach conclusions at some stage. As Mr Stevenson said in response to Mary Scanlon at question time, Planning Aid for Scotland concluded

“that the methods used to raise awareness and seek comments have been wide-ranging and have incorporated a variety of consultation methods”.

It commended

“the efforts made to engage harder-to-reach and diverse sections of society in the discussion of the overall vision.”

I hope that Parliament will take heart from that.

Concerns have been expressed about the process of selecting projects as national developments. The 12 infrastructure projects that are identified as national developments were selected after wide consultation and on the basis of an assessment against a clear set of criteria that I announced in Parliament in September 2007. The results of that assessment have been published.

Engagement on the identification of national developments involved two rounds of consultation and a further consultation on the potential environmental effects of candidate national developments as part of the strategic environmental assessment process. The parliamentary stage of the process provides a further opportunity for consideration and debate, which will ensure a high level of scrutiny.

It is important to be clear that the purpose of designation as a national development is to help to deliver key elements of national infrastructure that are subject to discrete consent procedures. It establishes the principle of the developments. Many important projects—for example,

regeneration in key locations such as the Clyde gateway, many projects that are identified in the strategic transport projects review, environmental projects such as the central Scotland green network and home insulation programmes—do not require national development status to secure their delivery.

Some have questioned how well the framework strategy and national developments sit with our commitment to tackle climate change and reduce emissions. Far from being at odds with our commitments on climate change and sustainable development, the NPF supports them. As I said, the framework has been subject to rigorous strategic environmental assessment.

Members have talked about energy. The Government's position on the nuclear question is clearly understood. We will support the Liberal Democrats' amendment to the Conservative amendment and we will reflect on the points that have been made when finalising the national planning framework. I am aware that Scottish and Southern Energy expressed concerns to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee about some of the wording on energy issues in the proposed framework and I have asked my officials to address those concerns in finalising the document.

The next step is for the Government to reflect on the debate. It is wholly appropriate that the Government listens to the debate, which parliamentary committees have led. We will consider the issues that committees have raised and reach conclusions, as is consistent with section 3B of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, which was inserted by the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006, which the Parliament supported. That will ensure that we have in place a framework that represents Scotland's future development and structures our interventions to bring it about.

15:34

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): When we evaluate the Local Government and Communities Committee's report on the “National Planning Framework for Scotland 2: Proposed Framework”, it is important to recognise that the committee restricted its comments to the Scottish Government's consultation on national planning framework 2 and to the key principles behind the proposals. My role has been to examine the proposed framework as a member of the committee, especially in the three evidence-gathering sessions at committee meetings. I will talk in depth later about the committee's detailed findings.

It is important to consider carefully the reasons for introducing national planning framework 2. Anyone with even a little knowledge of planning knows that it is complex, especially in terms of local government. For example, in my experience, there are real problems with planning enforcement—I should perhaps call it a perceived lack of enforcement—on the ground.

The lack of planning officers, which is key, was identified in the evidence sessions and is noted in the committee's recommendations. There is a requirement for on-going training in planning departments in local authorities and other bodies. Local government will no doubt make representations on the cost implications of the framework.

As the committee's report states, there is a requirement for an assessment matrix of candidate national developments and for less use of jargon. I cannot help but notice that *The Sunday Times Scotland* has already commented that the "matrix" terminology is not exactly jargon-free language.

A great deal of the committee's discussion—this is reflected in the report—was about how 12 national projects were identified at the end of the process whereas only nine projects were included in the original proposals. More flexibility is required in bringing projects on stream. As the committee recommends, it is vital that we have openness and transparency, which are critical to the process, especially in developing any lists of developments of national interest.

Various contributions were made during the NPF 2 consultation about the efficiency of the planning system. However, the briefing from the John Muir Trust provides a cautionary note on the process. It states:

"It is critical that the National Planning Framework does not become a vehicle for fast-tracking controversial decisions".

Planning decisions must be part of the democratic processes in this country. Quite rightly, they should not be party political.

As the committee's report states, there is clearly a debate on the rationale behind choosing what is and is not a national project, therefore I am glad that the committee will provide an overview of "Delivering Planning Reform". The report states:

"The Committee will keep a watching brief on developments in the planning system ... and it may decide to take further evidence from the Scottish Government at a later date".

In our evidence-gathering sessions, the considerable amount of time that we spent questioning witnesses proved to be useful in drawing out important points that needed to be scrutinised. As highlighted in an earlier discussion

on costs, I indicated to the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change that

"The projects will not come without any cost to the public purse. What level of public funding will be made available for the other issues that may arise from the projects in the national planning framework?"

The minister answered my question by stating:

"The framework does not represent a commitment to a single penny of public funding, because it is a planning document."—[*Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee*, 21 January 2009; c 1579.]

There has been a wider debate both inside and outside the Parliament on the Government's national project aspirations. The committee seeks further clarification on funding issues. It is worth reinforcing the point that many of the national projects that have been identified will rely on private finance.

The committee recommends that

"the NPF2 Action Programme should contain a timetable for the delivery of national developments."

As detailed in the report, the committee seeks some certainty in that regard. To provide context to the debate, NPF 2 needs some crossover with expenditure proposals if we are to have the necessary degree of joined-up thinking.

Getting to the heart of the matter on moving Scotland forward, I am glad that the Scottish Government's participation statement confirms that it will set out a detailed monitoring and evaluation process.

I welcome the general principles that are contained in the Local Government and Communities Committee's report. I thank the committee members, clerks and those who provided evidence for ensuring that we had a meaningful debate on the issues surrounding the development of a national planning framework for Scotland.

15:39

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I support the Labour amendment, but I want to speak to two other aspects: the position of Edinburgh in the national planning framework and the extent to which public participation was satisfactory.

I believe that the national planning framework ought to be modified to take account of Edinburgh's position as capital city and its significant role as an engine of economic growth for Scotland. It is the only city in Scotland whose population is going to expand considerably over the next few years, and the national planning framework must reflect the resulting pressure on infrastructure such as housing and transport. I therefore support the City of Edinburgh Council's

proposed additions after paragraph 185 of NPF 2, which include reference to the tram as a key element of transport infrastructure. There should also be an addition at the end of paragraph 74 to emphasise that the housing investment programme must reflect the geography of affordable housing need that is described in that paragraph and the surrounding paragraphs.

It is not just Edinburgh in general that is not given proper recognition in the national planning framework, but the waterfront in particular, much of which is in my constituency. The waterfront should be included in the list in paragraph 57 of key locations that offer substantial strategic growth potential.

Stewart Stevenson: Bearing in mind the fact that we are talking about a spatial planning document, can the member tell me whether he has in mind any planning issues associated with Edinburgh's waterfront? If so, I hope that I will be able to respond.

Malcolm Chisholm: There will be lots of planning issues. The whole point of the national planning framework is to identify sites of national strategic importance. I believe that the list in paragraph 57 does that and that the waterfront should be added to it. I also believe that it should be in the list in paragraph 184 of areas where co-ordinated action is needed in the national interest.

It is astonishing that, in the assessment matrix document, we are told that the waterfront is not an infrastructure project. The fact of the matter is that the waterfront requires a substantial infrastructure package, and national planning framework documents should reflect the infrastructure that is needed. That will involve road networks, drainage, public rail and the tram—which I have already mentioned—as well as new lock gates at Leith for smaller vessels and the renewal of coastal defences. I could go on.

The council has been in discussions with the Scottish Government about the matter and has estimated that public infrastructure investment of just under £500 million is required for the waterfront to realise its full potential. It also estimates that that public sector spending would unlock private sector investment of £6 billion. Tax increment financing has been proposed by the council as a way of financing that infrastructure. I hope that the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth will sympathetically consider the council's proposals. The main point at issue is the fact that the framework should recognise the waterfront as a key location for which infrastructure development is crucial.

Finally, the following words should be added to the fifth sentence of paragraph 186:

"and help to regenerate adjacent communities."

In describing the waterfront—albeit inadequately—NPF 2 does not recognise the waterfront's important role in regenerating the existing communities in Pilton, Granton and Leith.

The cabinet secretary referred to participation in his recent speech and invoked Planning Aid for Scotland in defence of the consultation process. All that we can say in response to that is that there are different views, which are reflected in the committee's report. For example, although Veronica Burbridge of the Royal Town Planning Institute believed that the early stages of the consultation were satisfactory, she pointed out that the consultation was completely unsatisfactory in relation to the national developments. Those developments are crucial, because their need will be established by the framework, and there will be no other opportunity for communities to involve themselves in the discussion of need.

There are, of course, stronger critiques of the participation work. The Buckingham, Hamilton and Ruskin Association is quoted on page 17 of the committee's report. Most significantly, my constituent Clare Symonds undertook a comprehensive analysis and critique of the whole process, which was presented to the committee. Members should take that critique very seriously. The fact is that we are in the early stages of doing planning consultation and participation satisfactorily. Great strides have been made in planning legislation to flag up the importance of consultation and participation, but we should be realistic and accept the fact that we do not yet know how to do that in a totally adequate way.

The recommendations in Clare Symonds's report should be taken seriously. Some say, "Oh, but she only talked to 11 people," but the 11 people were involved. Also, Ms Symonds made 54 freedom of information requests. Her conclusions stand up to scrutiny. For example, she points out that the participation statement says that there should be wide representation of all groups, including groups from the community sector and various equality groups. She does not feel that that criterion was met.

The participation statement should have made clear at an early stage how people could get involved. It failed on that front. There are lessons to be learned; let us learn them.

15:45

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

It is interesting to come to this debate following the brief inquiry of the Transport, Infrastructure and

Climate Change Committee, and to consider the issues from that particular and peculiar point of view. I am a member of that committee, and I would like to discuss a couple of issues, based on our experience.

Any Government that introduces any kind of national planning framework opens a can of worms that leads to the kind of criticism and debate that we are seeing today. Once any list is drawn up, there will be no shortage of politicians who believe that some things have been included that should not be included, and that some things are not included that should be included. So here we are, having the debate.

Following the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee's inquiry and the evidence that we heard, I feel that some question marks hang over the consultation and participation. I will not take a position on either side of the argument; all I will say is that opinions were expressed about both the effectiveness and the lack of effectiveness of the consultation process. Rather than panic about that, politicians and the Government should continue to consider what a consultation process should be. Previous Governments have gone to great lengths to consult to death about everything. We have now evolved a structure for consultation. It seems to follow a recognisable and acceptable pattern, but, in the end, just as many people as ever feel that they have not been consulted. Perhaps we rely too often on the usual suspects.

Getting people to participate in consultations—ordinary people who will suffer from the disadvantages or benefit from the advantages of any decisions—continues to be as difficult as ever. I ask the minister to take seriously the comments on consultation in the Local Government and Communities Committee's report, and in the contributions to it from the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee.

Moving on—and to participate in the same old arguments about what should and should not be on the list of national developments—I must mention high-speed rail. I do so not only because it is mentioned in the Labour Party amendment, but because in recent months it has become a topic of considerable discussion in the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee and beyond.

The need to develop high-speed rail is, of course, of national importance in a United Kingdom context. High-speed rail links from London to central Scotland are as important for the people of London as they are for the people of central Scotland. The links will displace air travel between the two points, thus improving the quality of the environment at both ends of the railway line, not only here in Scotland.

I understand the point that the Labour Party makes in its amendment, and I am happy to support it, if for no other reason than to ensure that high-speed rail is made a higher priority than it has been. The Conservative party supports that basic change in thinking.

Another point that came out in evidence to the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee was that there is inconsistency between some of the objectives in NPF 2 and the climate change objectives that the Government has expressed generally and specifically in the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, which the committee is currently considering. I do not object to there being inconsistencies, because, in the present difficult economic times, there may be more than one example of situations in which we have to choose between our climate change imperatives and the need for short-term recovery in the Scottish economy. However, I object to a Government that denies that a choice is being made and then tries to steer away from that particular argument.

There is no better example of that than the Government's clear decision to pursue clean coal technology—by suggesting that there should be coal-fired power stations with carbon capture readiness, whatever that means—rather than consider replacing our nuclear power stations. It is wholly inappropriate that that decision is clearly written in the framework document. As a consequence, I support the Conservative amendment.

Stewart Stevenson: Does the member accept that the opposition to nuclear power is a response to the environmental concerns that he has expressed?

Alex Johnstone: I do not accept that at all. John Swinney has made it clear that he believes that the reasoning behind the decision is clearly understood. I clearly understand what the Government wants to achieve, but I do not understand the reasoning behind it. Nuclear power has delivered a great deal for Scotland. A new generation of nuclear power stations will deliver base-load capacity in a way that is cleaner, safer and more efficient than any other technology. Until the minister produces clear evidence that we can have a new generation of coal-fired power stations and that they will be guaranteed—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the member's time is up. [*Interruption.*] The member should sit down. Members should not carry on talking when I start talking.

15:51

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I welcome this stage in the development of our

national planning framework. I recognise that, inevitably, it is imperfect and that, as we are undertaking Parliament's first real attempt to scrutinise the framework, there will be criticisms. I will deal with one or two of those criticisms.

I do not believe that the framers of the planning legislation thought that Parliament would be asked to endorse every national planning development. However, it just so happens that we have a minority Government and that it suits the politics of the occasion for people to seek that. That concerns me. We have a Government that is elected to govern and the legislation was set out to allow that to happen, with wide scrutiny.

Talking of scrutiny, the criticisms of the way in which the consultation was carried out are important. Dr Iain Docherty, in evidence to the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, stated:

"For many years, Governments—not just in Scotland but in the United Kingdom and further afield—have struggled to build consultation processes that are genuinely public and that bring in a wide variety of voices."—[*Official Report, Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee*, 6 January 2009; c 1225.]

We all agree with that. However, as Malcolm Rifkind alluded to with regard to Clare Symonds's report, she spoke to very few people. The intemperate language in that report did not help the consideration of how the process should proceed.

I welcome the major document that is before us, as it is an all-Scotland one. Some people have put their interests ahead of others in proposing developments that they think should be in the framework. However, at long last, we are seeing measures that will support the clean energy developments in the far north. The development of the Pentland Firth as an area for co-ordinated action on clean energy can go ahead. The planning framework points to the importance of that development in relation to our efforts to reduce emissions and tackle climate change. If we do not go ahead with that development, in the medium to longer term, we will have bigger problems than we think.

Patrick Harvie: Will Rob Gibson give way?

Rob Gibson: Not at the moment, thank you.

The Scapa Flow transshipment development in Orkney puts the north of Scotland—which was ignored by many transport projects of the past—into the planning framework for Scotland for the first time. That kind of thinking might allow us to be a Parliament for the whole of Scotland, now that we have a Government for the whole of Scotland.

We can see from the approaches that have been taken to upgrading the railways towards

Inverness that that has been ignored until now. To suggest that the Halbeath exercise, which is important if we are to link up parts of the central belt with points further north, should be added should not take away from the fact that we need to deliver quickly the time savings that can be made on journeys between, for example, Aberdeen and Inverness and Perth and Inverness.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: I do not have time.

On the development of the high-speed rail network, the Scottish National Party's manifesto mentioned that positively. Across this chamber, we have people who believe that the high-speed rail network should be a priority. However, that is one very good example of the fact that projects come along out of phase with the creation of the national planning framework, as is the rebuild of the Beaulieu to Denny power line.

On that issue, I point out to people who lobby us from organisations such as Highlands before Pylons that the transmission of electricity from the north of Scotland to the centre and the south relies on land transmission and, eventually, on undersea transmission. We cannot have one without the other, because the process of expanding our clean power development relies on those upgrades. I am delighted that the east coast upgrades and the one from Dounreay to Beaulieu are included in the NPF.

We are beginning to get a rational view of what the parts of Scotland that have often been ignored can contribute to the national picture.

With regard to the Conservative amendment's call for the removal of any technology-specific references, I should say that I led the minority in the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee that stood by the non-nuclear policy. It is great to see the potential that there is for us to have a Scottish planning framework, not a north British one, which is what the Tory amendment smacks of. We should play to Scotland's major strengths. With 40 per cent of Europe's renewable energy sources in Scotland, why would we not make them our priority? We have heard a lot of arguments about base-load. In that regard, I point out that we will be having an energy inquiry that will be able to deliver on that issue. Having moved on from smokestack socialism, we can also leave behind north British planning views and get on with creating a Scottish picture that plays to Scotland's strengths. I welcome the framework's essential focus on that end.

15:57

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

A number of areas of the region that I represent feature in the national planning framework. Scapa Flow remains a site of not only national but international importance. The same features that made Scapa Flow a haven during wartime also give it peacetime potential, as it has deep water, is sheltered and is also to the north of our nation. The transshipment hub that is sought for Scapa Flow would be enormously important and of international significance. It could bring important development to Scotland and to Orkney in particular. I am pleased that the area is a priority in the NPF.

The Cromarty Firth was a significant wartime base for the same reasons that Scapa Flow was. It has continued to offer major economic development for the Highlands, particularly since the 1970s. It has an oil terminal, a rig construction base, rig repair facilities and now a cruise ship port, all of which feature in the local economy. Further, despite that development, it has some of the cleanest waters around our coast. However, the Cromarty Firth is not reaching its full potential by any means. It has a significant amount more to offer.

Nigg, within the Cromarty Firth, sits at the heart of the largest skills base in the UK's energy sector. Within easy travel distance of Nigg, we have Scotland's hydro, wind and nuclear expertise. We do not have a lot of time in which to ensure that the skills of the current generation of experts transfer to the next generation. If the right kind of development takes place, Nigg and the wider Cromarty Firth can help to ensure that that transfer happens. There must be high-skilled development, not just breakers yards. The Nigg dry dock is of national importance, as it is the only facility of its kind in the United Kingdom. Indeed, it is arguably the best such facility in Europe. We need a socially responsible owner of that facility if we are to develop its full potential.

I am disappointed that the Cromarty Firth and Nigg do not feature more strongly in the NPF. I hope that the Government will nevertheless address those issues and allow developments to happen.

Another area, Argyll and Bute, would like to have featured more in the NPF. I have had representations from the local council on that, particularly in relation to its disappointment at the fact that the subsea cable from Hunterston to Carradale does not feature in the NPF. The council believes that it should, and I hope that the Government will re-examine the matter.

If such a cable—and if cables elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands, which are mentioned in the

NPF—existed, Argyll and Bute and the wider Highlands and Islands would be offered the chance to contribute even more fully to meeting the national renewables objectives. Subsea cables in general need to be given the priority that they deserve. There are potential environmental benefits from the subsea system in comparison with landline transmission in the longer term.

The Western Isles, Orkney, Shetland and the west coast of the Highlands all have the potential to make a greater contribution to renewables targets, but that energy needs to be transported. I hope that the Government will give the necessary priority to subsea infrastructure over time.

I have received representations on the big issues—the potential of Scapa and the Cromarty Firth, and of Argyll and Bute and the wider Highlands in relation to subsea cables—seeking their inclusion in the national planning framework. Part of people's motivation in seeking inclusion in the framework is to ease the path of development.

However, that contrasts substantially with the opposite views that I have heard from a number of my constituents, who are deeply concerned about the impact on their community of its being mentioned in the NPF. They feel that that is a way of shortcutting planning procedures and full democratic scrutiny. I refer to the mention in the NPF of the A96 corridor between Inverness and Nairn, and the Tornagrain development in particular. I have personal reservations about that development as an adjacent resident. Lest anyone feels that I have not declared an interest, I make that clear to Parliament.

Inverness has been one of the most successful communities in Scotland in recent decades. It needs to continue to expand, which means that more land is needed for development. The A96 corridor has been identified by Highland Council as a strategic corridor for development, and that is recognised in the NPF. However, that is where the problem lies for the constituents who have made representations to me. They are deeply concerned that their right to take part in and influence planning decisions is to some extent being compromised by the very existence of a mention of Tornagrain in the NPF before the area has even been approved as a zone for development in the local development plan.

My constituents feel that the consultation on the national planning framework, which other members have mentioned, is inadequate.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Peter Peacock: I would be grateful if I could get through this issue—perhaps the minister will pick up on it when he replies to the debate.

My constituents believe that if the purpose of the NPF is effectively to ease the passage of certain specific developments that figure in the final framework, the consultation is not adequate. There is a genuine dilemma: if figuring a development into the NPF is a means of easing the planning process, some will feel that their rights are compromised. For others, however, the attraction of having a development mentioned in the NPF is the easing of that process.

The genuine concerns of some of those whom I represent need to be addressed if the status and worth of the NPF are not to be undermined. I would be grateful if the minister could clarify the Government's position on that. Can my constituents expect that the local development planning process will continue, unaffected by the mention of the development in the NPF? Will the potential for a public inquiry also be unaffected? Does the mention of a specific development in the NPF predetermine that the local development plan will contain that development? Will such a mention be a material consideration for ministers when they finally reach a decision on specific applications? I would be grateful if the minister could answer those questions.

I have not had time to mention the Western Isles and the A82, as I would have liked to have done, but I will come back to those issues on another occasion.

16:04

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): National planning framework 2 is one of the most important documents that the Government will bring before the Parliament—it is certainly much more important than any waffle about an independence referendum.

One of the main issues that arose in the evidence sessions in the Local Government and Communities Committee—of which I am a member—was the severe lack of consultation. I know that the minister will say that the Government has bent over backwards on consultation. However, it is not only members of the Opposition in the Parliament but many groups and individuals outwith the Parliament who have expressed their deep concerns about the poor consultation. In that respect, the Government does not seem to be a listening Government.

It is a disgrace that the Government gave only one day's notice of the publication date of the discussion draft. To make matters worse, it published the document just before the Christmas recess. Such a blatant attempt to minimise the flak would have had captain Salmond, first officer Swinney—who has left the ship—and the rest of

the motley crew shouting from the rafters if it had happened when they were in opposition.

Before the Government protests too much, I remind it that it is a minority Government that is beginning to display publicly qualities that many of us in the Parliament have known that it possesses for some time. Complacency, secrecy and failure are sure-fire ways for a Government to be rejected by the electorate and put on a fast train to opposition.

The only area in which the Government has admitted to any prioritisation is the replacement of the Forth road bridge. I am sure that it is no accident that that project had the number 1 slot in both the discussion draft and the proposed framework. That is quite right—not because the new bridge will fall within my Dunfermline West constituency, but because the loss of, or reduced access to, the present Forth road bridge would devastate the economy of eastern Scotland. However, the Government should not be afraid to get things right for fear of getting things wrong. There is no excuse for refusing to give at least an indicative prioritisation of the other national developments.

Some of the Government's actions would be funny if the issue was not so serious. For example, the Government's plans to finance the replacement Forth crossing have taken it from the hugely discredited Scottish Futures Trust to holding out the begging bowl to Westminster for money that is not even available. Only yesterday, the Westminster Government offered the new bridge a £1 billion lifeline, yet after begging for that money, the Scottish Government has been strangely silent. Is that political posturing or poor governance? I will let you decide, Presiding Officer.

Another of the Government's national priorities lies within my constituency—the proposed international container terminal at Rosyth. Given that four of the 12 priorities in the proposed framework relate to container facilities, one might reasonably ask why there is such a focus on container traffic, particularly during a global recession.

On a recent visit to the Forth Ports Grangemouth facility, a senior manager told me that container traffic in Scotland is forecast to grow from the present quarter of a million units a year to nearly 2 million in a decade. It was strange that he admitted that point to me while giving me a presentation on why the Grangemouth facility should grow at the expense of the Rosyth proposal. I do not deny that there is room for expansion and that there should indeed be expansion at Grangemouth. However, if someone speaks out strongly against Babcock Marine's Rosyth proposal, that might reflect their concerns

about a new kid on the block rather than an acceptance that more than sufficient expansion is likely in Scotland.

With an easily accessible deep-water facility, Babcock's proposal would make good use of a facility that was originally designed to refit Trident nuclear submarines, but it would also greatly benefit the Scottish economy if we had container facilities feeding the central belt from both the north and south sides of the Forth. There is also potential to create some much-needed employment locally. Those are the main reasons why I have supported Babcock's proposal in the Parliament.

I noted recently that Cathy Peattie had submitted a large number of parliamentary questions in which she questioned the need for a container terminal at Rosyth. Today, I read with interest the minister's answers, which were published earlier this week. At no point in his answers do I detect any concern about the need for a container terminal at Rosyth. I therefore ask the minister to clarify when he sums up that Babcock Marine's proposal for a container terminal at Rosyth is a vital link in ensuring the future growth of Scotland's economy, and that to regard the proposal otherwise is narrow-minded and self-serving in the extreme.

The Government's NPF 2 is a vitally important document for Scotland's future, but it could have been a lot better if it had been properly consulted on. The earlier publication of information such as the matrix would have made analysis of NPF 2 more effective. I hope that the Government will show a little humility and admit that its report card on NPF 2 should read, "Could have done better."

16:09

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): The second national planning framework outlines a vision of the Scotland that we want to see develop in the next 25 years, with sustainable economic growth at its heart. The document was two years in the making, and although there are, no doubt, lessons to be learned regarding the consultation process, much effort was made to engage with the widest possible audience of stakeholders and the public.

NPF 2 will play a crucial part in modernising Scotland's planning system. The Confederation of British Industry Scotland estimates that

"Scotland's cumbersome planning system costs the country £600 million a year",

so there are clearly serious issues that need to be addressed.

Designation of a development as nationally significant is not a means of fast tracking or

avoiding scrutiny of controversial decisions, but a means of streamlining the process. It allows one line to be drawn under one aspect of the debate—general need—but the details of each proposal will still be open for much further public scrutiny as the process continues.

The seven transport projects that are included in the 12 national developments will play a vital role in improving Scotland's creaking infrastructure, enhancing public transport links as well as developing our potential to move from road to rail and sea. They are also crucial to maintaining and building Scotland's international connectivity, without which we cannot hope to compete with our European neighbours.

The need for a replacement Forth crossing has already been debated at length. Almost everyone agrees that it is vital that that economically important link is retained for the economy of the east coast of Scotland. We cannot allow the maintenance of a crucial transport link to be left to chance; I agree with that part of Jim Tolson's speech, although little else. The proposal emphasises the need to move away from the private car to public transport, with the creation of a dedicated public transport crossing.

One of the most controversial developments that the document proposes for the Lothians is airport enhancements. Edinburgh airport has become Scotland's busiest airport, but its current infrastructure is not fit for purpose—it is in no way an international business and tourism gateway of which we can be proud. The focus of that national development in NPF 2 is on improving surface access to the airport, especially by public transport. We should be clear about the fact that the document includes no proposals for building a second runway.

Although it is important to have transport hubs that are fit for the 21st century, it is also important that Scotland's aviation and shipping emissions are included in the statutory targets that will be set by the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill; there will be no special pleading for aviation. I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment on the issue.

Des McNulty: Will the member take an intervention?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am afraid that I must refuse, as I have already been told that I have one minute less than I thought I had.

One of the most important elements of the framework is what is omitted from the document—nuclear energy. I am delighted that the Government has reiterated its belief that there is no place for nuclear power in Scotland's future. As Alison McInnes pointed out, the construction of any nuclear power station in Scotland would inevitably drain funds away from the research and

development of renewable technology. At a time when Scotland has the opportunity to set itself up as a renewables powerhouse of Europe, with the development of natural resources and scientific and engineering skills to harness our potential, how sad it is that some politicians in other parties want to throw that all away.

Nuclear energy has both high costs and high risks; it is not the solution that will deliver a low-carbon future. We can and will achieve secure, clean, low-carbon energy by harnessing Scotland's vast green potential and tackling climate change without adding to the burden of toxic radioactive waste.

In 2006, the Labour-led Executive stated in response to a parliamentary question on future national planning frameworks that it

"will not support the further development of nuclear power stations while waste management issues remain unresolved."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 11 April 2006; S2W-24498.]

With the costs of dealing with existing waste soaring, and with Greenpeace research reporting that waste from the new generation of nuclear reactors is up to seven times as hazardous as that from previous reactors, where does Labour stand now? We expect the Tories to be taken in by the nuclear lobby, but what about Scottish Labour?

I know that many Labour members are uncomfortable with the leadership's obsession with nuclear. As Labour's environment spokesman Sarah Boyack stated in a parliamentary motion,

"the argument for new nuclear build in the United Kingdom has not been made".

SNP members continue to believe that; I hope that Sarah Boyack and a number of her colleagues, who, to be fair, have stood up in that debate in the past, will support the Scottish Government's position today.

In summary, the national planning framework is a well-considered document that makes an important contribution to tackling the economic, social and environmental challenges that Scotland will face in the coming years. By ruling out nuclear power and powering ahead with renewables, we can build a greener future for Scotland.

16:14

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I support the Labour amendment.

The Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee states that it is

"essential that further work is carried out in advance of the preparation of the next NPF to develop initiatives to increase the levels of engagement by the wider public"

and that

"Such steps would ... have potential to benefit for public consultation exercises across all policy areas."

As the Local Government and Communities Committee report notes, committees

"considered the key objectives of the NPF2 as they relate to economic growth, sustainability and the contribution to climate change targets."

There can be few more pressing matters globally or locally than the current state of the economy or our climate for the next century. Those matters are so important that few aspects of Government policy or action can be divorced from them.

Many of the proposed developments are important because of their contribution to economic growth, which may be combined with social benefits, as with the Commonwealth games. However, other issues are more contentious. There are clearly question marks around the sustainability and wisdom of expanding airports while tackling climate change; and the pros and cons of different forms of energy generation are guaranteed to raise the debate's temperature, as we have heard.

Any policy or development that can tick the boxes of being good for the economy and good for the environment must surely be a priority. I would place in that category measures to transfer passenger and freight traffic to more environmentally friendly forms of transport; enhance rail and shipping facilities; integrate transport; and promote and improve roads and pathways for walkers and cyclists. I therefore support moves to improve cycle paths, enhance pedestrian access, extend rail provision and further develop freight hubs, such as the port of Grangemouth in my constituency.

Grangemouth is already the busiest port in Scotland, but I understand that it has significant spare capacity and room for growth. For example, the port would benefit from improved links to the motorway network, as would local people and the local economy. I am proud to say that the community in Grangemouth has come together with local businesses and elected representatives to push for such improvements. That is an excellent example of people working together, and I hope that the minister will accept my invitation to discuss with them the importance of Grangemouth to the economy and environment of Scotland.

Committee witnesses were asked for their views on the sense of duplicating existing provision at Grangemouth with a new container terminal at Rosyth. It may well be that, with the right support from the Scottish Government, sufficient container traffic will be generated to justify both. However, I note the unhelpful response to my parliamentary question on research into the increase needed in container capacity:

"No such research has been undertaken by the Scottish Government. It is for the ports industry to respond to anticipated demand based on market conditions and commercial considerations."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 2 March 2009; S3W-20711.]

What is the point of a national planning framework if the assessments and the important decisions are to be left to the whim of the market—a solution that has become laughable and discredited in recent months?

There is something to be said for the suggestion in the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee's report on NPF 2 that there should be

"an open, Scotland-wide consideration of need for port expansion, taking into account existing facilities, their location and future capacity as part of this process."

My committee therefore called on the Scottish Government

"to continue dialogue with Forth Ports ... and ... take into account the views of all interested parties."

The national planning framework is welcome, but it is important that it does not become a wish list. The environment cannot wait until 2017. The improvements in the NPF that are essential to action on climate change must be tackled as soon as possible. Scotland and the rest of the world simply cannot wait.

16:18

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): This morning, the Parliament debated a motion titled "Scottish Government Failures". Understandably, it prompted some scathing speeches from Labour members, and some glowing ones from the SNP about how near to perfection the Government is. The reality, of course, is somewhat different. Governments have strengths and weaknesses, and even some of the worst have a few saving graces. However, the clearest signs of failure in government in the face of the climate crisis, the economic crisis and the impending energy crisis are, I am sad to say, shared across most of the political parties in the chamber, and many of them are to be found in the annex to NPF 2.

During the previous session of Parliament, I argued for a number of changes to the planning legislation that underpins the national planning framework and gives ministers the power to designate national developments. In particular, I wanted a more intensive period of parliamentary scrutiny, reflecting the importance of the national planning framework and its impact on communities throughout Scotland. I also wanted a process of examination in public to allow the arguments to be put in a formal manner before a plan is adopted, recognising that, even with the best public consultation processes—which, of course, have

not been used in this instance—many people will not even be aware of the framework, let alone make a response to it. Crucially, I argued that the power to make the final decisions should remain with the Parliament and not be handed to ministers. Despite raising the prospect of a future minority Government, I was unable to persuade the Government of the day that it should take seriously that fear.

Much of the document, as ministers describe it, is a mere expression of Government policy. That is not the case, however, with the proposed national developments. They represent the Government's clear intention to give planning status to those developments in a way that has not been done before.

I recognise the work of the Local Government and Communities Committee in producing the report. My committee and the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee also contributed to the scrutiny process. However, I have to say how disappointed I am and how much I disagree with the Local Government and Communities Committee's decision not to comment on the national developments in its final report, or even in the motion that is before us today. Doing so would have allowed members to vote on the issue.

Just weeks after the Parliament passed overwhelmingly what all parties agreed was a business-as-usual budget in climate change terms, we look set to give majority approval to a report on a framework that contains the most environmentally damaging developments that Scotland has seen in at least a generation. We will have new coal-fired power stations, but without the carbon capture and storage systems that I am sure the minister wishes he could offer. The new stations will merely have car parks that are big enough to fit such systems if ever they should prove workable.

The additional Forth road bridge is now explicitly a road-only crossing and an addition, not a replacement, for the existing bridge—at a time when the chief engineer at the bridge is saying clearly that his confidence in its preservation is high. It is clear that the new crossing will result in an increase in total road capacity over the Forth. No minister will find it politically possible to keep the existing bridge as a public transport-only crossing once angry queues start to grow at the entrance to the new crossing.

Airport expansion is a crucial issue. I admit that we are not talking about new runways, which the Liberal Democrats in charge of the City of Edinburgh Council are now demanding. Nonetheless, the Government is planning increased capacity to cope with rising levels of air travel, and that in the face of climate change.

Every political party seems now to be proud of its environmental rhetoric. Every party also seems likely to sign up to the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill in the coming weeks and months. The question remains, however, whether any party, other than the Greens, is willing to put a stop to the Government's disastrous proposals that will so undermine that effort.

The Labour Party's amendment is admirable and I will, of course, support it. That said, Labour members have put themselves in the same position as their colleagues at Westminster, which is to both support high-speed rail and try to force through an additional runway at Heathrow airport. The Labour Party's answer seems to be to ask for more of everything—an answer that will ultimately prove to be nonsensical.

I cannot agree that the report, which contains no final judgment on the national developments, should form the basis of the Parliament's response to the Government. I deeply regret that the Parliament has been given no opportunity to approve or disapprove the national developments by way of a vote. Members who oppose the national developments should say so openly and those who support them in the face of the climate crisis should not get away with quietly nodding them through.

16:23

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): The debate has been an interesting and valuable one on an important issue.

Given that the Parliament demanded the right to scrutinise the national planning framework, it is right for it to do so. That scrutiny has taken place not only in today's debate but at the three committees that considered and reported on the framework document. I am happy to add my appreciation to that of other members for the work of the lead committee, the Local Government and Communities Committee, as well as the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee and, of course, the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, of which I am convener. I place on record my committee's thanks to those who gave evidence and to our ever-excellent clerking team, who helped to produce an excellent report in a very short timescale.

However, I have to say at the outset that it does nothing to enhance the reputation of the Parliament for any MSP to quote selectively from, paraphrase, or reinterpret recommendations of committees of the Parliament. Let me be clear that the recommendation of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee is not as stated in the Conservative motion, nor can it be interpreted in the way that David McLetchie and other

Conservative and Labour members have done in the debate and in the press.

For the record, the full and unadulterated recommendation of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee is this:

"At this stage, the Committee believes that it is too early for the Scottish Government to be technology specific in the case of candidate national developments N° 8 and 9 as the preferred technological solutions have still to prove their commercial viability on a large-scale. **We recommend that the Scottish Government makes reference to the policy objective and principle behind these projects in the NPF2 report itself and removes any technology specific references from these candidate national developments**".

I highlight that it recommends that the Government "makes reference to the policy objective and principle".

Let me spell it out: no new nuclear power in Scotland is a policy objective that is clearly spelled out in paragraph 152 of the NPF 2 document. Renewable energy targets are a policy objective and reducing carbon emissions is a policy objective, but carbon capture and storage is not—it is a potential means to achieve the policy objective, but it is not a policy objective in itself.

It is self-evident that a new coal-fired power station, such as the one proposed for Hunterston, or new or refurbished power stations at Longannet, Cockenzie or Boddam, cannot meet the policy objective of reducing carbon emissions, and hence meeting climate change targets, unless the carbon that they create can be captured and stored. However, the technology for carbon capture and storage on a commercial scale is as yet unproven, and the committee was concerned that NPF 2 appears to include as candidate national developments coal-fired power stations that need only to be carbon capture ready rather than carbon capture operative—Patrick Harvie made a fair point about that. That could have the impact of increasing carbon emissions in Scotland.

That is why we challenged the technology-specific nature of the candidate projects, why the recommendation in paragraph 71 of our report has to be considered in full and in the context of our full report, and why it cannot be interpreted as opening the door for new nuclear power in Scotland.

I will now turn to more general matters, but I will start with Hunterston as an example. One of the weaknesses of the process that we have just gone through is the lack of transparency in how projects become candidate national developments. Hunterston was not on the radar when the draft NPF 2 was published for consultation last year, as it was not one of the then nine candidate developments set out for consultation. The public therefore had no opportunity to comment on whether Hunterston is an appropriate national

development before its inclusion in the document that was laid for formal consideration in the Parliament. As David McLetchie highlighted, once a project is included as a national development, its need for national development status is taken as a given, but the case has not yet been tested by public consultation.

We must be entitled to ask where the project came from, what consultation the Government carried out before proposing it as a national development, what strategic environmental assessments have been done and what alternatives were considered. For example, a programme of decentralised power generation and combined heat and power schemes, as opposed to following the traditional approach of large centralised power generation, might be a more appropriate model for the future.

I presume that similar issues could be raised in relation to other candidate national developments that appeared between the discussion draft being published and the proposed framework being laid before Parliament. I would welcome the minister's thoughts on how such schemes find their way on to the list.

I would welcome an explanation from the minister of why west of Scotland strategic rail enhancements are deemed to be national developments but east of Scotland ones are not. Indeed, why is the most important strategic rail enhancement—a high-speed rail link to London—not included as a national development?

I agree with the Local Government and Communities Committee's conclusion that it

"is not clear whether some national developments that are listed are simply Scottish Government aspirations rather than firm commitments".

A weakness of NPF 2 is that, throughout the narrative, there is confusion between the committed and the aspirational. We need to get the action plan published and I can only hope that it will clarify some of the issues to do with what is committed and what is aspirational and that it will set clear timescales for when the Government expects developments in the framework to take place.

Finally, I take the opportunity to thank the Conservatives for their amendment this evening, as it gives the Parliament the opportunity, by voting for the Liberal Democrat amendment, to once again reaffirm its opposition to new nuclear power stations in Scotland.

16:29

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): Methinks the member doth protest too much.

In broad terms, we welcome NPF 2 and we hope that it will live up to the aspiration that it will

"play a key role in co-ordinating policies with a spatial dimension and aligning strategic investment priorities."

We welcome, too, the reports of the Local Government and Communities Committee and two other parliamentary committees.

Planning has been important in Scotland for a number of years. CBI Scotland thinks that the system costs the Scottish economy £600 million every year. The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee took evidence from the Federation of Small Businesses Scotland, which said that only 45 per cent of planning applications in Scotland are turned round within two months, although the target is to turn round 80 per cent of applications in that time. Members should contrast that record with the position south of the border, where approximately 70 per cent of planning applications are turned round within two months. Much more needs to be done and NPF 2 is an important part of moving the process forward.

In the Conservative amendment, we fully endorse the position that the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee took in relation to national energy developments. Iain Smith read out the committee's recommendation most eloquently and it is crystal clear. The committee recommended that the Government remove

"any technology specific references from these candidate national developments".

That clear statement was supported by the committee's comment that it

"believes that it is too early for the Scottish Government to be technology specific in the case of candidate national developments N° 8 and 9".

There is no play on words in the recommendation, the meaning of which is perfectly clear. Even more important, the recommendation is almost directly aligned with the evidence that the committee heard. Mr Smith listened to three hours of testimony from representatives of CBI Scotland, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and the Scottish Trades Union Congress, all of whom said the same thing about the technology-specific references in NPF 2. What the committee voted to put in its report reflected the evidence that it heard. Mr Smith should be sincere and accept that he perhaps made a mistake and voted the wrong way in the committee, as opposed to trying to weasel his way out of the situation by giving the recommendation a range of rather bizarre meanings.

Iain Smith: Let me say on the record that I made no mistake. I knew exactly what I was voting for, and I was not voting for new nuclear power stations in Scotland.

Gavin Brown: I accept that the member was not voting in favour of new nuclear power stations in Scotland. However, he was voting in favour of the removal of technology-specific references from the document—that is entirely separate. As he said, he knew exactly what he was voting for.

The recommendation reflects a balanced approach to a balanced energy mix. It would be unwise to rule out nuclear power at this stage, for a range of reasons. I will not go into those reasons now; that debate is for another day. I will say only that Scotland is currently a net exporter of electricity and I want the situation to remain that way.

The call in our amendment for the removal of technology-specific references in relation to projects 8 and 9 is particularly important given what the Council of Economic Advisers, whose members were all hand picked by the Scottish Government, has said. I commend the Government for setting up the council and I urge it to listen to what the experts say. They are an extremely impressive bunch of people, who have experience in industry and academia—some are world renowned in some quarters. The council made it clear in its annual report in December 2008 that a full, independent review of energy options is required. The council had called for such a review last June, but the Government sat on its hands for seven months before announcing in January that it would commission the review. If the Government had listened to the council last June, we might already have a report on energy and we might be capable of making a balanced decision. I ask the Government not to prejudge the review, which was suggested by serious business and economic advisers. It is ludicrous to include technology-specific references in relation to projects 8 and 9 before we have the result of the independent review; if that is done, the review is in effect redundant. I urge the Government to remove the references.

It is worth stressing, as the Local Government and Communities Committee did, that there is an issue to do with the delivery of projects. There is no priority or timetable for completion in the document. When that point was put to him in the Local Government and Communities Committee, Mr Stevenson said:

“If the funds become available and there is the commitment in the private sector and capacity in the civil engineering sector, all of them can proceed in parallel.”—*[Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee, 21 January 2009; c 1589.]*

If everything is a priority, in practice nothing becomes a priority. I ask the minister to give us greater clarity on that when he sums up.

We broadly welcome much of what is in NPF 2, but it is inappropriate to have technology-specific

references. Therefore, I support the Conservative amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I call Stewart Stevenson. Minister, you have eight minutes.

Stewart Stevenson: The debate has been interesting and has produced a degree of consensus, which I perhaps had not—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have to apologise, Mr Stevenson. I should have called John Park.

Stewart Stevenson: I did wonder, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry. My eyes are playing up. I call John Park, who has six minutes.

16:35

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thought for a minute that I had inherited Harry Potter’s invisibility cloak, but never mind.

John Swinney: Mr Park can sum up for the Government.

John Park: I was going to welcome the opportunity for Mr Stevenson to close on behalf of the Labour Party.

I add my thanks to the committee members and the clerks for pulling together a considerable piece of work. There is much to welcome in the Local Government and Communities Committee report and the national planning framework itself. I declare an interest in that five of the proposed projects are within 15 miles of my doorstep: at Rosyth, Grangemouth, Edinburgh airport and Longannet and—I hope—over the Forth.

Those of us who represent industrial areas in particular recognise the importance of early community awareness of large-scale projects of the nature that we have discussed today. As Duncan McNeil and Des McNulty said, concerns have been raised about the limited consultation, which was largely confined to statutory consultees and larger organisations. People want to understand the implications, both positive and negative, for the area in which they live. That is why I believe that early engagement with wider community interests is vital. I heard the point that John Swinney made, but I have received correspondence on this matter from constituents. There are already concerns among the general public about the lack of consultation, which Malcolm Chisholm highlighted far more eloquently than I can.

We need skilled people to make the projects happen. The projects that are set out by the

Government are significant and we need to ensure that we have the skilled workers to build the infrastructure. There are concerns in the construction sector that we are losing out on a new generation of workers. The skills gaps that existed a year ago, when we went into the current economic downturn, will be just as bad, and perhaps worse, when the economy starts to pick up. The type of projects that we are talking about will drive that recovery.

Cathy Peattie made a good point when she expressed concern about the available capacity for a container terminal at Rosyth and developments at Grangemouth. In close proximity to the development at Rosyth will be a new Forth crossing and there will be two new aircraft carriers. In response to Rob Gibson's comment that the NPF 2 is a Scottish solution, I point out that UK contracts are coming into the mix. We have to consider the people whom we will need to deliver these projects. Work will be carried out at Longannet and there will be a new Forth crossing. That is a huge planning challenge and a huge challenge in terms of finding the people whom we will need to meet it. That is why we need to ensure that we sustain the number of skilled workers in employment. We cannot afford to lose capacity. I am pleased that the recent budget focused on that area. That issue is not just a Scottish issue; it is a UK and Europe-wide issue. That is why we have to consider ways of involving employers in some of the decisions. Although I acknowledge the policy base of the document, it is understandable that concerns have been raised about the lack of clarity on funding, timetabling, prioritisation and the utilisation of skills.

We saw a similar approach taken in respect of the strategic transport projects review, which has provided more questions than answers. It is important that the Government fleshes out all the proposals in a way that will ensure that Parliament can play its role in the future.

I support fully the committee's recommendation that the Government should encourage greater engagement with the private sector, which will be vital to maximise the framework's effectiveness. We welcome that suggestion. That relationship should also seek to deliver wider economic objectives on skills, climate change and innovation.

Labour will support the Scottish Conservatives' amendment to the motion, but not the Liberal Democrats' one. In our view, it makes no sense to rule out any viable form of energy production at this stage. I am increasingly concerned that the debate on nuclear power is focused more on the comfort blanket of subjective opinion polls than on the real issue of security of supply. I agree with David McLetchie and Gavin Brown, who both

argued that there should not be a presumption against any form of energy production, which is a good point, given that the Scottish Government is tendering for a project to provide an independent view of the viability of the various energy sources that are available.

I was pleased that the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee's report, which was published last Friday, recommended the development of a high-speed rail link between Scotland and London. As Des McNulty pointed out, the report highlights the huge potential of such a link for our economy and for the climate change agenda. I welcome the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change's keenness to work with the UK Government on the issue. I am sure that other members agree that it is only through such co-operation that a project of that nature will ever get off the ground, never mind be realised.

We await clarity on the proposals, both on the priorities and on the financial resources that will be required to deliver them. We also need clarity on the skills and the people whom we will need to deliver such projects. Collaboration with the UK Government is necessary on that issue, too.

Labour members look forward to holding the Government to account on those matters and on other aspects of its plans in the coming months. I am pleased to close the debate on behalf of Labour by declaring my support for the amendment in the name of Des McNulty.

16:41

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): It has often been said that one can never have too much of a good thing.

I thank Parliament for the speeches that have been made by members of all parties. It has genuinely been a debate in which there has been a large measure of agreement, if not unanimity. Nonetheless, members have raised quite a lot of substantive points, and I will attempt to deal with as many of them as I can in my concluding remarks. Those that I do not deal with will be taken account of as part of our review of everything that has been said in the Parliament. Peter Peacock asked if I could respond to any points that I did not deal with in my summing up by writing to him. I would be happy to do the same for anyone else who wishes me to, by interacting in what I hope is a consensual and inclusive manner.

Let me put the national planning framework in context. It is about taking forward the spatial aspects of the Government's economic strategy and fleshing out a number of our commitments on climate change, renewable energy and waste

management. It sets a long-term vision for the spatial dimension and provides the opportunity to align strategic investment.

A number of members, starting with the Local Government and Communities Committee's convener, Duncan McNeil, raised the issue of consultation. I fully acknowledge that lessons can be learned every time we interact with the people whom we serve, and we will seek to do that. I make the general point that only on a few occasions has a Government sought to contact all the community councils in Scotland, even though they are statutory bodies. We had substantial engagement. Duncan McNeil asked for a debrief of inputs, which it is proper for us to consider.

In response to the point that the framework needs to be more flexible, I make the point that it contains 12 projects, four of which are public sector and eight of which are private sector. To some extent, we are creating a spatial framework for the future but, by and large, they ain't our projects. Others will have to progress them. Will we attach the appropriate priority to each of the projects as they come forward? Yes, of course we will. We have given pretty clear indications on the Forth crossing, the west of Scotland rail enhancements, the strategic drainage project in Glasgow and the 2014 Commonwealth games, for which we are responsible. The timetable for our projects is relatively well understood.

Des McNulty talked about finance and timing. Raising that is perfectly proper, but the document is of course about planning, so it would be unusual for it to talk about finance, which we will deal with in another way.

Des McNulty also focused on the west of Scotland rail infrastructure. I agree that including that in the framework is right because, if we are to deliver the infrastructure to include high-speed rail and the additional capacity that we want in the west of Scotland, significant infrastructure changes will be required in the Glasgow area.

Like other members, Des McNulty made a plea for more references to cycling, walking and microgeneration. We will see whether the final document can pick up those comments. He also suggested that opportunities for discussion had been lacking. I suspect that we will never stop feeling that we have more to say about this major subject.

Alison McInnes picked up on the north-east's expertise in carbon capture and on the geographic advantage of Peterhead power station, which is in our shared constituency. That power station is adjacent to the Miller sour-gas field, whose pipework makes it particularly appropriate for the sequestration of carbon dioxide.

Malcolm Chisholm—not Malcolm Rifkind, which one of my colleagues inadvertently called him, to my alarm—made several points. I make the general comment that many of Malcolm Chisholm's concerns relate to matters in which the planning system is already engaged. He threw in the lock gates at Leith. I must bring my family into every debate—that is compulsory—so I mention that my grandfather Alexander MacGregor was a lock gate keeper at Leith, so I might know more about the subject than the member imagines.

Malcolm Chisholm referred to Clare Symonds's interviews of 11 people who were involved in the consultation. We must give weight to what she said, because it was augmented by further research, but we must acknowledge that thousands of people were involved in the consultation.

Alex Johnstone, among others, mentioned high-speed rail. Several hundred flights a day take place between central Scotland and London. Everywhere that high-speed rail is introduced, the number of such flights withers. I suspect that we would be no different.

Patrick Harvie: Will the minister give way?

Stewart Stevenson: I am sorry—I do not have time.

Rob Gibson said that the framework was, inevitably, imperfect. I say that it is better to aim for perfection and miss than to aim for mediocrity and hit it bang on. I do not accept that the framework is imperfect, but we will always seek to do better—I see that that comment got the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth.

Rob Gibson also talked about Pentland Power, which is important.

Peter Peacock raised a wide range of issues, to some of which I will have to respond in writing. Scapa Flow is very important. He made interesting points about the Cromarty Firth. On the A96, I will supplement the answer that I gave at question time. The reference to Tornagrain does not short-circuit the planning process, because the project is not designated as a national development. We will consider everything that has been said about that.

Mary Scanlon: Will the minister give way?

Stewart Stevenson: I will do so if the intervention is very brief.

Mary Scanlon: My intervention will be almost as brief as was the minister's reply to me at question time. Given that I received a one-word reply of "Yes", I seek further clarity in writing about Tornagrain.

Stewart Stevenson: If the member wishes to have that, I am happy to write to her. We will pursue that later.

Shirley-Anne Somerville said that no second runway at Edinburgh airport is proposed. We will see, but we do not provide for that in the framework.

Patrick Harvie said that the replacement Forth crossing will be road only, but that is not the case. We have designed the hard shoulders for other uses in the future.

Iain Smith referred to high-speed rail. We are certainly happy to think about his comment.

We had huge consultation on the document, which was interesting. We have had a terrific debate. Jim Tolson managed to make a similar speech to a previous speech, in which he said that one day's notice of publication of the discussion draft was given. The discussion draft was published in January 2008—one year ago. As with the STPR, the consultation has not been slim.

Ladies and gentlemen, Presiding Officer, I thank the three committees for their work and look forward with interest to how we will vote at 5 o'clock.

16:50

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): The subject matter of today's debate presents problems for the person summing up. The opportunities that it presents for anecdote and stand-up comedy are slight—although I am sure that Jamie Stone might be up to even such a challenge—but the more substantial issue is that the debate has emphatically not been on the kind of planning questions about which our constituents generally write to us. Although constituents sometimes write to us about national projects, local planning matters are generally what grip people's attention in our respective communities. That said, I know that I have received e-mails from organisations as varied as RSPB Scotland and licensed trade bodies about the issues that are raised in the Local Government and Communities Committee's report. For instance, I have been given arguments for a framework to deliver a landscape-scale ecosystem that would link the urban areas of the central belt in a green corridor.

Although the evidence that we took inevitably strayed at times into discussions on the merits of individual projects, the remit of the report—and the remit of my remarks—is very much about process. Therefore, I welcome today's opportunity to debate the committee's report on the "National Planning Framework for Scotland 2: Proposed Framework", which is a significant document that maps out Scotland's development as far into the future as 2030. Although 21 years might not represent a long time to a giant turtle or to the House of Lords, for elected politicians whose horizons are notoriously short such a timescale

represents a welcome degree of foresight. Moreover, the decisions that are reached on the projects in NPF 2 will be with us for much longer than 21 years.

The committee's experience of considering the national planning framework was generally positive, although there are certainly lessons to be learned, given that this was the first time that the Parliament has gone through the process. The report states clearly:

"The Committee welcomes the production of the second National Planning Framework. It acknowledges that the NPF2 will play a key role in co-ordinating policies with a spatial dimension and aligning strategic investment priorities."

This is the first time that a national planning framework has been subject to consideration by Parliament and its committees. The Local Government and Communities Committee is grateful to both the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee and the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee for their detailed consideration of the issues in their reports and for their important contribution to the process. The committee would also like to thank all those who made written submissions.

As I said, the committee's report is generally positive. The committee

"welcomes the fact that the National Planning Framework is now on a statutory footing and is subject therefore to scrutiny by the Scottish Parliament and others. As an evolving document, the Committee acknowledges that it will be open to further scrutiny and monitoring and the Committee will take the opportunity to do so through continuing dialogue with the Scottish Government, the public and with stakeholders."

An extensive consultation programme was undertaken by the Scottish Government to engage with stakeholders and the general public. While recognising that point, the committee also acknowledges that it was perhaps inevitable that, given the subject matter, the consultation was not likely to engage community groups in quite the same way that a local development plan might. However, the committee's report is clear on the importance of engagement, despite the relatively low level of response from the public. The report also stresses the need to make such material comprehensible if public consultation is to be meaningful—necessarily difficult though much of that material is.

Another lesson that the committee felt could be learned for the future relates to developing the list of national developments. As has been said, the committee felt that the Scottish Government should engage with those who suggested national developments whose inclusion in the framework was ultimately rejected. I note that the minister has indicated that he is open to that idea. Indeed, one

of the report's recommendations is that the Scottish Government should continue to

"publish in future an *Assessment Matrix of Candidate National Developments against the National Development Criteria*, but that this should provide more detailed analysis and reasons why candidate national developments were accepted or rejected".

The committee looks forward to hearing how the Scottish Government intends to improve the consultation process and public awareness more generally.

As I said, rather than consider the specific national developments—we are grateful to the other committees that reported on those—the committee has indicated ways in which the process of selection might evolve. For instance, our report recommends that more information be provided on the status of individual national developments in terms of their relative priority.

In his opening speech, the convener emphasised the committee's view that, when possible, publicly funded infrastructure projects might be brought forward. I know that that reflects much of the Government's thinking.

I also draw attention to the contributions of other committee members. David McLetchie pressed the nuclear button, but I will resist the temptation to respond to that, as I am speaking on behalf of the committee. Malcolm Chisholm made a plea for projects in his constituency and created the opportunity for the minister to refer to his ancestors. Alex Johnstone raised questions about consultation and about high-speed rail and nuclear issues. Rob Gibson responded to some of the criticisms of the consultation, especially those from Clare Symonds. Peter Peacock highlighted Scapa Flow and subsea connections in Argyll and elsewhere. Jim Tolson nursed some metaphors about report cards and fast tracks. Shirley-Anne Somerville highlighted transport issues relating to Edinburgh airport and opposed the nuclear option as a solution for altering Scotland's carbon footprint. Cathy Peattie made the case for transport improvements in Grangemouth. Patrick Harvie called for more intensive parliamentary scrutiny of the framework in future and opposed aspects of the report.

Patrick Harvie: I am grateful to the member for referencing some of the points that I made. I also asked why we are faced with a motion that does not allow members to vote for or against the national developments in substantive terms, in the way that the Communities Committee in the previous session agreed. Why has the committee chosen to lodge a motion in these terms?

Alasdair Allan: I can only say that I have summarised Patrick Harvie's concerns and there

is an opportunity for the committee and the Government to respond to them.

The committee will consider the final framework when it is laid before Parliament. Likewise, we look forward to a continuing dialogue with the Scottish Government on NPF 2 and other improvements to the planning system that seek to make it more streamlined and proportionate. As did the convener, I commend the report to Parliament.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): That concludes the debate. I have no option other than to suspend the meeting until 5 o'clock.

16:57

Meeting suspended.

On resuming—

Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of legislative consent motion S3M-3513, in the name of John Swinney, on the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation. I invite John Swinney to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill, which repeal Sections 14-20 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 and those which amend the construction contracts legislation in Part 2 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, introduced in the House of Lords on 4 December 2008, should, insofar as they relate to matters within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, be considered by the UK Parliament.—
[John Swinney.]

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): We have eight questions to consider as a result of today's business.

Members should note that if amendment S3M-3609.3, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on Scottish Government failures, be agreed to, then amendment S3M-3609.1, in the name of Mike Rumbles, will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-3609.3, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3609, in the name of Johann Lamont, on Scottish Government failures, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)

Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 45, Against 74, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-3609.1, in the name of Mike Rumbles, also seeking to amend motion S3M-3609, in the name of Johann Lamont, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)

McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)

Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 72, Against 47, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-3609, in the name of Johann Lamont, on Scottish Government failures, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)

McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)

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

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 72, Against 47, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that SNP manifesto promises have been broken on a wide range of issues including health, housing, community safety and education; further notes the absence of a credible strategy to address the needs of people facing difficult economic circumstances and to tackle poverty and disadvantage; regrets that the Scottish Government prefers to focus its attention on the powers it does not have in order to pursue its party's agenda of separation; urges the Scottish Government to examine how it might effectively use the powers at its disposal to meet the needs of people by sustaining economic activity and employment and supporting communities across Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to concentrate its efforts on economic recovery and abandon its divisive plans for a Referendum Bill for the remainder of its term of office.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that amendment S3M-3584.2, in the name of Des McNulty, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3584, in the name of Duncan McNeil, on behalf of the Local Government and Communities Committee, on "National Planning Framework for Scotland 2: Proposed Framework", be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-3584.1.1, in the name of Alison McInnes, which seeks to amend amendment S3M-3584.1, in name of David McLetchie, on national planning framework 2, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)

Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 54, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-3584.1, as amended, in the name of David McLetchie, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3584, in the name of Duncan McNeil, on "National Planning Framework for Scotland 2: Proposed Framework", be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

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

ABSTENTIONS

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)

Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 14, Abstentions 42.

Amendment, as amended, agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-3584, in the name of Duncan McNeil, on behalf of the Local Government and Communities Committee, on "National Planning Framework for Scotland 2: Proposed Framework", as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

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

ABSTENTIONS

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)

Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 16, Abstentions 41.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government and Communities Committee's 5th Report, 2009 (Session 3): National Planning Framework for Scotland 2: Proposed Framework (SP Paper 218), together with the Official Report of the Parliament's debate on the report, should form the Parliament's response to the Scottish Government on the Proposed Framework; supports the inclusion of the high-speed rail link between Scotland and London on the list of designated national developments; recommends that the Scottish Government ensures that both interim and long-term targets for reducing emissions are fully taken into account in land use and energy policies; considers that local and national land use planning must facilitate walking and cycling in urban as well as rural areas; endorses the recommendation of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee that the Scottish Government removes any technology-specific references from candidate national developments 8 and 9; calls on the Scottish Government to amend the descriptions of these national developments to reflect this in the final version of the National Planning Framework for Scotland 2, and reaffirms that in accordance with paragraph 152 of the National Planning Framework for Scotland 2 proposed framework document it does not support the construction of new nuclear power stations in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-3513, in the name of John Swinney, on the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill, which repeal Sections 14-20 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 and those which amend the construction contracts legislation in Part 2 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, introduced in the House of Lords on 4 December 2008, should, insofar as they relate to matters within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, be considered by the UK Parliament.

International Women's Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-3456, in the name of Cathy Peattie, on international women's day.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the many events being organised throughout the world to mark International Women's Day on 8 March 2009; notes the role that this day plays in recognising, promoting and celebrating women's issues worldwide; considers that there are still many aspects of women's rights, representation and welfare that need to be addressed through a gendered policy approach, including the gender pay gap, the under-representation of women in senior positions within the public and private sectors and as elected representatives, and with regard to the provision of violence-against-women support services; recognises the requirement under the Gender Equality Duty for the Scottish Government, local authorities and other public bodies to undertake needs analyses and equality impact assessments, and believes that these are central to single outcome and other agreements.

17:08

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I thank the many members who signed my motion. Many events are being organised throughout the world to mark international women's day, which is now nearly 100 years old, having been launched in March 1911. We celebrate advances that we have made and recognise and promote women's issues. We highlight what is still to be done and we share our experience here in Scotland and with our sisters globally. We want to advance the social, political and economic equality of women.

Many aspects of women's rights, representation and welfare still need to be addressed through a gendered policy approach. The issues include the gender pay gap, under representation of women in senior positions in the public and private sectors and as elected representatives, and the provision of violence against women support services.

There is still a large pay gap between women and men. Women tend to have less access to income, earnings, pensions and resources such as cars and houses. Women, young and old, also have real problems with public transport. I have to tell members that getting on an average bus with a buggy and two bairns is damned near impossible.

Similar observations can be made about other barriers and discrimination against women. Women are not adequately represented in many professions. Last year's "Sex and Power" report highlighted the fact that there is a declining percentage of women among public appointments, senior police officers, judges in the Court of Session and Scottish MPs and MSPs. Women constitute 7.4 per cent of senior police officers and

only 11.8 per cent of judges in the Court of Session, which I believe results in the lack of awareness that is evident in some of the decisions that are made by our justice system. For example, in rape cases, victims do not deserve to be jailed for finding proceedings difficult.

In the Scottish Parliament, 35 per cent of MSPs are women—that is up on the figure in 2007, thanks to the two new Scottish National Party women, but is still down on the figures of 39 per cent in 2003 and 37 per cent in 1999.

In spite of the high number of women who are active in communities, we still remain under represented in local government and central Government. The struggle for women's representation will be remembered later this year by the Gude Cause group: October 10 will mark the 100th anniversary of the 1909 women's suffrage movement's march along Princes Street. Hundreds of women took part, dressed in violet, green and purple, the colours of the movement. One of the banners read:

"A GUDE CAUSE MAKES A STRONG ARM".

In 2009, the march will be re-enacted. It will be a special day for all women in Scotland—aye, and for men and bairns, too.

Another march will take place this weekend. Edinburgh communities will march together, uniting to end violence against women. On Sunday 8 March, a reclaim the night march will pass through parts of the city where women feel unsafe. However, the organisers are careful to emphasise that, in general, women are safer outdoors than they are in their own homes. One in five women experiences domestic abuse during her life. The "Map of Gaps 2" report, which was published recently, shows that many local authorities in Britain have no specialist violence against women support services such as rape crisis centres, children's services, refuges, outreach projects and services for black and ethnic minority women.

It is recognised throughout Britain that Scotland leads the way in the provision of those services, which is due in no small part to Scotland being the only part of the United Kingdom to take a gender-based policy approach to violence against women. I am, however, concerned that removal of ring-fenced funding for local authorities might lead to a dilution of focus and service. I call on the Scottish Government and local authorities to ensure that rigorous needs analyses and equality impact assessments, as required by the gender equality duty, are central to the single outcome agreements.

This week, Parliament hosted an exhibition by the Women's Environmental Network, an organisation that seeks to empower women to

make positive environmental change, to increase awareness of women's perspectives on environmental issues and to influence decision making to achieve environmental justice for women. A gender equality approach needs to be taken to protect women's health and help women to participate more in environmental decision making. It is essential that women are brought into the main stream of environmental decision making, whether it is community based or initiated by Government.

The Scottish Parliament has contributed enormously to Scotland's good record on equal opportunities. We have promoted mainstreaming and the gender proofing of budgets through working with the voluntary sector, businesses, trade unions and campaigning organisations to improve the lives of women. I want that record to be maintained and the equal opportunities agenda to be advanced. I believe that that is key to the continuation of a gendered approach to policy, and I look forward to the Scottish Government reaffirming that commitment.

17:14

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP):

I congratulate Cathy Peattie on bringing this debate to the chamber in the week that we are celebrating the events for international women's day.

Cathy Peattie referred to last year's "Sex and Power" report, in which I was mentioned as one of a diminishing group of female politicians in the Scottish Parliament. We have restored the balance slightly, as Shirley-Anne Somerville and Anne McLaughlin are now here, although tonight I am part of a shrinking group on these benches—I am the sole female cheerleader for the Scottish National Party in this debate. Sandra White wanted to be here, but she has a constituency engagement—she wanted me to say that she is here in spirit and in sisterhood.

One of the things that struck me in the "Sex and Power" report was the idea of prejudice. All through my working life I have been involved, as part of the trade union movement, in trying to address the equal pay issue. There are issues with regard to being a woman in a world in which you are trying to get ahead. I worked in social work, which was quite female dominated, but the big positions always went to men. There was a boys' club network: the method of promotion was to go for a pint with the boss. If you were a female who wisnae inclined to go for a pint or play a round of golf with the boss, you faced a barrier to promotion. As Cathy Peattie said, that was usually because women had two weans waiting at home for their dinner and they had to get back and sort them out, run one to the fitba and the other to

something else. Prejudice is still endemic in the working world, and there is still a network of boys' clubs, especially in top jobs in the private and civic sectors.

Another thing that struck me in the "Sex and Power" report concerned female ambition. If a female is described as ambitious and puts herself forward, she is usually described as a nippy sweetie or an aggressive woman, or as someone who is trying to act like a man in a man's world. A woman does not have to act like a man, by which I mean no discredit to any of my male colleagues; she just needs to act like herself—but that is sometimes tough because there is a preconception that if you are an ambitious woman, you are aggressive, which is quite wrong.

There is still an expectation in today's society that the female is the main care giver in a family. That has been an issue for me—I have always been the main care giver. I have been expected to be that person. We should address the long hours culture and resistance to flexible working, and give rights to parents—not just female parents, but all parents—to allow them to have a good work-life balance. That would go some way towards allowing women to advance their career further.

I was going to mention some of the events for international women's day, but Cathy Peattie has already done that. One of the things that brought me into politics and being part of society was my gran, who passed away last year at the age of 98. She went through her young life as part of the suffragette movement, and I have a brooch on today, which one of my friends gave to me, that has the suffragette colours in it. It is a butterfly, which represents rebirth and beauty. We women always have to undergo rebirth and become something else.

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe presents an award for female comedians every year—on which I congratulate it. Last year, I had the real privilege of giving the award to Janey Godley. She uses her issues and concerns, and the challenges and barriers that she faces every day as a woman in the workplace and in the family, as humour. She won the award because she has been on a journey through being a woman in a man's world, which led to her success.

Our responsibility as females in the world is to encourage, mentor and empower. Women who, like us, are in positions of power should be the cheerleaders for that. When I was first elected and did my wee interview, I was asked who inspired me the most and who I would have to dinner. A lot of people have inspired me. The interviewer said, "I suppose it would be Winnie Ewing." In a political sense, Winnie Ewing has always been an inspiration to me, but one of my inspirations is Rosa Parks—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member should wind up.

Christina McKelvie: Rosa Parks was involved in the civil rights movement, and she said that sometimes you have to sit down to stand up for yourself. On that note, Presiding Officer, I will sit down.

17:19

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Since its birth in the socialist movement, international women's day has grown to become a global day of recognition and celebration in developed and developing countries alike. The idea started in 1910 at the second conference of working women, where a woman who can certainly inspire us all, Clara Zetkin, raised the question of organising an international working women's day. That conference decided that, from then on, every year and in every country, women should celebrate on the same day a women's day under the slogan

"The vote for women will unite our strength in the struggle for socialism."

I commend Cathy Peattie, a good socialist woman, for bringing the debate to the chamber this evening to highlight women's inequality at home and abroad. In the past decade, she and other persistent comrades have raised the issues of inequality, discrimination, lack of representation and violence against women. They have done so in the Parliament and outwith it so that those injustices are recognised as societal problems here in Scotland and around the world and to highlight the need for action to address and eliminate them. There have of course been some successes, as Cathy Peattie said.

In a debate in the Parliament in 2000, I said:

"In 1918, the suffragettes won votes for women. Eighty years later, 82 per cent of MPs were men. That picture is reflected across society. For the whole of the past century, women have battled for equality."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 2000; c 1436.]

Sadly, we have only to consider the terms of Cathy Peattie's motion to know that the same battles continue in the new century. Women remain underrepresented in public life, are paid less than men, endure violence at the hands of men, and suffer disproportionately from the effects of poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth and power. The Public and Commercial Services Union points out that the earnings gap between men and women in the civil service is higher than the UK average.

Whether in debates about equality, violence against women or international women's day, or on other relevant occasions, I and others find ourselves making the same points over and over

again. Unfortunately, nearly a decade after the Scottish Parliament was established, there remains a need to debate women's unequal status in Scottish society and abroad.

I note that Jack McConnell has a current motion that encourages MSPs to support One World Action's more women more power campaign. That shows that there are examples of good practice around the world that should be recognised and shared. In Tanzania, the Women's Legal Advice Centre's access to justice for refugee women and girls project helps refugee women and girls to gain access to legal assistance. In Zambia, Women for Change works with and empowers remote rural communities to contribute towards gender-sensitive, sustainable development and the eradication of all forms of poverty. In India, the Self Employed Women's Association is a trade union movement of informal women workers who believe that women's human rights will not be achieved without economic empowerment and self-reliance. We can also learn from socialist Cuba, where the Federation of Cuban Women is an example of female solidarity within a socialist system. It makes real change in fighting for women's rights.

Of course, the lives of women today are very different from the lives of our grandmothers. Christina McKelvie referred to that. We remember that it is only within the past 100 years that women have had the vote. Sadly, however, many women do not use their vote. They are disfranchised and disempowered; they do not see the point of voting because they do not see it as relevant. Despite many advances, women are still oppressed, still not equal and still fighting for our rights. That inequality is rooted in exploitation, patriarchy and capitalism. It is in the interests of private greed to stand in the way of equality.

Perhaps now, with the seeming collapse of global capitalism and the personal disgrace of those who have worshipped at the throne of Mammon, we have an opportunity to try to rebuild society on the tenets of freedom, equality and justice instead of avarice, greed and injustice. We can do that. We can put people before profit and allocate the resources that are needed to deliver a truly equal society.

I finish where I started, with the founder of international women's day. Throughout her political career, Clara Zetkin focused on the liberation of women in society through Marxist reforms of the capitalist system. Her words help to explain why we continue to make the same points over and over again. She said:

"The total liberation of the world of proletarian women ... is only possible in a socialist society."

More than 100 years later, and after 10 years of devolution, I have to concur with that view.

17:25

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Cathy Peattie on bringing this important debate to the Parliament. International women's day is celebrated worldwide and provides a welcome and necessary opportunity to highlight and raise awareness about women's issues, in their varying complexity.

The motion mentions, among other things, women's representation and welfare as aspects of women's rights that still need to be addressed. Who could doubt the validity of that statement, given the incidence of trafficking, which has been described as the new slave trade? Trafficking involves predominantly women, but also children, in what has become a growth industry both globally and on an intrastate basis. The last point is worth emphasising and was effectively brought home to me when I attended the recent Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference on trafficking in London. There is a common misconception that trafficking takes place exclusively between states, but in reality it is also a thriving domestic trade. If today's debate succeeds in making people in general more conscious of and vigilant about the abuses that are being perpetrated on their doorstep, it will have been worth while for that reason alone.

Violence against women is a key welfare issue. In that area, at least, there is some small glimmer of optimism, as the subject is at last receiving the attention that it merits, through domestic violence awareness-raising campaigns such as the highly successful breaking the circle of violence campaign that was launched just before Christmas in the *Airdrie & Coatbridge Advertiser*, in conjunction with Strathclyde Police, North Lanarkshire Council, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and Scottish Women's Aid. The campaign, which ended recently, has had remarkable results in encouraging the reporting of abuse and educating the public about the insidious, complex and manipulative nature of domestic violence, which has such a devastating impact on both the victims and the children involved.

Also to be welcomed are the provisions of the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill, which is being considered by the Justice Committee and will reform the law on rape. The bill's provisions bring clarity to the concept of reasonable belief of consent, for example. It is to be hoped that, in doing so, they will help to prevent some of the travesties that take place in courtrooms, where the victim often feels that she, not the perpetrator, is on trial.

I turn to the other aspects of the motion. The first is the gender pay gap, which—like death and taxes—seems always to be with us. When scrutinising the 2009-10 Scottish Government draft budget, the Equal Opportunities Committee focused on the issue of equal pay in local government and the escalating cost—already running into hundreds of millions of pounds—of the 40,000 outstanding cases. Oral evidence that was taken recently from Audit Scotland and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has been relayed to the Local Government and Communities Committee, which is to pursue the issue.

Meanwhile, the Equal Opportunities Committee has produced guidelines to help committees mainstream equal opportunities in their work across the equality strands, including gender. Among other things, the guidance suggests ways in which committees could scrutinise the Scottish Government's approach to equality impact assessment and its responsibility under the public sector equalities duties. The guidance was discussed recently by the Conveners Group, which brings it another step closer to adoption.

Finally, it is hoped that the Conveners Group's agreement to the Equal Opportunities Committee's request to commission research into sexualised goods aimed at children will result in useful material and evidence to help us get to grips with the root causes of low esteem in girls.

As the motion indicates, many aspects of women's rights are still to be addressed. The various events that are planned to celebrate international women's day will help in that process.

17:29

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): Like other members, I thank Cathy Peattie for bringing this important debate to the chamber. The number of topics that have already been touched on shows how wide ranging the debate can and should be.

International women's day gives us a chance to review the position of women at home and across the world. Importantly, it allows us to focus on what it means to grow up as a female.

We talk a lot about mainstreaming, which is often taken to mean, sadly, trying to make everything gender neutral when we seem to have so little idea of gender differences in the first place. We need to take on board the concept of the girl-child and how her experiences are different and how her needs must be addressed.

Last month, I attended the Women's National Commission event in Glasgow, which was organised by the commission and the UK

Government Equalities Office. The event's purpose was to raise awareness of, review and take stock of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which is often described as an international bill of rights for women. The UN commission and the convention bring together women's organisations and movements across the world for the advancement of women and gender equality.

The Glasgow event was an opportunity for Scottish women's groups, such as Engender and the Scottish Women's Convention, to present their viewpoints. I look forward to the report-back on that UN meeting. I encourage members to attend that session because the themes of the UN meeting are relevant to our work in Parliament. The priority theme this year is the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS. That is an interesting way to look at the issue, because it looks at equal sharing of responsibilities rather than at equality and rights. The status of unpaid carers is a frequent topic for us in Parliament. I hope that a major debate on it will be scheduled soon.

The review theme, which is last year's theme, is evaluating progress on the implementation of the conclusions on the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels. That is significant for us and for our political parties because only one third of MSPs are women, and we know that the statistics for local government and Westminster are similarly poor. We ourselves need to take action to make that change.

An emerging issue of concern to everyone is the gender perspective of the financial crisis. Members have talked about equal pay, which is one of the biggest issues for us. Many of our committees are grappling with it, and it is an on-going problem across the public and private sectors. The statistics, as reported by the PCS, are that women's average hourly earnings are 17 per cent less than those of men, with the gap widening to 35 per cent between women and men part-time workers. We know that that is caused by discrimination, the responsibilities of caring and occupational segregation. We need to reverse those gaps.

I welcome the equality legislation and the work of trade unions and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. I hope that we can soon see a difference so that we can truly present Scotland across the world as a country of good practices, whether we are talking about how we deal with sexual offences, and the reform of legislation in that regard, or equality measures. I look forward to

hearing what action the minister will propose to help us make that difference.

17:33

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): I, too, congratulate Cathy Peattie on securing the debate and I pay tribute to her work down the years on wider equality issues. It is good to see Elaine Smith back in the chamber in full voice.

I will briefly outline what the Scottish Government is doing for international women's day and then discuss three of the topics that the motion mentions, because I cannot cover in four minutes every topic that has been raised in the debate. The Scottish ministers are more actively involved this year than ever, building on the success of the previous Administration in this area, with events and activities to mark international women's day. I hope that that demonstrates our commitment to the women's agenda in Scotland and to equalities generally, and to ensuring that we make progress on the issues that have been identified.

We are helping to fund three organisations to hold international women's day events: Fiona Hyslop will speak in the chamber on Saturday at the Scottish Women's Convention event, as, I think, will Cathy Peattie; Women@Work is holding an international women's day event on Saturday in Inverness; and Shona Robison is attending and speaking at an event on Friday 13 March, which is organised by the Dundee International Women's Centre.

We are funding the organisers of three events that will take place between July 2008 and March 2011. The three organisers are: the Scottish Women's Convention, Women@Work, and the Dundee International Women's Centre. The Government's assistance is respectively £521,351, £258,855 and £160,000.

In total, we have committed nearly £3 million to continue to fund nine of our strategic partners to carry out specific work to help us to progress gender equality issues. In addition, in celebrating international women's day, a delegation from Armenia is being met and a range of other activities is taking place.

I turn to three substantive issues: violence against women, equal pay and occupational segregation. The subject of the event in the Parliament on Saturday is violence against women. Scotland has been leading the way in developing this agenda over a number of years on the basis of a firm gender-based analysis. We believe that our success comes down in the main to the partnership approach that we have adopted with the organisations that I mentioned earlier.

This work will be developed further during the next stage of the single outcome agreement process, in which we will ensure the full involvement of community planning partners. In turn, that should assist in engaging the multi-agency partnerships that work to prevent violence against women in identifying local priorities. I am conscious of the concerns that what should be going on locally across Scotland is going on locally. The Government has discussed the matter with our national group on violence against women and COSLA representatives. COSLA is keeping a very close eye on the situation to ensure that there is no diminution in service levels or in local network activities in this area. I am keeping a close personal eye on the matter.

Over the next three years, the Government will allocate over £44 million to tackling violence against women and children, including domestic abuse. I am making not a party-political but a substantive point when I say that that funding more than doubles that of the previous three years.

The annual domestic abuse publicity campaign, which runs in December and January each year, is absolutely vital to our work in this area. This year's campaign involved a new television advert, "I Soar". There is also our online work to encourage women to contact the Scottish domestic abuse helpline for support. Recent figures from the helpline reveal an increase of 7.5 per cent in calls over the festive period from last year. We are evaluating the campaign to see how we can further improve it in future years.

Given that I am running out of time, or have run out of time—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister has seven minutes.

Alex Neil: Excellent.

Elaine Smith: Will the minister take an intervention?

Alex Neil: Yes, I can. I thought that I had only four minutes in total.

Elaine Smith: Will the minister include the issue of pornography within the spectrum of his work on violence against women? Will he further indicate where action can be taken to tackle the issue?

Alex Neil: We discussed the issue of pornography at the last meeting of the national group on violence against women, albeit briefly. We are taking forward the issue in conjunction with our partners at Westminster. Clearly, pornography is a UK issue. We are aware of it, and we will address it in the months and years ahead.

Given the bonus of another two minutes, I have time to address one final issue, which is that of closing the gender pay gap and equal pay. I say to Cathy Peattie that the civil service undertakes regular pay audits in which it has found no significant equality issues in its pay structure other than in terms of senior civil service pay. That needs to be addressed. Obviously, the issue comes under the control of Her Majesty's Treasury in London, which has the primary responsibility for the civil service.

Meeting closed at 17:42.

Cathy Peattie: My point was about women's promotion to posts in the senior civil service, because the number of women in such posts is very low.

Alex Neil: Absolutely. We are also keen to address that issue.

The gender pay gap for full-time workers in Scotland is currently 13.5 per cent, based on the average, or mean, and the median figure is almost 11 per cent. Those figures are far too high. In our view, there should be equal pay—I am old enough to remember Barbara Castle introducing the Equal Pay Act 1970. Although there has been a slight decrease in the pay gap since 2007, when the equivalent figures were almost 15 per cent and 12 per cent, that is still not good enough and we are determined to do everything that we can to help close the gap.

The gap is even more profound for part-time work: it is just over 32 per cent based on the average, or mean, and almost 35 per cent based on the median. Because such a relatively high proportion of women work part time, that statistic is at least as important as the one for full-time pay.

Although equal pay legislation is reserved, the Scottish Government is trying, through the gender equality duty, to do what we can to address the issues—as did previous Administrations.

I hear what members say about the problems associated with single status and about the trafficking of women. Although it has not been mentioned, forced marriage is also being addressed. We are also addressing, with our Westminster colleagues, the issue of no recourse to public funds; it does not affect a large number of women, but someone who is affected can find themselves in a desperate situation.

I had much more to say, but I have run out of time. I recommit the Scottish Government to the gender equality agenda and I commit this Government to do everything that we possibly can—working with the campaigners in the Parliament—to promote in the months and years to come not only international women's day but equality for women in pay and in every other respect.

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