

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 11 June 2009

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 11 June 2009

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 08:45*]

Influenza A(H1N1)

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good morning. The first item of business is a statement by Nicola Sturgeon on influenza A(H1N1). The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her 10-minute statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

08:45

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I am grateful for the further opportunity to update Parliament on the current situation in relation to the A(H1N1) flu virus.

As of this morning, the World Health Organization reports that 27,737 cases of H1N1 have been officially reported across 74 countries. Some 2,500 of those cases have been reported in the past two days. There have been 141 reported deaths in five countries. A total of 797 cases have been confirmed in the United Kingdom; a third of those cases have been in Scotland. As of yesterday, there were 311 confirmed cases in seven health board areas in Scotland and 522 possible cases. We have no probable cases at this time.

The WHO's pandemic alert level remains at level 5, but in light of sustained community transmission in countries outside North America—most notably in Australia—it is likely that level 6 will be declared later today following the WHO's emergency committee meeting at 10 am in Geneva.

Members should be aware that a move to level 6 is not a verdict on the severity of the virus. It does not mean that the WHO thinks that the virus has become more serious; it simply means that the extent of its global spread now fulfils the definition of a pandemic. A move to level 6 means that countries need to be ready to implement pandemic plans immediately. However, it is important to stress that, as we are already operating at a heightened state of readiness, a move to level 6 will not trigger any material change in our response.

As I made clear in the statement that I made on 14 May, a move to level 6 may mean a change in the schedule for delivery of the H1N1 vaccine that

we are now procuring. Level 6 would activate pre-existing contractual arrangements for securing pandemic vaccines and would cause adjustments to worldwide vaccine production timetables, which would mean that the UK receives supplies over a longer timeframe. We have, of course, factored that change into our contingency planning.

We have seen a rapid increase in the number of confirmed cases in Scotland over the past 10 days. Based on that experience, Health Protection Scotland has expressed the view that sustained community transmission appears to be taking place. The data are being shared with the Health Protection Agency for analysis on a UK basis.

The highest numbers of confirmed cases so far are within the 15 to 24-year-old age range. There has only been one reported case involving someone over the age of 65. Of the 311 confirmed cases in Scotland, 18 people have been admitted to hospital for clinical reasons. That gives us a hospitalisation rate that is broadly in line with that in the United States. Five people have required management in an intensive care or high-dependency unit. Two of them are critical but stable; the other three are stable. I emphasise that although a small number of people, most of whom have underlying health conditions, are developing complications, it is still the case that the vast majority of people contracting the virus are experiencing relatively mild symptoms.

We are still working hard to disrupt and slow the spread of the virus. That policy has been successful in limiting its transmission over the past six weeks. In areas in which there is only a small number of isolated cases, the current level of containment will continue to be appropriate, but where more sizeable clusters arise and there is evidence of community transmission—such as we have seen in Dunoon, Glasgow and Paisley—our current approach of tracing and offering prophylaxis to all close contacts becomes less effective. In addition, because it involves giving antivirals to very large numbers of people, many of whom will not be ill, the risk of the virus developing resistance to Tamiflu increases. Yesterday's meeting of COBRA—Cabinet Office briefing room A—therefore agreed a number of refinements to build more flexibility into our approach and better target the measures for containing the virus towards those who are at greatest risk. Those refinements will now be applied in areas of the country in which they are deemed to be appropriate by public health assessments. They include, first, the use of clinical diagnosis, rather than laboratory testing, where there is a high probability, due to close contact with confirmed cases, that symptomatic people are positive; secondly, continued antiviral treatment of all those who have the virus but more targeted use of antiviral prophylaxis, based on local risk

assessment and limited to contacts considered most at risk of contracting the virus—in practice, mainly household or household-like contacts, or, in a school context, those at surrounding desks; and thirdly, the restriction of contact follow-up to those most at risk.

Decisions to close schools will continue to be taken on a case-by-case basis, following robust risk assessment and advice from public health officials. As of today, 15 schools and nurseries across the country are either closed or partially closed; of those, seven are fully closed. I take this opportunity to extend my and Fiona Hyslop's appreciation to education departments and staff for their hard work in managing the situation at affected schools and nurseries, and to parents for their understanding and co-operation.

The refinements to our containment strategy are based on expert advice and are appropriate to the reality of what we are dealing with now. However, there will come a point at which even that more flexible approach to containment will no longer be effective and the focus will shift from containing the spread of the virus to mitigating its impact. That mitigation phase has always been anticipated in our pandemic plans. Significant preparation and further planning for it have been carried out in recent weeks, involving health boards and NHS 24.

I will now touch on a number of issues relating to national health service preparedness. In my view, health boards across the country have dealt exceptionally well with the outbreak so far. NHS boards have built on their winter, pandemic flu and business continuity plans. Next week, as part of that routine planning, NHS board chief executives and chief operating officers will meet officials to discuss planning for the coming winter. In particular, they will consider what lessons have been learned from the outbreak of influenza A(H1N1) so far and how we can best plan for potential escalation, if that is required.

In addition to the work of territorial health boards, it is important to remember that, since the first cases of swine flu were confirmed in Scotland, NHS 24 has dealt with a significant increase in the number of calls to its core out-of-hours service, including the dedicated flu line. Last week, when further cases were announced, there was an increase of around 30 per cent, on average, in the number of calls to NHS 24. I am pleased to report that NHS 24 has coped extremely well with the rise in call demand, with more than 98 per cent of calls being answered within 30 seconds and an average time to answer of around four seconds.

The most recent development has been the setting up of the Scottish flu response centre, which is based at NHS 24's Cardonald contact centre and works in conjunction with Health

Protection Scotland and health boards across the country. The centre has been established to help us deal with developments in the spread of flu. It will provide vital information, advice and reassurance to the public and to health professionals who are concerned about the virus and how it may affect them.

Finally, I will touch on wider preparations. The effects of a pandemic have the potential to have a wide-ranging impact, even if the symptoms continue to be no more serious than those of seasonal flu. Many agencies are already well prepared to deal with those effects, but we are continuing to work with our partner organisations to enhance further their levels of resilience. We are working closely with Scotland's eight strategic co-ordinating groups to ensure that the emergency services and other members of the groups are working together to refine their arrangements. Although we are in regular contact with the groups, we will host a specific meeting on 24 June to take stock of progress and to address any specific issues that have arisen. Colleagues will be aware that a pandemic has the potential to put some sectors under considerable strain. Under some scenarios, maintaining business exactly as normal will not be practical. To anticipate such challenges, we are continuing, in partnership with other Administrations across the UK, to ensure that our planning takes account of any possible eventuality.

The recent rapid increase in the number of cases in Scotland has undoubtedly put increased pressure on health and local authority services. I take this opportunity to thank all staff working in front-line services—including general practitioners, nurses, doctors, teachers, social workers and social care staff—for all of their efforts in tracing, treating and caring for those affected by the outbreak. I assure members that I will keep Parliament updated on any further developments.

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. We have exactly 20 minutes for such questions, after which we must move on to the next item of business.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement and for the regular briefings that she and the chief medical officer have provided. I also add my thanks to all the staff who have been involved in dealing with the situation so far.

With the move to a level 6 pandemic anticipated imminently, we are clearly in a new situation. Notwithstanding the fact that all the available information suggests that the actual flu might not be as severe as perhaps had been feared, there is no doubt that the general public will be concerned by the change in the designation. What additional

measures does the Scottish Government intend to take to give further information to members of the public to explain what the new level of pandemic means and how the situation will be dealt with?

I also want to ask about the Dunoon and Paisley clusters, where there have been concerns about the lack of any obvious traceability of some of the contacts. In essence, the situation is almost like a test run for dealing with such clusters. Will the cabinet secretary indicate whether any lessons have been learned from the operation of the procedures that might need to be picked up by other health boards as we move on?

Finally, given that we will now move to a situation in which clinical diagnosis rather than lab testing will be used in those clusters, how will the numbers continue to be recorded and reported? Are GPs, in particular, geared up for that change in the procedures?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Cathy Jamieson for her questions and for the support that she and her colleagues have given us so far in this outbreak.

Cathy Jamieson is absolutely right that, if the WHO goes to level 6 today—which is not definite but is widely anticipated—that will take us to a new level. However, we should all stress that the move to level 6 is a statement not about the severity of the virus but about the extent of the spread of the virus.

Cathy Jamieson is also right that the emerging evidence suggests that—apart from complications in a minority of cases—the flu seems to be no more severe than seasonal flu. We must be cautious about that, as there is still a possibility of mutation. In addition, even if the outbreak is no more serious than seasonal flu, the impact might still be considerable.

First, on the issue of further information to the public, we all have a duty and an obligation to get measured messages across to people. As members would expect, I will certainly play my part in doing that. We are also preparing to rerun the pandemic flu advertising material from early next week. That has a twofold significance: first, it will help to reassure people about the stage that we are now at; secondly, and more important, it will get the message across to individuals throughout Scotland about the part that they can play in helping to minimise spread by adopting good hygiene measures, such as hand washing, and by following the appropriate advice. Cathy Jamieson should be reassured that we will continue to work hard to get those messages across to the public.

Secondly, the Dunoon and Paisley clusters—and, indeed, the cluster in Glasgow—were the first clusters where we began to see significant numbers of sporadic cases for which we could not

trace the source. That is to be expected in any outbreak and has happened in other parts of the UK and elsewhere in the world. Clearly, the clusters in Dunoon, Paisley and Glasgow have had significant impacts, not least on schools in those areas. Lessons will continue to be learned. As I said in my statement, a key focus of the meeting with stakeholders on 24 June will be to take stock of experience so far to ensure that we have used those experiences as learning lessons for the future.

Lastly, we will move to using clinical diagnosis in some circumstances, although in emerging clusters it will clearly still be important to use laboratory testing to confirm the presence of the H1N1 strain. We will continue to report the number of confirmed cases and to put in place arrangements to ensure that the genuine level of infection can be tracked and reported. GPs, like other members of primary health teams and the rest of the NHS and wider society, continue to ensure that they are geared up to cope with whatever might lie ahead.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I thank the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing for keeping the Opposition health teams informed of all the issues relating to swine flu, and acknowledge the excellent work that has been done by all the staff who are addressing the outbreak.

First, given that Scotland has 9 per cent of the UK's population and 30 per cent of the confirmed cases of swine flu and that we are likely to move from containing the spread to mitigating its impact, what additional resources are being allocated to NHS 24 to help it to cope with the increased calls? Secondly, will the clinical diagnosis be done only by GPs, or is there any other source that will act as assistance to GPs in carrying that out? Finally, given that we are moving to level 6, can I have an assurance that the distribution system in the Highlands is in place?

Nicola Sturgeon: Taking the last of those questions first, I can reassure Mary Scanlon that, as a result of a considerable amount of work in recent weeks, NHS Highland and health boards across the country are prepared for the mass distribution of antivirals, should they be needed. We have in place a telephone and web-based system that is ready to go, should we need it. It will allow the public to access and be assessed for antivirals, and the systems for distribution are in place beneath that.

Mary Scanlon is right to say that Scotland currently has 30 per cent of all UK cases. We can speculate about the reasons for that. I do not want to overstate this suggestion, but it might be that we measure and count cases more robustly here than elsewhere. However, it is more likely to be

the case that the reason is to do with the fact that, in any virus outbreak, clusters tend to appear in particular areas. In England, the bulk of cases are in one geographical area: the West Midlands. That tends to be how viruses spread, and I would not read too much more into that.

NHS 24 has taken care to increase its staffing complement to deal with the increase in calls. We also have the dedicated flu line and flu response centre that I spoke about in my statement. We will continue to ensure that NHS 24 continues to have the resources that it needs to cope with the outbreak.

It would be reasonable to assume that clinical diagnosis would be done principally, although perhaps not exclusively, by GPs.

I think that I have answered all Mary Scanlon's questions. If I have missed any, I will come back to her in writing.

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I thank the cabinet secretary and the chief medical officer for their continued updating of parties and their health spokespeople on this crisis. I associate myself with the remarks about the excellent work of NHS staff—they deserve our thanks. Last Friday, on constituency business, I visited the Cardonald NHS 24 centre, where the 24-hour flu line was being established. It was a very impressive operation indeed.

The cabinet secretary has consistently taken a measured approach to keeping the public informed. If we move to level 6, the public are likely to infer that that means that there has been an escalation of the problem. However, on good clinical advice, you are advising us this morning that the Government will be adopting a more targeted use of antiviral prophylaxis. How does the Government intend to advise the public that, even though the general information gives an impression of an expansion, the availability of prophylaxis will not reflect that? I am not suggesting that there will be confusion, but I think that there is a need for the public to understand better that change in approach.

Finally, although we are delighted that the actual nature of the disease is not developing, there are a number of warnings of its possible or potential return in the autumn. In that regard, and with reference to the cabinet secretary's planning, is she any closer to being able to advise Parliament as to the epidemiology of the virus?

Nicola Sturgeon: Ross Finnie is right to say that a move to level 6 will be considered an escalation. In some respects, it is an escalation. It is a statement that the virus has spread to the extent that it fulfils the definition of a global pandemic. However, it is important to continue to

stress that it is not an escalation in terms of severity, nor will it necessarily trigger an escalation in our planning, because we are already operating at a heightened state of readiness. In particular, our public health response on the ground will continue to be dictated by the extent of the spread that we observe in Scotland.

As I said in response to Cathy Jamieson, I and others have a responsibility to continue to ensure that we communicate messages in a measured way. Ross Finnie is right to raise the issue of ensuring that the public understand the rationale for changes in our strategy. Again, there is no single, simple way of doing that. We have to communicate the rationale through the media and our public advertising campaigns. Our public health teams on the ground are already working hard, and will continue to work hard, to ensure that the public are advised and reassured about the steps that are being taken and why they are being taken. There is no doubt in my mind that the changes and refinements to our containment strategy that I announced to the Parliament today are right. They are based on expert evidence and they will allow us to ensure that resources are targeted to best effect so that we continue, as far as we can, to minimise the spread of the infection.

The chief medical officer is far more qualified to answer the question on the epidemiology of the virus than I am, but some evidence is emerging about the age range that the virus affects, which tends to be younger rather than older people, and the fact that it is no more severe than, say, seasonal flu, although we have to be careful about that when we have people in intensive care. However, experts continue to study the virus closely, and the knowledge will continue to grow.

The Presiding Officer: We move to open questions. We are very tight for time, so I ask for strictly one question per person, please.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): It has been estimated that the cost of the H1N1 vaccine and of delivering it will be more than £100 million. What financial help will the Treasury provide to help the NHS in Scotland to meet that substantial additional cost?

Nicola Sturgeon: As I think I said when I last reported to Parliament on the matter, we have budgeted for certain things that we had to do to prepare for a pandemic. Our clinical countermeasures—such as the stockpiles of antivirals, antibiotics and face masks—were budgeted for and will be paid for out of those budgets. We could not have budgeted for a vaccine or the things that we have to do when a pandemic appears. No Administration in the UK has budgeted for that.

In common with the Welsh Assembly Government and the Northern Ireland Government, the Scottish Government has written to the Treasury to ask for assistance with those costs from UK contingency funding. To date, we have not received a reply on that. We continue to seek constructive discussions on the matter and I will keep the Parliament updated.

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement and the way in which she has kept members up to date in recent days.

One consequence of the statement is that, in cluster areas such as Paisley, routine laboratory testing will stop and antivirals will not be given to whole classes. I believe that we need to communicate specific, targeted messages to the affected communities.

Given that we now know that children are the spreaders of the virus in many cases, will the cabinet secretary commit to a specific, school-based campaign to ensure that the catch it, bin it, kill it message is discussed in every Scottish classroom when pupils return to school? Given that the only way in which one can heed that message is to have a handkerchief, will the cabinet secretary consider backing up that campaign with the supply of paper hankies in every classroom, in the same way that water fountains are found in schools, to ensure that we prevent the spread of the virus?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Wendy Alexander for her comments. As someone who is suffering from a cold—I stress that it is a cold—I understand the importance of the availability of handkerchiefs. I will certainly pass that suggestion on and discuss it with Fiona Hyslop, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning.

Wendy Alexander is right to stress the importance of communication, particularly when the strategies that we are pursuing are, for the best of reasons, changing. As she would expect, I will certainly consider carefully what further communication is required, and whether it should be targeted at particular communities, to ensure that we get the message across.

I will also take away her suggestion about specific campaigns in schools on the catch it, bin it, kill it theme, although the generic advertising material is appropriate in schools, too. I have anecdotal evidence from my constituency and from family members that there is a heightened awareness in schools of the importance of such messages, but Wendy Alexander is right to say that children shed virus more easily than adults, so they are more likely to spread it. That is why we must ensure that such messages get across to a part of the population that is perhaps not as

susceptible to hygiene messages as other parts of it are.

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary advise us of what further conversations she is having to encourage continued media restraint? There has been responsible reporting to date, and that will be important in the light of the WHO's anticipated level 6 announcement later today and the tactical changes in the containment strategy that she is planning.

Nicola Sturgeon: It is tempting to get drawn into a debate about media restraint—I quite like that idea.

So far, the Scottish media have behaved extremely responsibly. They have reported the outbreak, as we would expect them to do—after all, it is a news story, and they should be reporting it—but they have managed to strike a good balance. I hope that they will continue to do that. I have had discussions with newspapers over the past few days about what might happen in the future as regards the development of the virus.

For my part, I will continue to do what I have tried to do from the outset, which is to put as much information as possible into the public domain so that people can draw reasonable and reasoned conclusions from it. After the statement, in anticipation of the move to level 6, I will go to brief the media at St Andrew's house in an effort to get across some of the messages that we have discussed. Jackson Carlaw is right to raise an important point.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I note what the cabinet secretary said to Mary Scanlon about the distribution of medication in the Highlands, but I would like to press her further on the issues of sparsity, distance and rural transport. What is her officials' thinking on what would happen if the disease were to strike the people who provide us with rural transport?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am sure that NHS Highland officials would be more than happy to brief Jamie Stone and, indeed, Mary Scanlon and others on the specific plans that they have in place. Suffice it to say that I am satisfied that all boards are planning, in the context of their geographic and other circumstances, to ensure that they are in a position to distribute antivirals to members of the population who need them.

Clearly, the campaign for mass distribution of antivirals will be based to a large extent on asking ill people to stay at home and to send a friend or family member to get their antivirals for them. However, we recognise that that will not always be possible, so all health boards are putting in place

plans to ensure that they can take antivirals to people who need them.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will appreciate that there is growing concern about front-line public service workers; indeed, NHS workers have disproportionately borne infection. Can she provide more detail on how such workers will be supported and, just as important, what steps have been taken to communicate that message effectively to such vital and valued staff?

The Presiding Officer: As briefly as possible, please.

Nicola Sturgeon: NHS workers have clear guidance about what they should do to protect themselves if they are in prolonged contact with people who have the virus, which includes wearing face masks. When we received confirmation that health care workers had been infected with the virus, we altered that guidance to ensure that people who were admitted to hospital with certain symptoms that might be suggestive of the virus were treated as positive until we knew otherwise so that those protections would kick in as early as possible.

The Presiding Officer: Hugh Henry will ask the final question.

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): I, too, commend the cabinet secretary for the way in which she has attempted to keep members informed.

In relation to schools, what additional information will be given out to those who are responsible at local level for assuring that teachers and other staff are also adequately protected during the outbreak?

Nicola Sturgeon: We will continue to operate on the basis of risk assessment, and public health officials will continue to advise local authorities and schools on appropriate action. If teachers have been in close contact with pupils or other members of staff who have been confirmed as having the virus, they will be advised—as will pupils—to stay at home. We will continue to do what we can to ensure that those messages get across and that staff members in schools are adequately supported. I thank the member and his colleagues for their support in that regard over the past few days.

The Presiding Officer: I apologise to Jamie Hepburn and Dr Richard Simpson, but I am unable to call them because we must move to the next item of business.

United Kingdom General Election

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Our next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-4344, in the name of Annabel Goldie, on Scotland needs a general election.

I point out to members straight away that we are very tight for time in this debate. Members will be held strictly to the time that is allocated to them. I call Annabel Goldie to speak to and move the motion. Miss Goldie, you have 13 minutes.

09:16

Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): This debate comes during a tumultuous period in British politics: there is a crisis of confidence in our political system, which has been brought into sharp relief by the expenses scandal at Westminster; there have been daily resignations from the Government; there has been a reshuffle in which the Cabinet, not the Prime Minister, called the shots; and there has been electoral meltdown for the governing party. In the European elections, Labour was beaten by the nationalists—in Cornwall. Labour is a national party no more. Only as a source of ridicule and contempt does the Labour Party operate at anything approaching a national level.

The demise of the Labour Party does not, of course, trouble me any more than it troubles the Prime Minister, but the consequences of the collapse in authority of the Government and the Prime Minister are not confined to Westminster or to reserved areas; they affect Scotland and the Scottish Parliament, too. That is why this debate is needed. That is why members of the Scottish Parliament should be concerned.

I have spoken previously of the need for a new relationship between Scotland's two Governments. In a time of economic turmoil, that is more important than ever. However, such a relationship cannot exist when the United Kingdom Government is hellbent on creating tension, as it was when the current Scottish Government was formed. I still find it astonishing that, during this time of economic crisis, the Prime Minister and the First Minister did not meet for nearly a year, as Labour's recession emerged. However, a new relationship cannot exist when the UK Government itself has ceased to function in any meaningful form.

We have a careworn and exhausted Prime Minister, wrestling with the recession and raddled by the treachery of colleagues who are united only in their desire to distance themselves from him as quickly as possible and who are vying with each other to accomplish that end with the ultimate in tawdry, tacky and contemptible behaviour. From

the smoking ruins of the Government that they have left behind them arises the shadowy spectre of an unelected éminence grise, Lord Mandelson: the new Prime Minister by default omnipotent, absolute and unchallengeable. What a distortion of democracy. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Annabel Goldie: We have a Prime Minister who, even at the peak of his power—*[Interruption.]* It is interesting, Presiding Officer, that for member's debates and party debates we seldom see more than about five Labour MSPs in the chamber. What a testament their presence today is to their insecurity. What a visible demonstration of their discomfiture. What they lack in quality they are going to try to make up for in numbers.

This Prime Minister has paid scant attention to Scottish issues. He has been content to pick fights with the Scottish Government, and content to allow others to do so as well. Now that he is fighting for his political life, what chance is there of his adopting the constructive approach that is needed? To paraphrase James Purnell, with Gordon Brown there is no chance.

If anyone on the Labour benches should doubt that the Prime Minister's time is up, let me remind them of the harbinger of doom, the final sign that all is lost: Lord Foulkes has pledged his full support. It can now be only a matter of time.

Members: Where is he?

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Annabel Goldie: In the 10 years that I have been a member of this Parliament, the party that has been in power at Westminster has never had a majority here. It has always been possible for all the other parties in the Scottish Parliament to combine to defeat the party of Government at the United Kingdom level. However, that has never happened in a vote on a motion of this kind. Today's vote, if carried, will be a parliamentary first. We have not lodged our motion lightly. A unique combination of factors makes it right that we demand a UK general election. We are in the final year of the current Westminster Parliament. Even Gordon Brown cannot avoid calling an election in the next 12 months, unless he ceases to be Prime Minister. The question is not whether we have a general election in the next 12 months, but when. Let no one pretend that there is any principled objection to holding a general election now.

The expenses scandals at Westminster have caused grave damage to trust in politics in general. All parties at Westminster—Labour, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party—have had serious questions to answer. The issues may be particular

to the Westminster system of expenses, and the transparency with which we operate in this Parliament may stand in contrast to the shroud of secrecy that surrounds the House of Commons, but let us not pretend that the public considers the Scottish Parliament beyond reproach. Last week's elections show us that much, if we did not already know it.

We are, sadly, all tainted by what has happened at Westminster—deservedly or not—so we have a legitimate and fair question to ask: how do we restore faith in politics? Yes, there must be transparency and changes to the rules, but until there is a general election and the opportunity for the people to have their say, the stench will remain. There is currently a wave of cynicism—not just a lack of faith in individual politicians or even in the political system, but a more fundamental and damaging view that politics can never deliver change. That is corrosive and strikes at the heart of democracy. That cynicism or scepticism must be dispelled.

Why do the public doubt the motives of politicians of every party more now than in the past? Why has there been such a breakdown of trust in the capacity of politics to deliver? Yes, in large part it is a reaction to the expenses scandal, but there is much more to it than that. We have grown used to a Government that routinely says one thing and does another. That is a lesson that the SNP Scottish Government must heed. We have become accustomed to a hatchet job being done on anyone who dares to speak out or question what the Prime Minister says or does. When Government ministers speak openly of smears against colleagues, what message does that send to the public?

Moreover, what signal does it send when the Chancellor of the Exchequer is the subject of briefings by number 10 and is hung out to dry in public? He is clearly the Prime Minister's second choice, yet he remains in office not because the Prime Minister wants him there but because the Prime Minister lacks the authority to move him. That sends an atrocious signal to the financial markets, investors and the international community. It sends an even worse signal to the public. If the Prime Minister has no confidence in the chancellor, why should anyone else?

Until there is a general election, a cloud will hang over politics. I shall, of course, campaign for the return of a Conservative Government at the next general election. I hope and expect that David Cameron will prevail. Others will argue for different outcomes. However, the fact remains that, at present, we have a weak and pitiful excuse for a Government that is not worthy of the name.

Unlikely as it seems, it is possible that Labour could win a general election. Let us consider that

ghastly prospect—one party should certainly consider it. How can any Labour member seriously argue that their Government and Prime Minister would not have greater credibility and more authority if they had the mandate of a general election victory? Would any member really claim that the Government is better able now, in the current horrendous mess, to take tough but necessary decisions than it would be following an election victory? In short, would the party be better able to govern if it won that election? Of course it would. There is only one reason why Labour members are against a general election: they expect to lose it, as the Prime Minister admitted at question time some weeks back.

Government is a privilege, not a right. It requires the national interest to be put ahead of party interest, but it is clear that such a concept is alien to the Labour Party and to Gordon Brown. As Scotland languishes in what is expected to be the worst recession since the second world war, members of the UK Government are more concerned about briefing against each other and clinging to office than about taking the right decisions for our future.

The right decisions involve not only sorting out the appalling mess that Labour has made of the public finances, although that challenge will dwarf all others, and will have direct and lasting consequences for this Parliament and Scottish Governments for years to come. There should be a UK Government that not only tolerates the devolution settlement but is keen for it to evolve, and which treats the Scottish Government and Parliament with respect.

David Cameron's Government will be such a Government. He has demonstrated impressive leadership on the expenses issue, and has shown how a new relationship that is built on mutual respect must be forged between our Parliaments and Governments. That is why David Cameron, if he is elected as Prime Minister, will meet the First Minister within a week of taking office; why Conservative ministers will be allowed to appear before committees in the Scottish Parliament—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps one of the Labour members will, among all the sedentary bawling and shouting, volunteer to tell us how often Labour ministers at Westminster have appeared before committees in this Parliament.

A Conservative Government—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Annabel Goldie: There may be order, Presiding Officer, but there are no volunteers to answer the question.

A Conservative Government will seek to strengthen and stabilise devolution, rather than undermine it at every turn as the current

Government has done. We are seeing not only the collapse of a Government and the waning of power of a Prime Minister, but a wholesale collapse of faith in the political process. Promoting Lord Mandelson or bringing in Glenys Kinnock cannot correct that; even Sir Alan Sugar cannot fix this one. The situation can only be resolved by a general election, and the Scottish Conservatives would welcome the opportunity to prove, as we did last week, that we are again winning throughout Scotland. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order, order.

Annabel Goldie: The voters deserve the chance to have their say on our broken economy and our broken politics. They deserve the chance to cast their verdict on our unelected Prime Minister—and on the unelected real Prime Minister, Lord Mandelson: the man who is actually pulling the strings and running our country. In a parliamentary democracy, the public are rightly outraged that so much power has been seized in a number 10 coup by someone who has twice been dumped from Government.

Change happens when those who do not usually speak are heard by those who do not usually listen. The people have found their voice, and their cry must not fall upon deaf ears: Labour must listen. Scotland needs a general election, and the sooner, the better.

Today, the Scottish Parliament can speak out not only for the majority in Scotland, but for the majority in the whole of the United Kingdom. In the words of the legendary Labour reprise, "Bring it on." Today, this Parliament can tell the Prime Minister to do just that.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the interests of Scotland and the United Kingdom would be best served by holding a general election for a new House of Commons as soon as possible.

09:29

The Minister for Parliamentary Business

(Bruce Crawford): The Labour Government in London has lost the trust and confidence of the people of Scotland; that was clear from last week's elections. That Government has run out of ideas and time, and is fast running out of supporters. It is presiding over the worst economic downturn in generations. We are living with the consequences of the decisions that the UK Government took during its age of irresponsibility. The UK Government has adopted a truculent attitude towards Scotland and our aspirations by blocking, undermining and always saying no.

For 12 long years, this Labour Government, which has had a majority sufficient to deliver real

reform and real social justice, has allowed the UK's system of parliamentary democracy to slide into the mud. It is weak, it is irrelevant and it is now mired in sleaze.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): When the Scottish Government asked whether it could accelerate capital investment to stimulate the Scottish economy, did the Treasury say yes or no?

Bruce Crawford: Whether or not the Treasury said no is utterly irrelevant. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Bruce Crawford: We have accelerated that expenditure. We have brought forward £293 million of capital expenditure into 2009-10 to support more than 6,300 jobs. That stands in contrast to Labour's cuts, which will lead to 9,000 job cuts.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention on job cuts? *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order. There is so much noise that the minister cannot hear a member trying to make an intervention. I really suggest that you keep the noise level down.

Bruce Crawford: In the 12 years that the Labour Government has presided over the country, the gap between the rich and the poor has grown. It has lied to take us into an illegal war and it now promises swingeing cuts in Scottish public spending while pressing on with a £100 billion investment in new nuclear bombs.

We know only too well that, with the recent scandals at Westminster, faith in politics and the political system has been shot to pieces by the double barrel of the economy and expenses crises. The damage inflicted on the democratic process has been very deep. The reaction of the people of this country has moved from initial disbelief to justifiable anger and disillusionment. No one can seriously believe that the current Labour Government or the current Parliament has either the leadership or the moral authority to see through the necessary reforms.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I agree with much of what the minister has said about the UK Government and the democratic process, but why should we look forward to replacing a tired and broken Prime Minister without a democratic mandate with a bright, shiny, new and arrogant Prime Minister without a democratic mandate and no interest in reform?

Bruce Crawford: At the end of the day, whatever Government is in power, democracy is all. The people will choose.

No wonder people are angry. Yesterday, Gordon Brown showed that he has truly lost his direction

when he announced his plans to reform our democracy. Those plans fall short of what is needed to address the crisis of confidence in that democracy; indeed, the best that one can say about them is that they are auld kail reheated. For example, the plans include a consultation on the voting system, but nothing about a referendum this side of the election; consideration of lowering the voting age, a move that has long been the policy of the SNP Government; reform of the House of Lords, which was started 12 years ago and shows no sign of completion; and allowing Parliament to debate public petitions, which is already a familiar occurrence in this Parliament. It is not difficult to imagine a seriously underwhelmed public asking, "Is that it?"

Vital reforms are needed, and it is patently obvious from what was announced yesterday that we also need a new Government and Parliament with a fresh mandate if any such reforms are to be successfully implemented. That is why a general election is required as soon as possible. The people deserve to have their say.

However, no matter when that general election is held over the next 11 months, the fact is that this deep economic crisis was with us long before the expenses tsunami engulfed the political process at Westminster, and unfortunately it will be with us long after Westminster has, I hope, put its house in order.

Not only have expenses scandals dominated the headlines, unfortunately they have also dominated the political agenda, at the very time when everyone's efforts should be aligned and focused on tackling the challenge of recession and delivering recovery at the earliest possible juncture.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Does the minister agree that the public expect all of us to take responsibility for what we claim? Does he, for example, think that it is acceptable for his leader to refuse to apologise for anything and claim that he somehow got caught up in the expenses culture? Does the minister not accept that MPs have a personal responsibility to address the question of expenses?

Bruce Crawford: That is the usual smears and utter nonsense from Johann Lamont. The attacks from the parties of moats, duck islands, tennis courts, chandeliers and flipping are laughable. Alex Salmond has said clearly that he is more than happy to be audited, and that will be completed shortly. I hope sincerely that Westminster sorts itself out. We in the Scottish Government are concentrating all our efforts and using all the levers that are available to us to protect jobs and facilitate recovery.

Like it or not, nobody can dispute the fact that Gordon Brown—the Prime Minister—and the Labour Government have lost their authority to govern. It is no wonder, as they have made significant mistakes, such as the decisions at UK level on fiscal deficits and on a regulatory system that dropped the ball and was unable to respond appropriately to the challenges in the banking and wider financial system. The UK public finances have a forecast debt in excess of £1 trillion in 2012-13. That is a truly mind-boggling figure—it is the equivalent of £17,000 for every person in the UK. The bottom line is that the UK Government's irresponsibility during the good times means that the UK public finances are, to say the least, not well placed to respond to the current downturn.

Other nations have avoided that situation. It is increasingly clear that the consequences of the UK Government's high levels of borrowing will be felt throughout the public sector for years to come. Rather than follow the lead of others, the UK Government is set on making swingeing cuts in Scottish spending. Those cuts come at the wrong time for our economy and they stand in stark contrast to the approach of President Obama in the United States, where stimulus will continue next year and will be focused on delivery at state level. In contrast, the UK Government will take money out of the economy next year and will reduce the money that we have to fight the recession and to support Scottish jobs. We must stop that, and the people can do so in a general election. The only way to protect Scotland from the cuts, and the best way to save the 9,000 jobs that are under threat from the UK Labour Government, is SNP success. The more SNP MPs there are, the better. We will be able to protect Scotland from the cuts, whether they come from Labour or the Tories. They amount to exactly the same thing, which is why there should be shame in Labour ranks.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I wonder whether we can touch on reality again. It does not matter who is elected. If the UK economy is deprived of its AAA rating among those people who lend us money, neither of the two parties that have so far spoken about cuts will be able to do anything about it.

Bruce Crawford: I point Margo MacDonald to some other countries that have done very well in the situation.

Members: Iceland!

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): What about the arc of prosperity?

The Presiding Officer: Order. Mr Henry, if you wish to take part in the debate, I suggest that you press your request-to-speak button and queue up to do so.

Bruce Crawford: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Canada, which has a much smaller economy than that of the United Kingdom, has been lauded by many experts as coming through the situation very well. Norway, with 4 million people, recently announced that it will contribute almost \$5 billion to the International Monetary Fund to help its neighbours. At issue is how we deal with the situation.

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister agree that Canada has been able to take a different path because, for the past decade, it has had surpluses, rather than the persistent deficits that we have had under Labour, even in the good times?

Bruce Crawford: No—it has the traditional Scottish banking model, which we should have stuck to in this country.

When the first signs of recession came along, the Scottish Government was quick off the mark in deploying our economic recovery plan. We are redoubling our efforts to tackle the problems for businesses and families and we will continue to do that.

In the previous Scottish Parliament elections, we said that it was time for Scotland to move forward. The people of Scotland agreed, and they trusted us with government. We are working hard day in, day out to repay that trust and to govern with vision and competence. Vision, trust and competence—those are our watchwords. The extraordinary lack of vision, the betrayal of trust and the lack of competence shown by the UK Government and the Westminster Parliament in recent years and months are the strongest possible evidence of the need for a UK general election. There is no doubt that we can do more without the dead weight of the failing Labour Government in London.

09:40

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Presiding Officer,

"The reality is that no matter what the Parliament resolves at 5 o'clock, it will mean nothing whatever. This is a massive exercise in self-indulgence ... It means nothing."—*[Official Report, 14 June 2007; c 704-705.]*

Those were Murdo Fraser's withering words on parliamentary posturing. He was talking about Patrick Harvie, but today the self-indulgence is all Annabel Goldie's. This debate has nothing to do with Scotland's interests and everything to do with the perceived interests of the Tories.

Nye Bevan said in 1951:

"The Tories, every election, must have a bogeyman. If you haven't got a programme, a bogeyman will do."

Here is Annabel Goldie:

"arises the shadowy spectre of an unelected éminence grise—Lord Mandelson ... omnipotent, absolute ... unchallengeable."

What a lot of florid, melodramatic guff—a Mills and Boon of a press release and a bogeyman instead of a programme. The people of Scotland know what the Tory programme is because they have suffered it before.

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): Can the member tell us what sells more copies—Mills and Boon novels or Labour Party manifestos?

Iain Gray: The answer is absolutely clear, but it is certainly the case that Mills and Boon sells florid, melodramatic guff, and that is exactly what that press release is.

The people of Scotland know what a Tory programme is. Thirty years ago the Tories came to power and began to slash and burn our public services. Twenty-five years ago the Tories took on our mining communities and destroyed them: they closed the pits, turned their police force on the miners and tried to starve them into submission. Twenty years ago the Tories imposed the poll tax on Scotland: they set the bailiffs on our people, they pushed them into debt that some Scots still suffer to this day and they would not back down until there were riots in Trafalgar Square. In 1992, Scots were paying interest rates of 15 per cent while one financier made £1 billion in a single day by short selling not a bank, but Britain itself, and the Tories gambled \$27 billion to shore up the pound.

Annabel Goldie: Does the member agree that under the Conservatives in Government we never had to service debt interest at a level greater than the entire Scottish budget, which is what we are seeing from the Labour Government at Westminster?

Iain Gray: Under the Tories the people of Scotland serviced and suffered the consequences of the way in which this country was mismanaged. The Tories dare to talk of a broken Britain and smoking ruins when they scarred Scotland, tore out its heart and set it against itself.

The only thing that has saved any Tories in Scotland is this Parliament. There they are, the Scottish Tory survivors huddled together in the lifeboat Holyrood. After 10 years, they think that they have spotted land at last, but for the Scottish Tories there is no safe harbour in Scotland; they are not welcome here.

In 12 years their recovery amounts to a single Tory member of Parliament.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will Mr Gray give way?

Iain Gray: No, sorry.

That Tory MP has spent thousands publishing thousands of photographs of himself—he is here, he is there, he is everywhere. However, we are not fooled: there is still only one Tory MP in Scotland.

Annabel Goldie is right that the MP's expenses scandal has poisoned British politics. Every major party has been embroiled in it, and some MPs have paid a heavy price, as they should. However, it has revealed the everyday concerns of average Tories—their country houses, moats, planting an orchard on their estate, the servants quarters and the ducks quarters. That gives the lie to the story that David Cameron has spun of a changed party. The Tory party is still the party of privilege and of the few—it has not changed. It is no wonder that David Cameron thinks that he can work with that other Margaret Thatcher fan, Alex Salmond. That is all a long way from the hug a hoodie and hug a husky photo calls.

Yesterday, the Tories' health spokesman gave the game away. Cuts of 10 per cent would mean cuts of £3.5 billion in Scotland. Will Annabel Goldie tell us what she wants to be cut? Is it schools, hospitals or care of the elderly? What is it to be?

Margo MacDonald: In all fairness, I must ask a question. Does the leader of the Opposition believe that it is possible to service our debt without incurring cuts in service provision?

Iain Gray: Parties must be judged on their track records. We have a track record of investment in public services; the Tories' track record has always been to cut.

Someone once said:

"A politician thinks of the next election; a statesman, of the next generation."

The debate is about the next generation. In the previous Tory recession, I was a teacher in a school in this city. I saw the spirit, the hope and the life drained from the young people in that school, because they believed that they would never find a job and that society had no place for them. Even the best of them believed that there was no point in trying.

Murdo Fraser: Will Iain Gray give way?

Iain Gray: No—I am sorry; I am in my last minute.

A whole generation was lost through the politics of doing nothing in a recession, letting industries die and saying that unemployment was a price worth paying.

Labour is doing what is needed in the downturn to save the economy, to protect jobs and to support people who are in debt or who are unemployed. Labour is investing more, not less, in our young people and in their skills and education. Labour is strengthening rights at work, not reducing them. Labour is supporting the economy, not starving it as David Cameron would. This morning, we see from National Institute of Economic and Social Research figures that that approach is working.

Scotland needs politicians who are focused on the next generation and not simply on the next election, the next headline or the next parliamentary stunt. Labour will fight to ensure that Scots are supported through the downturn. A general election will come, and then we will fight the Tories and their nationalist acolytes for every vote. That is in the interests of Scotland.

09:48

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): For a raft of reasons, Liberal Democrats think that Scotland would be better off if we had a general election. Apart from the self-evident fact that the Prime Minister and his Government are well past their sell-by date, Liberal Democrats highlight two reasons for that.

The first is the need for a completely new and more honest approach to economic management that will be more sustainable and which will produce a fairer society. What Margo MacDonald said in her interventions is right. It does not matter which way we look at the situation. We all welcomed the bailing out of the Royal Bank of Scotland, but that money did not grow on trees and it will have to be accounted for. On "Good Morning Scotland" today, we heard a debate in which the Labour and Tory finance spokesmen pretended that the whole issue would somehow disappear and evaporate. Such a debate is not honest and is certainly not the approach that will get us out of our present difficulties.

The second issue for Liberal Democrats is the urgent need to end the attack on civil liberties that the Labour Government is perpetrating.

The economic crisis is global. However, it stretches credulity for the Prime Minister to argue that because it is global, that exonerates his Government from any culpability.

The Labour Government changed the law on banking regulation and introduced the so-called light-touch regime. It was content to see personal debt reach record levels and for house price inflation totally to outstrip headline inflation. Indeed, it was content to give tax breaks to the rich but not the poor and to delude itself into believing that it had ended economic cycles. There

were two severe outcomes of that flawed approach. First, as we have heard, Britain was particularly badly placed to cope with the collapse of the banking sector and the concomitant collapse in the availability of credit. Secondly, in Britain—more than anywhere else in the world—if someone is born poor, they will die poor.

We need an election to ensure that the financial structures are rebuilt on sustainable lines—we cannot simply have a repumping of the existing failed model. As our Treasury spokesman at Westminster, Vince Cable, has argued cogently, we need a new financial regulatory regime. We need to redefine and separate short-term and long-term financial and investment banking institutions, and we need to make the Bank of England responsible for all aspects of inflation.

We also need to redress the imbalance between innovation, production and the service sector; return property to its traditional role as a long-term investment that yields lower but sustainable returns; close tax loopholes; and shift the burden of tax to achieve a greener outcome and lift out of tax millions of people who should not have been in that tax trap in the first place.

The Labour Government's erosion of our civil liberties has been steady and progressive. That is evidenced by its efforts to reduce the use of trial by jury; its support for the retrial of those who are acquitted, thereby threatening the double jeopardy principle; and its move to place previous convictions before juries. It has also attacked the independence of the judiciary. The terrorism legislation has reversed the presumption of innocence in respect of articles held by suspects and imposed restrictions on liberty on the basis of reasonable suspicion, evidence that is unavailable to the suspect and charges that are not disclosed. The terrorism legislation has also extended the period of detention without trial for suspected terrorists to 28 days, which gives the United Kingdom a period that is more than double the length of that in any other stable democratic state.

Finally, we have Labour's surveillance society, in which we have seen a massive expansion in the number of bodies that are authorised under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 to use surveillance information. Labour and the Tories talk of not curtailing but increasing those powers. We need an election to curtail significantly the use of those powers, which should be restricted to the investigation of serious crime. This country does not need identity cards or to retain innocent people's DNA. What it needs is regulation of the use of closed-circuit television.

We indeed need a general election to allow the public to return to Parliament members who are committed to sustainable economic policies that are designed to create a fairer society and who will

defend our civil liberties. Indeed, we need to return to Parliament members who are committed to the principles of liberal democracy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): We move to the open debate, in which speeches will be of six minutes.

09:53

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): I thank Labour members for turning out in such force this morning to support their leader, Iain Gray, even if, in their speeches, they are questioning our right to debate the subject, given that it relates to Westminster. Of course, they present that as a matter of principle, of respect for the reserved and devolved divide, and of focusing this Parliament's attention solely on issues for which it is directly responsible rather than wider issues. However, whether an election happens in the next few months or is delayed until June of next year, I am in no doubt that there will be a change of Government before long and that Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom will elect a Conservative Government that is led by David Cameron.

I ask Labour members to say whether the same self-denying ordinance will apply to all Scottish Parliament debates subsequent to that general election. Will Labour members undertake never to lodge a motion or amendment in which they criticise the actions of a Conservative Government in a reserved area? Can we be assured that that will remain a no-go area for Labour and that its members will hold scrupulously to that position of principle? Perhaps Mr Gray would like to tell us.

Iain Gray: Is Mr McLetchie seriously defending this morning's political posturing on the basis of hypothetical debates that we might bring forward in 2014? How pathetic is that? Why does he disagree with Mr Fraser, who is sitting next to him, who made it very clear two years ago what he thinks about this kind of pathetic posturing?

David McLetchie: Mr Fraser has spoken about many reserved matters in Parliament, including when he was trying to defend the Scottish regiments, which were abolished by the Government of Iain Gray's party.

To my mind, there are two main reasons why Scotland needs a general election. The first relates to constitutional reform, and the second relates to the state of public finances. On Monday of next week, the report of the Calman commission will be published. I will not anticipate its conclusions or recommendations, and I have no particular insight into them, but I very much hope that the commission will come forward with a unanimous set of recommendations that can form the basis for enacting such changes as may be

required to the present devolution settlement, with a view to drawing a line in the sand and establishing once and for all a constitutional future within the United Kingdom for Scotland that is stable and which takes full account of the experience of the past 10 years.

We need a new Government at United Kingdom level if we are to take the Calman commission's recommendations forward. We also need a new Government and a new House of Commons that will promote a better working relationship with this Parliament and the Scottish Executive or Government than has been evident under Labour over the past 10 years.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

David McLetchie: No. I am sorry, but I need to make progress.

The second reason why we need an election relates to public finances. We have heard a great deal about £500 million-worth of spending cuts in 2010-11 and dire warnings of what might follow in later years. As with all Government sums, the figures are complex and can be interpreted in a number of ways. What is certainly true is that the £500 million reduction that is frequently trumpeted by the First Minister is a reduction by reference to previous planned increases in spending totals. It is therefore perfectly fair for Iain Gray, Andy Kerr and others on the Labour benches to point out that the actual overall total will still increase in real terms.

However, we have to ask ourselves who introduced into the political lexicon the concept that a reduction in a projected rate of increase was in fact a wicked cut. The answer is the Labour Party. It is a standard Labour Party tactic to denounce anyone who calls for restraint in the projected growth of public spending as slashers, burners and cutters of public services, and to do so in the most alarmist manner, when that is manifestly not true. Our spendthrift Prime Minister, the architect of Labour's recession, tried to pull the same trick in the House of Commons yesterday, and Iain Gray has been at it again this morning in this Parliament.

In relation to the budget in this Parliament, Labour has been hoist by its own petard. Its own argument has been turned on itself, and Labour has no right to complain.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

David McLetchie: No, thank you. I am in my last minute.

The late John Mortimer, who was best known as the creator of Horace Rumpole of the Bailey, entitled his autobiography "Clinging to the Wreckage". As a working title, it would be equally suitable for the Prime Minister, who is clinging to the wreckage of the new Labour ship. Some of the

crew mutinied; others jumped overboard before they were made to walk the plank; the captain is floundering; and the ship is on the rocks. It is a sad and bitter irony that the Prime Minister is even more in hock to his new first mate, Lord Mandelson, than was his predecessor.

Gordon Brown is clinging to a wreck of his own creation, but such tenacity is not in the best interests of Scotland or the United Kingdom as a whole. The challenges that face Government and Parliament require a general election, a new House of Commons and a Government with a popular mandate to tackle the recession and the very serious financial problems that affect our country. That requires of Government and Parliament the political conviction and courage and the public trust and confidence that are sorely lacking at present. Those challenges are highly relevant to the powers and responsibilities of the Scottish Parliament, and we should not be afraid to say so. I support the motion.

09:59

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): We cannot talk about the prospect of dissolving the Westminster Parliament without talking about the European elections and their impact on the present political climate. Where should I begin? When I relate the story of the European elections, should I heed all the wisest political advice and keep my comments consensual, measured and free from any taint of triumphalism, or should I just unleash my inner Kenneth Gibson? Are there things that it would be more decent not to mention about the circumstances that have brought each member present today to the subject of a UK election, such as the fact that, in my constituency—a seat that was held by Labour two years ago—the Scottish National Party got its highest share of the vote in any local authority area in Scotland? Perhaps, in the interest of balance, I should even that up by saying that Labour did not suffer in the Western Isles the fate that it suffered nationally; it did not get its worst result since the first world war. In the interest of fairness, I should say that Labour had one worse election in the Western Isles in 1924.

However, I will avert my eyes from all that and concentrate on the reasons why so many people in the Commons argued for dissolution or struggled lamely to argue against it and, more important, why all politicians would do well to understand that the public's patience with the current United Kingdom Parliament is now at an end. The reason for that is certainly the expenses scandal: not only the transgressions of individual MPs and peers—spectacular as some of those have been—but the fact that the present United Kingdom Parliament spent four years fighting tooth

and nail through the courts and elsewhere to conceal the scandal rather than address it. Eighty per cent of those polled by the BBC and Ipsos MORI on 31 May agreed that not only MPs but the whole Westminster system were to blame.

Johann Lamont: Will the member give way?

Alasdair Allan: No.

We would struggle to find many people who would trust the current Parliament to reform itself.

Johann Lamont: My intervention is about personal responsibility.

Alasdair Allan: Well, okay. If Johann Lamont wants to intervene, I am happy enough for her to do so.

Johann Lamont: Does Alasdair Allan agree that Westminster MPs have to take personal responsibility for what they did and that it is unacceptable for anybody to excuse their behaviour on the basis that they were caught up in a culture? That is what the public believes.

Alasdair Allan: We should all commend people who, for example, give their second salaries to charity and are prepared to call for a general election and bring on a contest. Perhaps we should call for a general election in the House of Lords and get rid of our other dual-mandate member in the Parliament.

We would struggle to find many people who would not be impatient with the United Kingdom Government for another reason as well. However long that Government may stagger on, it knows that it is now kept in office solely by the personal terror with which its back benchers view a general election or anything that might rock the boat in the direction of one. Can we any longer be said to have a United Kingdom Government to speak of? We have seen 11—or is it 12?—ministers resign in a fortnight, few of them with good grace. If a Prime Minister finds that nobody will work for him except those whom he does not want to be there in the first place, his Government has surely long since lost its authority.

In the words of one of the speakers in another place last night—not someone in my party—the present House of Commons is “dead on its feet”. Some members here talk with horror about bringing down Governments, but perhaps they should wake up and realise what everyone outside this Parliament has already realised: the present United Kingdom Government is already over.

In Scotland, people want a UK general election but, if the European election results are to be believed, not for the reasons for which those who lodged the motion might hope. We should not allow the idea to take root in fanciful Tory minds or paranoid Labour ones that Scots want a UK

election because they want a chance to elect a Tory Prime Minister. Scots realise that, as ever under the present constitutional dispensation—as ever, without independence—whether they get a Tory Prime Minister, with all the undoubted misgovernment that that implies, will not be a decision of Scotland's making.

People in Scotland want a UK election because Scotland clearly faces a choice. Do we want to send to the House of Commons MPs who will represent Scotland's interests and aspirations, or MPs who will not do so? For all of us who on hearing the words "dissolution of the House of Commons" have the mental image of something permanent and conceivably acidic involuntarily brought into our minds, an election cannot come soon enough. Scotland has outgrown the debate about which UK party might be worst at ignoring Scotland, because we now have a Parliament of our own in Scotland. As the European election results prove, we have minds of our own, too. Bring it on.

10:05

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): The Tory motion exposes the Tories' attitude to the Scottish Parliament. They have never believed in it, and they still do not. If they were committed to devolution and to providing Scottish solutions to Scottish problems, they could have picked any number of important topics to talk about, as Iain Gray highlighted. They could have talked about the failure of the SNP's financial policies, including the Scottish Futures Trust and the local income tax, the failure of the SNP's transport policies, particularly its botched handling of the new Forth crossing, or the failure of the SNP's education policies, which are under attack from pre-school providers to university providers. However, they have decided to debate a nonsense of a motion. No one in the Scottish Parliament has the power to call a general election, and the House of Commons threw out a similar motion last night.

The Scottish Parliament has an enviable education outreach programme, which has resulted in thousands of Scottish youngsters coming to Holyrood. I enjoy the question-and-answer sessions that we as MSPs have with those youngsters. A question that is regularly asked is, "Why did you get involved in politics?" My answer to that question is simple. I did so because I saw at first hand the damage that was done to Scotland by Margaret Thatcher and successive Tory Governments in those long-ago days from 1979 to 1997. Thousands of people were thrown out of work. Industries such as the steel-making industry, the aluminium-smelting industry and the truck and car manufacturing industries were

destroyed by a Prime Minister who famously came to Scotland and told the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland:

"There is no such thing as society."

I do not believe that.

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way?

David Whitton: No. Sit down. We have heard enough from the Tories already.

I do not believe, and I do not think that the people of Scotland believe, that there is no such thing as society. That is why Scotland has always rejected Thatcherism and why the Scottish Tories are still an endangered species.

Only a few weeks ago, we marked the 25th anniversary of the miners' strike, the decimation of Britain's coal industry and the destruction of the National Union of Mineworkers by a Tory Prime Minister who used all the forces of the state that were at her disposal. I see that Mr Johnstone thinks that that is funny, but communities in Scotland are still suffering from that. When I talked to our visitors that night, memories were brought back of the lengths that a Tory elite will go to in order to smash the working class. *[Interruption.]* The Tories find that funny; that is pathetic. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

David Whitton: The Tories may believe that they won the war against the NUM, but they did not break the spirit of those who manned the soup kitchens and kept their communities going, and they have not erased the memories of what Britain was like under Tory rule.

Margo MacDonald: The member remembers covering the miners' strike as a journalist, as I did. I am sure that he remembers the devastation that was caused by the lukewarm support for the miners that came from the Labour Party.

David Whitton: I am sorry that I gave way to Margo MacDonald because, not for the first time, I do not agree with a word that she said.

Murdo Fraser: That was a devastating riposte.

David Whitton: Absolutely—just like Murdo Fraser's.

Let us not forget that it was the SNP that let Mrs Thatcher gain power. *[Interruption.]* SNP members have woken up. Ever since the SNP let Mrs Thatcher gain power, the real Tories and the tartan Tories have colluded against Labour. They were at it again last night in Westminster, aided and abetted by our First Minister, Alex Salmond, who made his way south for a rare appearance to vote against the Labour Government. Who knows how much that has cost the nation in food bills?

He is nowhere to be seen for this morning's debate in this Parliament, in which he is First Minister.

On the Conservative motion, I do not believe that Scotland needs a general election at this time. There has been unprecedented economic turmoil over the past year. Our two major banks and one of our leading building societies were brought to their knees by a combination of global recession and bad management.

This morning we have already heard the usual guff from the Tories about "Gordon Brown's recession"; that illustrates their failure to understand the nature of the world economic crisis. Who put together a rescue plan for the Royal Bank of Scotland, HBOS and the Dumfermline Building Society? It was Prime Minister Gordon Brown's Labour Government. Who put in place a financial rescue package of quantitative easing and other measures to stimulate the economy that drew international praise? It was Prime Minister Gordon Brown's Labour Government. Who organised the G20 summit that brought the most powerful nations in the world to London to draw up a plan to tackle global recession? It was Prime Minister Gordon Brown's Labour Government.

What has David Cameron had to offer while all of that has been happening? The answer is nothing. If it were left to him and his shadow chancellor George Osborne—a man who looks like a rabbit caught in the headlights every time that he is asked what he would do to tackle the UK's current economic problems—the United Kingdom would be following Ireland's example by slashing public spending and putting thousands of public sector workers on the dole. Yet theirs is the party that the SNP supports, not only in today's debate but at other times—Tories and tartan Tories together. No wonder Derek Brownlee was able to say that the next best thing to a Tory Government is a Government that does what the Tories tells it to do.

There is a glimmer of hope. Perhaps SNP members will tell us whether they agree with Pete Wishart, their MP for Perth and North Perthshire, who told the Commons yesterday:

"the last thing that Scotland needs is a Conservative Government."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 10 June 2009; Vol 493, c 861.]

Presumably, that means that he prefers a Labour Government.

Now is not the time for a general election. Labour believes that there is still work to do and time to do it before an election must be called. When the time comes to call a general election, Labour will be back where it belongs—in government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will be able to get everyone in if members stick to their time. From now on, I will keep members strictly to time.

10:12

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): I congratulate our Conservative colleagues on overcoming their reluctance to discuss reserved issues by bringing this important debate to the chamber. That is another small step forward in taking charge of our affairs.

Given that I have been in a good mood since last week, I will express deep sympathy for Prime Minister Gordon Brown. He has been attacked most unfairly. It is intolerable that such a nice man should have been accused by the former Minister of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Jane Kennedy, of being involved in bullying behaviour; by Frank Field of being even more inept than expected; and by his back bencher, Sally Keeble, of being unable to command authority in his Government. It is outrageous that he should have been charged by the outgoing Minister of State for Europe, Caroline Flint, with appointing women ministers merely as female window dressing, or by former Labour chairperson and Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears, with having lost connection with the public. It is scandalous that resigning Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, James Purnell, should have been so disloyal as to suggest that Gordon Brown should stand down if Labour is to have any chance of avoiding being massacred at the next general election. Later he was joined by Charlie Falconer, the former Labour Lord Chancellor, in calls for Gordon to quit. How can anyone support such treachery? Where is loyalty these days? Gordon Brown has his weaknesses, but even the greatest general could not win a battle with such troops behind them.

However, there are some small criticisms to be made. If Kennedy, Blears, Flint and Purnell are nothing but self-serving opportunists—as we are now being told—who appointed them as ministers in the first place? Who chose them? If Hazel Blears was guilty of totally unacceptable behaviour with regard to her expenses, why was she allowed to remain as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government until she chose to go in her own time? We have often heard that the sure sign of a ship that is sinking is rats swimming away from it. What can we assume when half the ship's officers join them in trying to escape?

We are told that a strong reason for keeping the Government in office is the financial experience and credibility of the Prime Minister. Let us look at his record. He came into office as chancellor in 1997, promising to end the cycle of boom and

bust. Do members recall that promise? We heard it many times. Over the next 10 years, we all experienced the good times, and some—including Gordon Brown himself—praised his Presbyterian values and moral compass. However, those good times were not all the product of sound financial decisions. The revenue from North Sea oil, which in Norway has been utilised to prepare for a future without oil, has all been spent. Our gold reserves were nearly all sold off when the price of gold was at a record low, and the income spent. A barely noticed change in one of his early budgets has meant that about £100 billion has been siphoned out of private pension funds. That money has been spent, but hundreds of thousands of pensioners have been left without the income that they confidently expected to support their needs in the last years of their lives. He has built hospitals and schools using the private finance initiative, which has built up debt for future generations of taxpayers. He allowed private debt to spiral out of control, with lax regulation and supervision.

Yes, the global downturn has hit all countries, but we should ask ourselves why the pound in particular has crashed. Why are the credit rating companies threatening to downgrade the UK as a credit risk? It is because we spent all our money and borrowed more in the good times. Now, folk are reluctant to lend us more. That is financial mismanagement on a huge scale. Is the architect of that disaster the best person to lead us out of it?

The truth is that, in the mid-1990s, the Labour Party made a Faustian pact with Tony Blair: "Abandon your principles, forget the poor and disadvantaged, cosy up to big business and I will give you political power."

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): On the issue of Faustian pacts, why is the SNP so enthusiastic in its support for Tory efforts here today and yesterday at Westminster, when we now know from Andrew Lansley that a Tory Government would mean £3.5 billion of cuts for a Scottish Government? Would that perhaps serve the SNP's purposes?

Ian McKee: I am sorry, but there was so much noise from the Labour benches that I did not quite hear the end of the member's question. However, it did not sound incredibly relevant to the point that I was making.

Under the Labour Government, of which we heard so tearfully from Mr Whitton, the gap between rich and poor has widened. The rich have become richer. Much of that wealth flowed into Labour's coffers, as Labour became the natural party of government—the friend of the likes of Bernie Ecclestone and not so much the friend of the poor.

However, there is a price to be paid for abandoning principles, and that price is being paid now. I feel sorry for many Labour members of this Parliament, who instinctively opposed what has happened in the Labour Party over these last years. Many of them said so, but they have not done enough to avert what is now happening to their party. Any party without principles is doomed sooner or later to lose power because no one believes what it says any more. To quote Cromwell's words to his Parliament, the time has come:

"You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you."

10:17

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): Yesterday in the House of Commons we saw the biggest display of self-indulgence, led by the nationalists in Scotland and Wales. In arguing for a general election now, they were franchising for the Tory party—well, what is new? Today, we see the same spectacle, but this time the Tories are doing the bidding of the nationalists.

When asked to justify why Scotland's First Minister yesterday left his post in the Scottish Parliament unattended so that he could sit through that Westminster debate—the First Minister made, I think, one intervention—Stewart Hosie MP said that the debate was on "a vital UK issue". However, he gave the game away when he said that he believed that the SNP is on course to elect more SNP members to a Parliament that it does not even believe in. No wonder people are cynical. Will people really trust the judgment of SNP MPs, who have so admired other countries such as Ireland—whose economy, sadly, is becoming a basket case—and Iceland? I do not think so.

Angus Robertson MP claimed on television yesterday that the people are demanding a general election. That is simply not true. It is made up. It suits the SNP's political agenda, but it is dishonest. The SNP is orchestrating chaos and is displaying a purely party interest. I, too, was on the election stump, not just last week but the week before. Not one voter demanded a general election. Rather, voters demanded the reform of MPs' allowances. They wanted action by all political parties to put their house in order. Calling for a general election now, before that process is complete, is irresponsible. All political parties have failed the public, so going to the country to get the people to choose which party they blame the most is cynical.

If the nationalists had the courage of their convictions, they would have led a motion of no confidence in Westminster yesterday. However, they would not do that. Why? Because it would nail the place in history that the SNP tries to deny,

which is that it voted down a Labour Government in 1979, thereby giving Scotland the most right-wing Government that it had ever had, which inflicted misery on millions.

They say that politics moves in cycles, and here we are again, in a new cycle with the SNP trying to pave the way for another Tory Government.

Alasdair Allan: Will the member give way?

Pauline McNeill: The member admitted as much when he spoke earlier.

A Tory Government will impose billions of pounds' worth of cuts in the Scottish budget.

Respect? It is not respect that Scotland wants but a decent Government.

The SNP says that it is indifferent to having a Tory Government, and Bruce Crawford displayed that indifference in his speech. How can anyone be indifferent towards a party that did not believe in the minimum wage? Do SNP members not remember when the security industry paid its workers £1 an hour? The Tories carved our NHS in Scotland into 47 individual trusts, forced trade unions to re-sign up their membership every three years and abolished the wages councils. They would not stand in the way of any bad employer having free rein over workers' conditions.

Norman Buchan MP, God rest his soul, said in 1979 that the Tories used the SNP as a "dishonourable trigger". The nationalists, desperate to be separate, believe that a Tory Government will help their case in Scotland because it will undermine Scotland's relationship with the UK. However, David Cameron says that the Tories want a general election because they want to cleanse our political system and let the people give their verdict. Which is it? Last night, on "Newsnight", I heard Murdo Fraser say that the Tories wanted a general election so that they can kick out the current Prime Minister and get David Cameron in. Will they tell us why they want a general election?

The behaviour that is on display today only makes the public more cynical about political parties, because, when they hear the statements of the parties that argue for a general election, they can see through them and they understand that they are motivated by self-interest.

Annabel Goldie argued that a democratic approach should be taken but thinks that, just because the Tories think that Labour's time is up, we should abandon governing the country and hold a general election. Gordon Brown rightly said that he would steer the country through this difficult period and that he would give the country the stability that it needed. Indeed, there are signs that the economy is beginning to turn. This is the wrong time to dissolve the Westminster

Parliament. Members know that four weeks of general election campaigning would create the crisis that we do not need.

Whenever the general election is called, Labour will stand on its record. We put millions back to work. We have been the most radical Government on social policy—whether on gay rights or the reform of family law, we did difficult things in government. We have been the most decentralising Government in history—witness the creation of this Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, the Northern Ireland Assembly and, in effect, the return of the Greater London Council in the shape of the London Assembly. We have made difficult decisions. We have reduced child poverty—instead of one child in three being in poverty, the figure is now one in five—and have made serious progress on pensioner poverty.

This morning, we should be discussing how we can fix the problem of stimulating the Scottish economy and the situation of those who face the repossession of their homes but have a Government that has been slow to take the right steps to put the situation right. We should have been talking about how we can kick-start the construction industry and challenge the broken promises of this Government, which said that it would match our programme brick for brick.

Labour has had victories in Glasgow and around the country. We stand on our record.

10:24

Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): What we have seen over the past few weeks has been unbelievable and unprecedented. I am talking not only about the expenses scandal but about the paralysis of Government—a Shakespearean tragedy involving the bitter resignation of ministers—and the language that has been used. James Purnell wrote to Gordon Brown:

"I owe it to our party to say what I believe no matter how hard that may be. I now believe your continued leadership makes a Conservative victory more, not less likely ... We need to show that we are prepared to fight to be a credible government and have the courage to offer an alternative future.

I am therefore calling on you to stand aside to give our party a fighting chance of winning."

Caroline Flint wrote to Gordon Brown:

"I am extremely disappointed at your failure to have an inclusive Government. You have a two tier Government. Your inner circle and then the remainder of Cabinet ... Several of the women attending Cabinet—myself included—have been treated by you as little more than female window dressing.

I am not willing to attend Cabinet in a peripheral capacity any longer."

The scale, the volume, the hatred—in my experience, they have never been seen before. Hazel Blears, Jacqui Smith, Beverley Hughes, Tom Watson, Geoff Hoon and John Hutton have all gone. In Parliament yesterday, Gordon Brown spoke of responding to people's concerns and of major reforms. He got big cheers, just as Iain Gray got big cheers this morning. However, I will make two points. First, Gordon Brown has now had more than 12 years in government to show his radical or reforming instincts but, on the crucial issues, he and his party have shown neither. Secondly, the proposals that we have seen so far have been timid and the commitment to delivery has been pathetic.

David Cameron, too, is using weasel words when he tells us that he is ready merely to consider, not to deliver, significant constitutional change. We cannot expect radical, dynamic change to be delivered by a mortally wounded Prime Minister, nor by the leader of a deeply conservative party that has resisted constitutional change at every key moment in Britain's history. Members should look around them at the Scottish Parliament and its chamber. We would have none of this with the Conservative Party. Considering fixed-term Parliaments, debating electoral reform and cutting the number of MPs are hardly a response on the scale that people are demanding.

What of a new voting system? Again, we hear weasel words from the two old parties. To those who are said to be considering the alternative vote system, I say that reform of the voting system that delivers an unfair, non-proportional system is precisely that—unfair and non-proportional, just like the first-past-the-post system that Gordon Brown and David Cameron have defended throughout every stage of their long political careers.

The message to them is that now, for the first time in more than a quarter of a century, people are crying out for change on a dramatic scale. They want revolution, not evolution, and now is the time to act. To have Gordon Brown twisting and contorting in the death-throes of his time in office for another 10 or maybe 11 months will be deeply damaging and destructive. In my view, it already is. The corrosive atmosphere is poisonous and bitter. Trust and confidence have vanished. It is time for change, and it is time for some genuinely radical proposals.

We need a fair, proportional electoral system for the House of Commons, with members elected by single transferable vote in multimember constituencies—a system to match the proportional representation systems that we have for council, Scottish and European elections. We need a reformed, elected House of Lords, with fixed-term elections of the type that we have for

the Scottish Parliament. We need votes at 16. We need a true separation of powers, with an elected Prime Minister and an elected First Minister. Ministers should no longer sit as members of the legislature. We need a stronger Parliament with less control from the party whips, and significant new powers to hold the executive—the Government—to account.

We need a more open and transparent Government that pushes forward with freedom of information rather than seeking to hold it back. We need more powerful scrutiny of ministers and confirmation hearings for key appointments. We need genuine decentralisation of power in a UK-wide federal system, with major new powers for the Scottish Parliament, including tax-raising powers. We need a written constitution to safeguard our civil liberties and freedoms.

That is the sort of transformation that would dramatically change government on a scale that has not been seen since Lord Grey's Great Reform Act of 1832. That act, which was passed by a Liberal Government, swept away the patronage and corruption of our past, just as today we must sweep aside the decay and corruption of our 21st century politics. Whether it is flipping houses, phantom mortgages, moats, duck ponds or inflated meal claims, now is the time when people expect change that is major, not timid, and wide-ranging, not superficial. Gordon Brown needs to realise that now is the hour.

The wounds that have been inflicted on our democracy are deep, damaging and divisive. Gordon Brown hangs on to office but is losing his grip on power. It is time for a general election.

10:30

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I have been called many things in my political lifetime, but I am certainly not a Tory acolyte. That said, I thank the Conservatives for holding a debate on a reserved matter, and I look forward to their lodging a motion on fiscal autonomy, which I know many Conservatives support.

Johann Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: I have just started; please sit down.

As for Labour's 30-year time warp to 1979, I remind Labour members that it was a Labour MP, George Cunningham, who introduced the 40 per cent rule, whereby the votes of the dead counted as a no vote, and prevented the establishment of this Parliament for three decades. I need no lessons in history from Labour members.

I suppose that we should not kick them when they are down, but I have to. Gordon Brown—the man who would have it all—has the classic fatal flaw of a Shakespearian character. After trawling the Shakespearian tragedies, I have settled for Hamlet, who prevaricated, wavered and finally brought about his own death. Yes, the Hamlet cap fits, for we are watching the slow political suicide not only of Gordon Brown but of Labour plc—and not a moment too soon.

Gordon Brown's epitaph will refer to his announcement, in April 2007, of the abolition of the 10p tax rate; to Damian McBride and smeargate; to the YouTube video—oh!—to the Ghurkas, on which he had to do a U-turn; and to the issue of MPs' expenses, which has already been dealt with. There have been ministerial resignations by the boat load: Beverley Hughes, Jacqui Smith, Tom Watson, Hazel Blears, James Purnell, John Hutton, Geoff Hoon, Margaret Beckett, Caroline Flint and Ian Gibson have all resigned.

What of the Cabinet at 10.32 and one second? The Presbyterian man of democracy has many lords a-leaping. At the top of the leaping pile is Lord Machiavelli, Lord Mandelson. He is joined by the right hon the Lord Adonis, the right hon the Baroness Ashton of Upholland and the right hon the Baroness Royall of Blaisdon, all of whom are unelected. On top of that, there are appointees by the bucket load: Sir Digby Jones, trade minister; Professor Sir Ara Darzi, health minister, patient care; Admiral Sir Alan West; Lord Malloch-Brown; Lord Stevens; and the Lib Dems Baroness Neuberger and Lord Lester. None of them has been elected by anyone—they are all outside appointments.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): What about Sir Alan Sugar?

Christine Grahame: I am coming to him.

The man who relies on those appointees has to keep Alistair Darling—that darling man—in the Cabinet. I wonder why. Maybe he knows where all the bodies are buried. Gordon Brown is so weakened and humiliated that he cannot even do a proper shuffle of a shuffle. He is trying desperately to be popular by clutching at celebrities. Sir Alan Sugar is to join the Lords and all the other appointees.

Why does he not bring in some other famous faces? Let me think. He could bring in Susan Boyle for culture, Joanna Lumley for immigration and Andy Murray for sport, although that will depend on whether he wins Wimbledon. If he wins, he will be British; if he loses, he will be Scottish. We must remember that Gordon has to wrap himself in the union flag.

This is the man who says that he will reform and improve democracy. I have just given his track record, his curriculum vitae, his report card. Meanwhile, the people are losing jobs and homes as a direct consequence of a credit crisis that was set in train on his watch as chancellor. The economic tsunami will last for generations, as we pay to bail out banks that were allowed to run wild in handing out credit. I have one message for that Shakespearian tragic hero—it is time to quit the stage, Hamlet.

10:34

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in this morning's debate, in order to expose the Tory failings ahead of the general election whenever it is called. There is no doubt that the Conservatives are not the answer. They are the party of the squires who would keep working people in the servants' quarters, they are the party of public spending cuts, and they are not the party that will take Scotland forward.

I submit that this debate is not the best use of parliamentary time. This is a legislative chamber, and we should be considering how we can use the levers at our disposal to protect the Scottish economy, to create jobs, to build more houses to avert the housing crisis and to find places for our probationary teachers.

In securing the debate, it seems that the Tory boys hanker for a return to the university debating club. However, if a general election were called now, the debate would not be about policy. Never in the field of political discourse has there been so much discussion about politics and so little discussion about policy. That is what has happened in recent weeks. An election called now would be all about moats and duck houses, and about a First Minister claiming food when Parliament was in recess.

Incidentally, has the First Minister managed to return home from London yet? What a shocking performance yesterday. While we discussed serious legislation at stage 3, the First Minister was down in the House of Commons, languishing on the green benches.

The Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution (Michael Russell): Will the member reflect on the fact that, since becoming Prime Minister in June 2007, Gordon Brown has voted in only 10.8 per cent of divisions in the House of Commons? That should be on the record, in the interest of fairness.

James Kelly: While we are speaking of Prime Ministers, I am reminded that, back in August, Alex Salmond took the time to praise a previous

Conservative Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. Perhaps he was showing his true colours.

When the election comes about, it should be about how we can support the economy, how we can build employment, how we can help businesses, how we can help the banks, and how we can stimulate economic growth. However, it should come as no surprise that we see the Tories and the tartan Tories lining up together, just as they did in 1979. I see Mr Welsh sitting quietly across the chamber. No wonder he is sitting quietly: he was one of the guilty men in 1979 who propelled Margaret Thatcher into Downing Street. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP) *rose—*

Margo MacDonald *rose—*

James Kelly: I have named Mr Welsh, so I will give way to him. I apologise to Margo MacDonald.

Andrew Welsh: I appreciate that.

As I said earlier, George Cunningham introduced the 40 per cent rule. What was on offer for Scotland at that point was less devolved power than that of the Isle of Man or the Channel Islands. I sat in a House of Commons that gave more devolved power to the island of Tuvalu than it was prepared to give to Scotland. I have no regrets about bringing down a failed Labour—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: This should not be a speech, Mr Welsh.

James Kelly: Perhaps Mr Welsh should apologise to the millions of people who were thrown on the scrap heap during the Tory years.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

James Kelly: I apologise to Margo MacDonald, but I have already taken two interventions.

There is no doubt that the SNP wants David Cameron in Downing Street. The SNP believes that having the Tories in Downing Street would enhance the SNP's prospects in any referendum. That is why the SNP is supporting the Tories in trying to bring forward an election. The SNP supports the hasty entry of David Cameron into Downing Street.

Last Thursday, on the day of the European elections, I spoke to many people in Rutherglen and Cambuslang in my constituency. They did not want a general election, and they said loud and clear that they do not want the Tories back in. In the area that I grew up in, and the area that I represent, people remember how the local steelworks were closed and people were thrown on the scrap-heap, some never to work again. As Pauline McNeill has said, security guards were on

£1 an hour and poverty levels rocketed. I see the Tories smiling on the other side of the chamber, but all that time the Tories stood callously by and let it happen. They did not intervene.

This is not a time for Tories or nationalists. People have long memories and, when the election comes, they will remember that Labour delivered the national health service while the Tories gave us Margaret Thatcher; that Labour delivered the Open University while the Tories gave us the poll tax; and that Labour delivered the minimum wage while the Tories gave us mass unemployment. I look forward to the election, whenever it comes, and to seeing the Tories once more getting a hammering in Scotland.

10:40

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): After that speech from James Kelly, Gordon Brown sounds almost coherent.

We might be forgiven for thinking that Labour would want a general election as soon as possible. Only yesterday, Iain Gray denounced the First Minister for spending time at Westminster and we have heard similar comments today. All that Iain Gray has to do is phone Gordon Brown and tell him to call a general election and he will have Mr Salmond's undivided attention. But how many Scottish Labour MPs voted last night to keep poor Mr Salmond down in London for up to another year? Perhaps having had a taste of revolt last week—unsuccessful as it was—they have decided to turn their attentions to the hapless Mr Gray.

The attitude that we have heard from the Labour Party in the debate has been all over the place. Yesterday, the Labour Party issued a bizarre press release in which it complained—a complaint that we have heard again this morning—that this debate is a waste of parliamentary time. That is rich coming from a party that, when it was in government, produced a walking strategy for Scotland that was full of such matters of pressing national importance as the thought that

“a pleasant walk in the sunshine is enjoyable in itself”

and then spent parliamentary time debating it. I apologise for our decision to debate such trivia as a UK general election when we could have followed Labour's lead and debated what a good thing breathing is, how nice it is that the earth revolves around the sun or even the merits of introducing detention without limit or trial for anyone who so much as looks the wrong way at Richard Baker. Such important matters of state will have to wait until Labour business, after the summer recess.

It is obvious to everyone except the Prime Minister that we have a lame duck Government clinging on in the hope that something—anything—will come up to save its skin. The Government has become so wrapped up in its internal politics that it is unable to provide a lead. That is not for the want of a parliamentary majority, as Labour has a majority at Westminster that many previous Prime Ministers would have been grateful for—but to what purpose?

Iain Gray mentioned Margaret Thatcher. We all remember that, early in Gordon Brown's tenure in Downing Street, he invited Baroness Thatcher to number 10. Perhaps we should remind the Labour press office of that when it spews out press releases about the 1980s. At the time, many people speculated about the conversation that took place. In one way at least, Gordon Brown is the true inheritor of the Thatcher legacy. She came close to killing off the Labour Party; Gordon Brown is finishing the job.

The lingering demise of the Labour Party is of no concern to the Conservatives. I suspect that it is of no concern to the SNP either. However, the fact that we are in the middle of the worst recession since the second world war, with a weak and divided Government that is unable to grapple with the problems that the country faces, is a real worry. Last month, the International Monetary Fund warned that the UK Government needed to

“put public debt on a firmly downward path faster than envisaged in the 2009 Budget.”

However, the Government has postponed all the difficult decisions until after the next election. In the meantime, it is merrily running up debt at a rate that has never been seen before. Every independent commentator in the country knows that taxes will have to go up, that spending will have to come down or that there will have to be a combination of the two if the Government is to deal with the debt crisis. However, the Government will not admit that—it is in wholesale denial.

I remind Labour members of the reality of what their Government is proposing for public spending. The Labour Government's own figures show that, after debt interest and benefits payments have been made, departmental spending will fall by 7 per cent in real terms between 2011 and 2013. If health spending in England were to be protected from that cut, the figure would be 10 per cent in real terms in all other departments.

Alistair Darling, the chancellor—presumably for the rest of the UK Government's term of office—said only last month:

“I have cut overall public spending”.

It is a pity that he did not tell his neighbour in number 10. It is left to the chancellor to sort out

the mess that Labour is in, but we know, after the events of last week, that the Prime Minister has no confidence in him. The chancellor was the subject of unprecedented briefing by number 10 last week but is now apparently unsackable.

Iain Gray mentioned spending under Labour, but the problem is that Labour has been spending money that we do not have. He talked earnestly about the next generation, but that generation is now saddled with debt: every child who is born in this country will have £22,000 of national debt to its name. David Whitton wanted us to debate local income tax, but we defeated that proposal back in January—one might have thought that the deputy finance spokesman for the Labour Party would have noticed that. Mr Whitton also wanted to talk about the miners' strike, but not with Margo MacDonald.

Labour members talk about unemployment, but they do not mention the forecasts that suggest that the number of people who are unemployed under the current Labour Government could rise to 4 million. Pauline McNeill mentioned employment law, but not the fact that the Labour Government has not reversed a single change that the Conservatives introduced in that area between 1979 and 1997. She also made the bizarre argument that it is cynical for the Conservatives to argue for the election of a Conservative Government.

A general election would allow a new Government to be formed that could command the confidence not only of the people but of the financial markets. It would allow the UK Government to give greater certainty to the Scottish Government about the path of public spending and the consequences that we will have to deal with here, and it would draw a line under the expenses scandal.

We always seem to face the question of how to deal with the mess that a Labour Government has made. Pauline McNeill said that Labour will campaign on its record—I sincerely hope that it does.

10:46

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): I believe that we need a general election now to restore our faith in democracy. Following scandal after scandal, it is not only the Labour Party but the entire UK system of government that has fallen into disrepute. The misuse of the allowances system demonstrates the need for dramatic reform at Westminster—

Johann Lamont: Will the member give way?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I have just started.

The system cannot be changed while the old personnel are still in place. We now have lame-duck MPs, whose reputations are ruined, and yet—with the notable exception of Ian Gibson—they have refused to resign and allow their constituents the opportunity of a by-election. It is no wonder that people feel that they no longer have any power over or influence on the way in which their country is run.

Johann Lamont: Will the member clarify the SNP's position on the responsibility of its members of Parliament in relation to expenses? Do its members take responsibility for the claims that they made, or do they take the view—as the SNP's leader does—that they got caught up in a culture and could not help it?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Every individual MP has to take responsibility for what happened, but they must also take some responsibility for not having enough faith in their people to let them decide the future. Public disillusionment with politics is running at an all-time high, and we have to deal with that.

A recent BBC/MORI poll showed that half of the general public think that at least half of their MPs are corrupt, and that has serious consequences for democracy. From my party's perspective, last Thursday's election results were a resounding success, but there was one note that had a sobering effect on me and on many other members in the chamber: the election of two BNP MEPs. The reasons why voters chose to elect two racists who peddle fear and hatred in our society are many and complex. They are not the fault of one party, nor are they the responsibility of one Government or institution to resolve. However, I believe firmly that in circumstances such as those that we currently face, in which people feel that they are not listened to and have no voice, extremist parties can grow. They can manipulate feelings of disillusionment, whip up resentment and take advantage of public dissatisfaction with the political system.

We need a general election now to wipe the slate clean and give the people a chance to have their say. We need to show people that we have the ability to give them an election and to put the power in the hands of the electorate.

Margo MacDonald: I infer from the member's remarks that she agrees with the commentators who have said that Britain is now represented by BNP members. Does she agree with me that this chamber is not represented by those members, and that they do not speak for Scotland?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I fully agree with Margo MacDonald, and pay tribute to Pauline McNeill for lodging a motion on the current "not in

my name" petition that makes that very point. However, we in Scotland cannot be complacent.

In the longer term, Westminster should learn from the Scottish Parliament's open, transparent and democratic system; it should not only emulate our expenses system, but move towards fixed terms to ensure that elections cannot be called at the ruling party's whim. It is clear to all that with their politics of self-preservation, Gordon Brown and his Government are putting their own best interests—and careers—before their country's interests. By limping on, the Labour Party is treating democracy with contempt. As with MPs' expenses, it might be acting within the rules, but it is not acting within the spirit of the rules. Meanwhile, in Scotland, it is a tale of two Governments: while the SNP fights to protect Scottish jobs, the Labour Government at Westminster is too busy fighting to protect its own.

Gordon Brown's ministerial team went into unprecedented meltdown before the European elections. However, what happened did not come out of nowhere, but represented the final straw of two disastrous years of a divided Government. Since taking the top job, Gordon Brown has seemed unsure of what to do with it, stumbling from one crisis to another with no clear strategy, no clear mandate and no clear policy direction. Instead of the promised conviction politics, we got dithering, indecision and insincere attempts on YouTube to alter his image to suit his audience.

I did not agree with Tony Blair, but at least I knew what he stood for, even if it happened to be illegal wars and a privatisation agenda that would have made Mrs Thatcher's toes curl. I may not agree with David Cameron, but at least I know what he stands for: the usual round of Tory cuts to public services. Except for his mission to save the world, who knows what Gordon Brown stands for?

The public could not have sent a clearer message than they sent last week in the European elections: they want to have their say. We should remind ourselves of the facts: Labour got 16 per cent of the vote; was third behind the United Kingdom Independence Party; achieved a disastrous second place in the Welsh heartlands; and came in second place in Scotland. I am particularly pleased that for the first time the SNP won the vote in Edinburgh, with fantastic wins in Edinburgh North and Leith, Edinburgh East and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Edinburgh South West constituency. Gordon Brown might not have been able to budge the chancellor from the Treasury in his botched reshuffle, but perhaps in a general election the people of Edinburgh will finish off the job on his behalf.

Gordon Brown must listen to the message from the elections. When he became Prime Minister in 2007, he said that he would

“heed and lead the call of change”.

Will he heed that call now and call the election? Another rebranding of Gordon Brown will not wash; we all know that the new Gordon is out to save himself and not the country, never mind the world.

The Labour Party has lost all authority to govern. A democratic mandate is not an added extra for a Government, but a necessity. It is time to end the misery, put politics back on track and call the election now.

10:52

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): As Iain McWhirter made clear in the *Sunday Herald* on 7 June 2009,

“there is no doubt that if Scotland had been independent”,

as the SNP wants,

“when the”

global economic crisis

“hit,”

our

“economy would have been destroyed by the debts of our delinquent banks, HBOS and RBS, just like Iceland’s. The losses on their multi-trillion-pound balance sheets would have wiped out the £30 billion Scottish economy in half a day. ...

First minister Salmond’s mistake was to get carried away by Celtic neo-liberalism, and start thinking that Scotland’s future was as a small open economy with low taxes and very big banks. That would have led to a very big disaster and decades of pain.”

Where is the First Minister today? By the way, he does not, as one SNP member suggested this morning, have two salaries; he has three, with an income close to £250,000 a year. They seek him here; they seek him there; but that Alex Salmond is never here.

In the face of the past year’s global economic crisis—not, I add, Gordon Brown’s economic crisis, Nicolas Sarkozy’s economic crisis or even Angela Merkel’s economic crisis, but the direct consequence of the outrageous decisions made by bankers and of American sub-prime mortgage lending practices—our Prime Minister has been at the forefront of leading the way out.

Barack Obama emphasised the need for G20 leaders to sing from the same song sheet when he said:

“The most important task for all of us is to deliver a strong message of unity in the face of crisis.”

That is exactly what every political leader in Scotland should be doing today. Instead of indulging ourselves as the Tories, Liberals and the SNP have been doing this morning, we should be acting in unity and forming a coalition and united front to focus solely on helping our people.

Scotland’s people need all politicians to lead them out of the on-going challenges that we face collectively in Scotland. We do not need the approach of the Tories that we had on the BBC yesterday morning and again this morning. We heard Andrew Lansley—who is not very popular with his leader, David Cameron—talk about £10 billion of cuts in the UK. That would be together with tax giveaways to the 3,000 richest people in the UK.

Gordon Brown has led the way and continues to do so—we are very proud of him. He has the required experience, knowledge and ability to ensure that the United Kingdom recovers from the crisis. As G20 leader, the British Prime Minister proved his ability to deal with the post-crisis policy, globally and in Europe. I have known Gordon personally and worked with him for more than 26 years. He is a good and decent man who commands respect across the spectrum. Globalisation’s first great crisis necessitated a co-ordinated international response and a decisive exercise of collective action on world and European scales. Gordon Brown saw that and led from the outset. It is thanks to his vision and leadership that we were able to lay the basis for a new system of global economic governance at the G20 summit last April. Gordon Brown was hailed by leaders from throughout the world—Sarkozy congratulated him. Last week, constituents in Cowdenbeath came out of polling stations one after the other saying that Gordon Brown is a class act. No one in Westminster comes near his intellect in seeing the big picture and the solutions.

At the weekend, Michael Portillo said that the Tories will go into the next election with fewer MPs than Michael Foot won in 1983, with 199 to Foot’s 210. So to win a majority of just one, Cameron must secure a net gain of 125 seats. Assuming a mere handful of Scottish seats, that is a very big mountain to climb, so Cameron has still not sealed the deal. Why is that? He has been leader for three and a half years, so we might think that people would have made up their minds about him by now. If they have, they have decided that they can take him or leave him. We have not yet heard one of his policies, which is a big issue for the people of Scotland.

I watched Prime Minister’s question time on the television yesterday and noted that not one question to Gordon Brown from the Conservatives, the Liberals or the SNP was directly relevant to the real issues in the United Kingdom. The

Government and Opposition parties should concentrate on the issues that matter most to the people of the United Kingdom and Scotland, such as how to solve the current financial crisis, how to get companies employing again and how to reduce the number of companies that have no option but to make redundancies. Calling a general election now would not benefit the country on issues such as employment; it would waste time. Having MPs and ministers rolling round the country on the campaign trail would take the emphasis away from the real issues, such as employment and the economy. Those issues would simply be talked about, and nothing would be done to resolve them.

As has been pointed out by those who are involved in the nitty-gritty of delivering training services, if we had a general election now and the Labour Party was no longer in government, many service programmes that are designed specifically to help the unemployed would be scrapped by the Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats. I refer to programmes such as the new deal for 18 to 24-year-olds, new deal 25 plus, the new deal for disabled people, the entry to employment plus scheme and the many others that are designed to help the UK's unemployed back into sustainable employment. The Tories would simply scrap those programmes and replace them with nothing. The UK's unemployed would be left with no real support or training to help them back into work.

Calling a general election today would not help the country out of the recession, nor would it help the unemployed or those who face unemployment to find new jobs or to retrain. Some people might want to take us back to the nuts and bolts of the tragic years of Thatcher's Britain—there is book after book about that on bookshelves throughout the country. However, I will certainly not support the Tory motion at decision time.

10:59

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): It was quite a surprise to hear that Helen Eadie will not support the Tory motion. In the interests of accuracy, I wonder whether I might take issue with her opening remarks. She said that had Scotland been independent, there is no doubt that—if members will excuse the metaphor—we would have been all at sea when the tsunami hit us. Had Scotland been independent, we might have had a Labour Government and we might have repatriated Gordon Brown to run the economy in Scotland. We cannot choose our hypotheses without looking at the corollaries. The corollaries would have been that we would have had the same sort of oil fund as Norway has. We might well have had a leftish Government and the sort of regulations on the financial centre that there

should have been. I urge Helen Eadie to take that into account when she says what it might have been like had we been independent.

In the interests of historical accuracy, I correct my friend James Kelly. It was not the SNP that brought down the Thatcher Government; it was a man called Frank Maguire, who represented Fermanagh and South Tyrone, and who abstained in the vote of confidence. He is the man to blame if we are handing out blame.

I apologise to Dave Whitton for reminding him that the miners' strike was a bit more complex than he presented it. I pay tribute to men such as Davey Hamilton—a present member of the House of Commons—for his efforts in the miners' strike, but that does not take away anything from my criticism of the Government. I am sure that there are Labour members in this chamber who are a wee bit embarrassed by some of the things that the present Labour Government in London has done.

Do we need a general election to give Labour a chance to stay in government or to hand over to—I forget his name—the nice Tory man? No, we do not need a general election for that reason; we need a general election to get rid of the stench of corruption and the disgust that people feel with the democratic process, and for the very practical reasons that were advanced by Derek Brownlee. We are walking a tightrope as far as the finances of not just Scotland but the United Kingdom are concerned, and we had better get off the tightrope and start being honest about the choices that we have to make on spending cuts. As I have said before in the chamber, it will not matter who is elected in London.

David McLetchie mentioned that we should debate the constitution and I could not agree more. It is a pity that he is not here—[*Interruption.*] Oh, he is over there; good. If members look at page 26 of today's *Business Bulletin*, they will see my excellent amendment to the motion; unfortunately, it was not accepted for debate. It would have meant that we spent the time between now and the inevitable general election, which will come not sooner but later, informing people in Scotland of the constitutional choices. Then, depending on the outcome of the election, we could use that as the basis for renegotiation either of advanced devolution or, as I hope, the transfer of sovereignty to this Parliament. I commend that idea to members.

David Whitton: Would Margo MacDonald prefer to have a Conservative or a Labour Government in London?

Margo MacDonald: It does not matter what I prefer; it matters what people in England prefer. Any Government that is elected to Westminster

should answer to people in England and conduct their affairs. We have the Scottish Parliament to build on and we should do the same for Scots voters. I take the same interest in who is elected to be the Government in England as I do in Governments that are elected in other countries over which I have, and seek, no control.

There is no chance of a general election being held, because members of Parliament—not just those in the Labour Party—have worked out that they will do better with 12 months' wages than with 10.

Before members of the Scottish Parliament fall into line and churn out Pavlovian responses about spending cuts, I commend to members another of my ideas, which I shared with the Scottish Trades Union Congress last week at a meeting of its general council. It might be a good idea for the people in here to trust the people out there and consult them on how they want to determine priorities during a time of spending cuts and contraction of services. We cannot service our debt without making cuts or—more likely—having a mixture of tax increases and cuts. I find some agreement with that analysis from Ross Finnie. We know that cuts will happen, so why do we not consult our communities? The STUC could do that by working in conjunction with representatives from the Parliament. That would ensure that people were properly informed and allow them to make the priority choices that suit them and not us. If we are serious about cleaning up politics, that is how we can start. We could do that between now and the general election.

There will be a general election, so people should just put up with it. We should try to ensure that we get something better for Scotland from the election. That is not selfish; it just makes sense. We know perfectly well that a huge difference exists between the construct of the Scottish economy and that of the English economy, and we know perfectly well that the size of our public sector demands a different answer. We in the Parliament can provide that answer.

11:06

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I am happy to speak in the debate, which has several features—some are unsurprising, some are surprising and some are less surprising than they might have been in the past.

I will comment first on the miners' dispute. I am proud that we have a Prime Minister and a Government who are willing to use the Government's power to intervene on people's behalf rather than to unleash the state's power against communities. If anything ever confirmed my views about nationalism, it was the fact that I

never understood how the nationalists could have compassion for miners and mining communities in Ayrshire but not for mining communities in Yorkshire. The nationalists considered the oppressed person to be the Duke of Argyll in Scotland and not the miner in England. That is inexplicable, and those who claim to be progressive must explain that.

It is hardly surprising that Opposition parties want a general election—that is what Opposition parties say. However, it is illogical to say that the scandal of parliamentary expenses must be addressed through a general election. How do people expect to deal with the problem by holding a general election before the investigation is complete into those who affront us all in the political process by claiming what they are not entitled to, and before political parties can clear out those who have brought shame on us? That makes no sense.

It is equally unsurprising that the First Minister preferred to travel the length of the country for a 20-second contribution to a political stunt in Westminster than to be in this Parliament on one of the few occasions since the SNP became the Government on which the Parliament has had thoughtful and challenging debate—yesterday, it was about how best to legislate to protect victims of rape and sexual violence. Of course, that subject does not attract headlines or lend itself to the music-hall approach to political debate with which the First Minister is most comfortable, so the choice for him was a no-brainer. His Government wants to condition us not to expect debate in the Parliament. The Government wants to use its executive power and resists parliamentary accountability. Shamefully, it is backed by back benchers who are silent when it acts in a way for which it did not seek the support of the people in the Scottish Parliament election.

I am genuinely surprised that the Tories collude with the SNP's instinctive approach of making this place a combination of a student debating chamber, a vehicle for lobbying Westminster and a platform for grievance. I am genuinely surprised that the Tories have actively chosen to debate having a general election rather than the absence of a strategy for supporting businesses and construction workers, the fact that the SNP is in denial about what is happening on its watch in education or the funding cuts that groups and organisations are experiencing. What SNP ministers tell us that they care about is absolutely separate from the resources that they deliver and their accountability for that. The SNP centralises credit for the fruits of plans that the previous Scottish Executive produced and delegates blame wherever it can for the consequences of the active political choices that it makes in the Parliament.

I referred to features that are less surprising than they might have been in the past. We had come to expect the SNP to put its own cynical party advantage above all else; the memories of 1979 are strong. We believed that its approach was entirely about party advantage—let the people across the UK suffer, if that means drawing increased political support to the SNP as Scots turn away from the UK Government. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that the SNP thinks not only that a Tory Government might be to its advantage, but that a Tory Government would believe in the same things that it believes in. Alex Salmond believes that Thatcherite economics had a lot to recommend it. He leads a Government that will not put a duty on public bodies in Scotland to narrow the gap between rich and poor in the way that is happening elsewhere. Indeed, until very recently, he believed that the British banking system was overregulated—in fact, he takes his economic advice from George Mathewson. On the front bench of the SNP Government, we have David Cameron and Alex Salmond—Thatcherite brothers under the skin. That is to their parties' political advantage, and, increasingly, their political advantage in combination, too.

The fact is that Labour understands the need for change. It has delivered change. It decentralised powers to the Scottish Parliament and took a courageous position in pioneering the openness and transparency for which people commend this place. It is critical that that work be done elsewhere. We have to take seriously the debate on expenses. When I was a teacher, it was unacceptable for a child to say, "It wasn't just me who did it", or "A big, bad boy did it." It is similarly unacceptable that the leader of the SNP takes that approach to the expenses question by implying that the problem is particular to the Labour Party.

Margo MacDonald: It was the Labour Government in concert with the Liberal Democrats that brought that about in this Parliament. It was not given to Labour; you did it yourselves.

Johann Lamont: My point is that Labour promised a Scottish Parliament and then delivered it. Labour handed out the power so that the Parliament would be open and transparent. I am proud of the role that we played in that. Ten years on, I am proud that we fought for that. We are unlike that squad in the SNP, who claim that they believe in things but do not deliver.

These are serious times. Hard choices have to be made regarding economic intervention. The Labour Government is determined to act on economic questions, and the constitution.

11:12

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Annabel Goldie opened the debate with a rather negative speech. She claimed that a general election was needed primarily to clean up Westminster. However, she completely failed to say what the Conservatives would do to reform politics. Why? Because the Conservatives have nothing much to offer. They want a general election simply because they seem to think that it is Buggins's turn. That will not do.

Bruce Crawford said that only the SNP could protect Scotland from Westminster's cuts. The statement was rather nonsensical. Indeed, he provoked much laughter when he said that Canada's success in the recession was due to its having a Scottish banking model. The SNP needs a reality check.

Iain Gray's performance was not his best. In a very partisan speech, he seemed to say that only the Tories with their moats and duck houses were involved in the MPs' expenses scandal. However, members of all parties are involved to a greater or lesser extent. Given that Iain Gray decided to go down that road, why did he not mention the worst excesses? I refer to MPs claiming money for mortgage interest payments when they no longer had a mortgage to pay. Some would call that criminal activity; others might call it fraud.

Iain Gray: Mr Rumbles misrepresents what I said. I said that MPs of all parties were embroiled in the scandal and that some had paid a heavy price, and rightly so. My point was that the claims about the Tories revealed the kind of lifestyle that seems to pass as normal in Conservative circles. That is a different point altogether.

Mike Rumbles: I am glad that Iain Gray clarified what he said earlier. However, from what he said, I took the points that I have just mentioned.

In contrast, Ross Finnie focused on what we need an election for. He was the only opening front-bench speaker to set out clearly and methodically why we need a general election. He said that we need a new and honest approach to the economic management of the country's affairs; that we need to end the UK Government's attack on our personal freedoms and civil liberties; and that we need political reform of our institutions, of our economy and of our entire taxation system. Above all, we need to elect MPs—of all parties—who believe in and will promote liberal democracy and an open and transparent system.

I turn to one or two speeches from back benchers. Alasdair Allan seemed to think that Scotland has no influence on who governs the United Kingdom. Has he forgotten that we have a Scots Prime Minister and a Scots Chancellor of the Exchequer? They are not doing very well, to

say the least, but nobody could deny—except, apparently, Alasdair Allan—that they are influential Scots. There is no doubt that Scots will influence the next UK general election.

Nicol Stephen said that the UK Government had failed the country. Dramatic constitutional change and reform will not happen with the present UK Government. The Prime Minister has had 12 years in which to initiate change and reform. Nothing happened with the Jenkins commission, for a start. Why has the Prime Minister failed the test?

It is time for a change. The country realises that. It is time for radical reform: fixed-term Parliaments, voting at 16, an elected Prime Minister, electoral reform and fair votes, and a more transparent and open system of government.

This morning's debate has given MSPs around the chamber the opportunity to engage in what I thought would be pure partisan political knockabout—I am not complaining about that.

Christine Grahame: He would never complain.

Mike Rumbles: I said that I was not complaining, if Christine Grahame wants to listen. It was therefore no disappointment when that happened. However, the debate could have been an opportunity for each of the four main political parties to set out its stall on why we need a new UK Government. As I said, Ross Finnie did exactly that for the Liberal Democrats, and I will focus on that. We need a new approach to economic management, a focus on individual freedoms and the protection of civil liberties, and political reform. I have already mentioned fixed-term Parliaments, an elected Prime Minister, voting at 16 and a more transparent and open system of government.

This could have been a real debate about what the political parties have to offer the country, but I am afraid that, for the most part, the opportunity to highlight positively what we all have to offer the country has been wasted.

11:17

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): When I first learned that the Conservatives had, rather than hold the Scottish Government to account, chosen this subject for debate, I was disappointed but not surprised. Over the past two years, we have witnessed ever more examples of the strengthening of the tartan Tory alliance, which first emerged in the late 1970s, when the SNP and the Tories combined to bring down a Labour Government, heralding in the Thatcherite destruction of Scotland's economy. *[Interruption.]* Regardless of how many members in other parties might try to refute that, those are the facts.

As my Labour colleagues have argued this morning, the Tories could have used their time today to highlight the SNP's dangerous plans to end six-month sentences, they could have debated the state of Scottish schools, and they could have forced the issue on hospital-acquired infection, or the increasing problem of home repossessions. Instead, given the outcome of a similar debate yesterday in Westminster, they are indulging in a pointless debate in order to join with their tartan twins, not to argue for any high moral ideal, but for base political self-interest.

Even if they are not prepared to hold the Scottish Government to account, we might have found some value in this debate—I agree entirely with Mike Rumbles on this—if our opponents had used their time to outline the policies that they would bring to a general election. However, not one policy idea has been forthcoming. We are left to wonder what the purpose would be of a general election now, as our opponents are clearly devoid of any policy ideas on which they would fight a campaign.

The Tories have told us, however, that they cannot wait to get started on their campaign. I am sure that we will see David Cameron's fake concern for our disadvantaged communities soon enough. It would appear that he will be visiting as many people who have no hope and no money as he can, to learn from their experience. His first stop will be Nick Clegg's office.

The debate has helped to expose yet more of the contempt with which the First Minister treats this place. Alex Salmond would prefer to pop off to Westminster to attempt to repeat history and vote down a Labour Government, than to take part in important votes on sexual offences legislation. I appreciate that he cannot vote in two places at the same time, even though his Westminster expenses claims indicate that he may have the capacity to eat in two places at the same time, but how telling it is that he hates Labour more than he cares for the victims of crime. Alex Salmond has never been able to make his mind up about whether he prefers Westminster to Holyrood. I was going to suggest that he should take a long, hard look in the mirror, but there is no point—he admires himself so much that he will be doing that anyway.

The debate has provided us with the opportunity to remind the Scottish people of the 18 years of Thatcherism. Scots remember Ravenscraig, the demolition of the Scottish mining industry and the Tories using Scotland as a guinea pig for their hated poll tax. The tartan Tory alliance claims that we need a general election so that we can restore trust and confidence in Parliament and politicians, but the motion merely exposes the SNP's desire to join forces with the Tories in order to defeat

Labour. The fact is that the next general election will be a two-horse race between Labour and the Tories. The SNP's support for an election now, as it was in 1979, is calculated to help to put a Tory—David Cameron—in office. The SNP wants not an election but a Tory Government. It knows that Scotland dislikes the Tory party and hopes that the election of David Cameron would drive more Scots towards supporting independence. No matter how good it thinks that that strategy is, it should consider the results.

Margo MacDonald: Is Michael McMahon not concerned that having to put up with the embarrassments of the Labour Government for another year would harm his party's chances when it comes to the Scottish parliamentary elections? Is there nothing for the Labour Party in Scotland in having an early election and the stables being cleansed?

Michael McMahon: I could not disagree more with Margo MacDonald. We need more time to remind people of what the Tories did when they were in office; that the Labour Government delivered the Scottish Parliament when it promised to do so; that it introduced a minimum wage that the tartan Tories opposed; and that there are other great benefits of the Labour Government. We are in a recession and we must, although it is a difficult time, remind the people what Labour Governments have done for Scotland. I would never give up the opportunity to do that.

Scotland and its people are far too important to be treated as pawns in the SNP's obsessive constitutional game. Labour is down, but it is certainly not out. The Labour Government led by Gordon Brown will lead us out of the recession, and Labour and the UK economy will be stronger for it. That is why the tartan Tories want an election.

The debate has been an utter waste of Parliament's time. The Tories will win the vote tonight, but they will not get what they want and will not get the result when the election comes.

11:23

The Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution (Michael Russell): I admit to being confused by two things during the debate. The first is Helen Eadie's invention of a new political philosophy—Celtic neo-liberalism—which I must investigate further. The second is curious—it is a dog that has not bitten. It is Labour members' slavish loyalty to their London colleagues, which is bizarre, because we all know that they do not like one another much. That is an open secret, so why are they locked together in that way? I will tell members why. They are locked together in a dance of electoral death; they are

going down together. If anybody had any doubt about that, it was demonstrated by the results on Monday: 22 out of 32 local authority areas voted for the SNP, not Labour. In the three that preferred Labour, the difference between the two parties was—I will not use a phrase that my friend Kenny Gibson once used in the chamber—very narrow.

The reality is not only that Labour is going down but that it deserves to go down. I will use two examples to prove that. The first, which was referred to by Dr Alasdair Allan and Nicol Stephen, is yesterday's extraordinary sight: Gordon Brown trying to pose as the great reformer. He is not so much the great reformer as the late reformer. On expenses, he failed to act and, indeed, damaged action by his bizarre YouTube performance.

On a written constitution and bill of rights, which he claims to believe in, it is "Maybe aye, maybe no." On reform of the House of Lords, he is, after 12 years, still talking about an unelected element. On electoral reform, which he has rejected again and again, there is simply more talk. Westminster first considered electoral reform in a Speaker's conference between the wars, and has since considered the matter again and again. The Jenkins commission has been referred to, but no decision has been taken. There was, despite the corrosive arrogance of the Westminster system, nothing in Gordon Brown's speech about the sovereignty of Parliament, nor was there anything about innovation, except perhaps in respect of giving people the vote at 16, which the Scottish Parliament is already pursuing. There was but a mere mention of Calman. In short, there was nothing at all in the speech. Any Prime Minister who builds up their statement as a major step forward and then delivers nothing deserves the description that Disraeli gave of Gladstone's Government:

"a range of exhausted volcanoes. Not a flame flickering on a single pallid crest."

For that reason, the Labour Government has to go.

There is another stronger reason why the Westminster Labour Government must go, which has been repeated again and again today. The argument that we have heard is that the Labour Government must remain in office because all the other options are worse. That is an affront to every member, to every citizen of this country and to every citizen who believes in democracy. What has been said is not a fact, but the opinion of a group of people: if those people said that the sky is blue, one would have to go out and check for oneself. Members have even claimed that elections are a waste of time and that they would make people suffer. That is an outrage. Democracy should triumph—people should decide. Any Government that says that people

cannot vote it out because they will make the wrong choice should automatically be voted out. Brecht talked satirically about the people failing the leaders and electing a new people. That is now Labour's mantra.

What has been said is an outrage because it is wrapped in a lie. We have heard repeated again and again in the chamber the lie in which that outrage is wrapped. Iain Gray, David Whitton, Pauline McNeill, James Kelly, Johann Lamont and Michael McMahon have all said the same thing. They have pointed to a lie that I must disprove. I shall do so in three ways.

First, the fall of the 1979 Government was caused by Labour rebels, not by the SNP. In evidence, I cite none other than James Callaghan, who wrote a book entitled "Time and Chance"—an appropriate title. Labour has had its time and now it must go; its chance is over.

Richard Baker: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it appropriate for the member to call other members liars, particularly when they are telling the truth?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I will look at that. Mr Russell, carry on, please.

Michael Russell: James Callaghan said in the book that I mentioned:

"Michael Cocks, the Chief Whip, had spoken with some of Labour's Devolution rebels. In his view the difficulty within the Party was much greater than any from the Scottish National Party and the Whips' judgement was that the Government could not rely on the votes of Labour Members from Merseyside or the North".

That is first point. Labour brought itself down.

The second point is very important. It is that the manifest failures of Labour brought down that party then, as they are doing now.

Thirdly, let us get to the heart of the democratic point. I will tell members who it was that voted the Labour Party out of office. It was not 11 SNP MPs—not even my good friend Andrew Welsh—who voted the Labour Party out of office. It was voted out by 13,697,923 voters in an election. Those voters brought down the Labour Government—nobody else.

Let us tackle the other myth about what happened during the Thatcher years. Those years were awful, and the Thatcher Government was culpable. I was among those who marched and protested. I was at Gartcosh, Ravenscraig and Caterpillar. I did not pay the poll tax—I could have, but I would not. Labour could have followed that campaign, but instead it undermined it. When the marchers got to London, it preferred to debate Westland to Gartcosh. I was in George Square;

indeed, I was on the board of Scotland United. Labour did not back us, but instead walked away.

Michael McMahon: Will the minister give way?

Michael Russell: No, I will not. I want to quote again from James Callaghan's memoirs; what he said is important. He said that, in 1979, he consulted Labour's general secretary, Ron Hayward, who

"reported that the Party in Scotland was pretty shell-shocked."

It wanted to take forward devolution, which should have remained

"in the forefront of Labour's programme, but the well-being of the Government must be the priority".

That was the case with UK Government then and it is now.

Let us take the issue further.

Michael McMahon: Will the minister take an intervention?

Michael Russell: No, I will not.

I believe that politics is about the positive, not the negative. The more Labour argues a negative line, the more it will repeat the experience of the past weekend. There are now nine points between positive and negative. Shortly there will be 19, and the gap will continue to grow.

I want an election now for the following reasons. They are positive reasons that will move Scotland forward. I want an election to give the people of Scotland the opportunity to choose a better way for Scotland. I want an election because I reject the self-interested desperation of the "late reformer" yesterday. I want an election because I reject the intellectually dishonest compromises that we have had. I want an election because I want to ensure that we do not have the empty glitz of David Cameron. I want an election because Scotland needs an independent future and because an election can usher one in. The time for change in Scotland is now. An election can change us—we should have one.

11:31

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Yesterday at Westminster we saw a valid attempt by the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru to force dissolution of the House of Commons. Their call was supported by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. I am sorry that that bid failed, not least because—as we have heard throughout this debate—it brought back memories of the famous vote of no confidence in the Callaghan Government 30 years ago, which was supported by the SNP at the time and which famously ushered in the 18 years of Conservative

Government of glorious memory. I am sorry that we did not see history repeat itself yesterday, but I am confident that it is only a matter of time before the glory days come again.

Michael McMahon: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: Not at the moment.

Today the Scottish Parliament has an opportunity to do what Westminster did not do yesterday—to resolve firmly that the United Kingdom needs a general election now. Let us send a clear message from this place to the Labour Government that its time is up and that the Scottish Parliament believes that this country needs a fresh start.

There are three clear reasons why we believe that an election is required now. First, the whole political system has been rocked by the scandal of MPs' expenses that has been revealed by *The Daily Telegraph* over the past five weeks. We have all been shocked by revelations not just about moats and duck houses, but about MPs claiming for phantom mortgages that have already been paid off, for flat-screen televisions, for digital radios and for Toblerones. The First Minister has claimed for generous amounts of food for periods when he may not even have been at Westminster. Public confidence in the whole system has been seriously undermined, and some MPs have behaved disgracefully.

Johann Lamont: I genuinely wonder how Murdo Fraser thinks people can pass judgment on their candidates when the full extent of the problem is not known and the parties have not been able to act against their offenders. Does he not agree that there should be a thorough investigation, so that people can make a real choice knowing who has dipped their hands in the till and which members at Westminster are still honourable?

Murdo Fraser: What an arrogant attitude is on display from the Labour Party. Labour members say that it should be up to the political parties to sort out the matter. No—it should not. The people, not the political parties, should decide whether MPs are re-elected, which is why we need an election. Let the public have their say on their members of Parliament; let them decide whether members are fit to be re-elected to the House of Commons. That is how we will restore confidence in our democracy, not through some stitch-up by political parties.

The second reason why we need a general election is that the Labour Government in London has run its course. It is out of ideas, has lost its way and no longer has anything to offer the country. The Government has presided over the worst economic recession since the second world

war at least. It has mismanaged the public finances to the extent—as Derek Brownlee reminded us—that every child who is born in Britain today is saddled with £22,000-worth of debts. Believe me, Presiding Officer—the welfare of newborn babies is of great interest to Conservative members at present. All the debts will have to be repaid. What a cheek it was for Iain Gray to lecture us on lost generations when he is saddling future generations with such a debt burden.

Throughout the debate, we have heard from Labour members the repeated mantra about Tory cuts. Have they forgotten already this week's Finance Committee report, which refers to evidence from the Centre for Public Policy for Regions that, under Labour's spending plans, this Parliament's budget will be cut by 13 per cent in real terms—£4 billion in real terms—by 2014? That committee's report was agreed to unanimously, including by the three Labour members: Jackie Baillie, James Kelly and David Whitton. Each of them signed up to that report, which undermines the attack that has been made by their front-bench spokespersons. Therefore, let us hear no more about Tory cuts. Labour cuts are coming down the line and we will all suffer their consequences.

David Whitton rose—

Murdo Fraser: I will give way to the guilty man.

David Whitton: Murdo Fraser names me the guilty man, but he is the guilty man if he thinks that we are returning to "the glory days".

If Murdo Fraser reads the Finance Committee's report properly, he will realise that the Scottish Government's budget will still increase over the next two years.

Murdo Fraser: I am surprised that David Whitton is so quickly trying to distance himself from a report that he signed up to. The facts are clear: cuts are coming—Labour cuts—that are far worse than any cuts the Tory party would impose.

I accept that some people, perhaps even some members of this Parliament, will believe that the Labour Government deserves to be re-elected. I think that they are wrong and that they represent a dwindling section of the population, but I would ask even them why they do not put that belief to the test. In a democracy, the people should decide whether a Government continues in office. That is why it is time we had a general election to allow the people their say.

I agree with Mike Russell that we have seen an appalling attitude from Labour members today. They have argued that we cannot have an election because it would be too confusing and too distracting, or that the people might reach the

wrong decision. Like Mike Russell, I remember Bertolt Brecht's satire on the East German communist Government—there are so many parallels with that today—in which he wrote that the people had lost the Government's confidence and would have to work very hard to regain it.

Michael McMahon: I thank Murdo Fraser not only for taking my intervention but for exposing the fact that a Tory-SNP alliance brought down the previous Labour Government.

Murdo Fraser has agreed with Michael Russell on a number of points. Does he agree with Michael Russell that those who pass legislation should encourage people not to pay their taxes?

Murdo Fraser: I can assure Mr McMahon that I do not agree with Michael Russell on that point.

The third reason why we need a general election is that we have in Gordon Brown a Prime Minister who has lost all authority. As Chancellor of the Exchequer for 10 years, he promised us that he had delivered an economic miracle. He promised that there would be no return to boom and bust, yet he delivered both. As Prime Minister, he now has the worst personal ratings of any Prime Minister in history. Do not just take my word for it—many of the Prime Minister's senior colleagues in the Labour Party are now saying the same thing. Stephen Byers and James Purnell, and even *The Guardian* newspaper in its editorial, are all saying that Gordon Brown's time is up. Gordon Brown still has some friends in the Labour Party—some of them have been in evidence this morning—but they are hanging on to him only because they know that, if they change leader now, they will need to have a general election, which is the thing they fear most. Labour members know that, if a general election was held now, they would be utterly crushed.

In the European elections results on Sunday, the party of Government scored only 16 per cent across the United Kingdom, which was behind the Conservative party, which is ready to take office, and even behind the United Kingdom Independence Party. In Scotland, the Labour Party came top of the poll in just three local authority areas, whereas the Conservative party came top in four. Following the local elections down south, the Labour Party now controls not a single county council. Perhaps worst of all, the collapse of the Labour vote has allowed the election of two members of the extremist socialist British National Party as members of the European Parliament.

It is truly painful to watch the slow death of the once mighty Labour Party in Scotland. It would be the kindest thing in the world to seek to end that torture by putting the party out of its misery with a swift and painless execution. I appeal to all members—even those on the Labour benches—to

have a heart. Now is the time to put Gordon Brown and the Labour Government out of its pain. Now is the time to give the country a fresh start under David Cameron and a Conservative Government. Now is the time to have a general election and allow the people to decide.

I have pleasure in supporting the motion.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

11:40

Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Meetings)

1. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when the Cabinet Secretary for Justice last met the chief constable of Strathclyde Police and what issues were discussed. (S3O-7319)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): I last met Chief Constable Stephen House on Tuesday 2 June, when we launched the strategy for tackling serious organised crime in Scotland, "Letting our Communities Flourish", and I had the pleasure of being able to announce a £4 million funding package over the next two years to boost Scotland's capacity to respond to organised crime.

Johann Lamont: When the cabinet secretary last met the chief constable of Strathclyde Police, did he discuss the role of the police in supporting the advice, support, safety and information services together—ASSIST—process in ensuring proper risk assessment to inform the domestic abuse courts? Will he clarify whether he expects the police to guarantee participation in partnership working and, more broadly, in working closely with local people—an approach that, of course, underlies any serious attempt to ensure community safety.

Kenny MacAskill: After the launch, I had a meal with the chief constable and the director general of the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency. Obviously, I do not interfere with operational police matters, but I can assure Johann Lamont that chief constable Stephen House views domestic violence as being one of the most serious matters facing not only Strathclyde Police but Scotland as a whole. He takes that view because it is part of the culture of violence in Scotland. As I have said before in the chamber, if kids grow up in a household in which it is standard for their mother to be abused by her partner, they will view striking out as the way in which they should deal with matters when they are upset or angry, and that behaviour will manifest itself as early as their nursery-school years.

The chief constable has made it clear, from the top of Strathclyde Police, that domestic violence is a serious priority. He has the full support of the Government in that regard.

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP):

The last thing I would ask the cabinet secretary to do would be to get involved in the operational matters of Strathclyde Police. However, I would like the cabinet secretary to raise with the chief constable the wider community policing role of the Strathclyde Police pipe band, as its future appears to be under threat, which might result in the loss of a community policing tool as well as a Scottish cultural icon.

Kenny MacAskill: As well as domestic violence, the pipe band came up in the pleasurable meeting that I had with Stephen House and Gordon Meldrum.

The matter that Stuart McMillan raises is an operational matter on which the police board has a responsibility to state clearly where it stands.

The question is one of balance. As we know, there are issues around charges for policing in relation to the golf championship at Turnberry. However, the chief constable has been prepared to listen to arguments that there are benefits that go along with that.

Stuart McMillan should raise the matter with the chief constable, as should members of the police board. Pipe bands are appropriate: this is the year of homecoming. Clearly, the police have their own priorities, but as with many issues, where there is a will there is a way, and the truth is often somewhere in the middle.

Young People not in Education, Employment or Training

2. Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to support young people not in employment, education or training during the economic downturn. (S3O-7352)

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Keith Brown): As the First Minister made clear to Parliament last month, this Government is determined to avoid another lost generation of young people.

The top priority of our robust more choices, more chances strategy is to help young people to stay in learning after the age of 16, since that is the best way in which to improve their long-term employability. We are doing that by rolling out the 16+ learning choices programme across the country, with the aim of offering every young person an appropriate offer of post-16 learning and support.

We are also boosting provision in order to support the efforts of local partnerships. Last week, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning announced an additional £28.1 million for colleges over the next two years.

Last month, we announced new activity agreement pilots in 10 local authorities for unemployed school leavers and, prior to that, we announced nearly £10 million for the inspiring Scotland project, which involves 23 voluntary organisations that are ready to deliver more opportunities and support for particularly vulnerable 14 to 19-year-olds.

Margaret Smith: I welcome much of the work that is being done by the Government. However, does the minister agree with the Scottish Training Federation that the 16+ learning choices programme lacks a means of engaging effectively with members of the training provider network—particularly work-based learning providers—and that the decision to stop Careers Scotland from handling school-leaver vacancies has left a gap in vacancy matching that must be addressed by, for example, the setting up of an apprenticeship vacancy-matching service and more personalised careers advice for young people who are likely to find themselves not in employment, education or training?

Keith Brown: I do not agree with Margaret Smith's first point. The 16+ learning choices programme is extremely effective and has been well received by the partners with whom we have been in discussion. Indeed, it was formulated with their input.

There have been gaps in provision for a number of years, but we are working to address that. The initial response to the 16+ learning choices programme and the input that we have had from partners suggest that those gaps will quickly be filled. Given that we have entered an unprecedented recession, it is a difficult time for the more choices, more chances strategy and the 16+ initiative, but we believe that both projects will be effective in limiting the effect of the recession and in ensuring that young people in the relevant categories are well placed to come out of it with the necessary skills and opportunities.

Housing (Fife)

3. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what percentage of the estimated £53.8 million in increased funding in housing investment for Scotland from the United Kingdom budget will be allocated to Fife. (S3O-7320)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): Ministers will decide in due course how the consequential from the UK budget will be allocated.

Marilyn Livingstone: The minister will be aware of the deep and growing concern of Fife Housing Association Alliance in my Kirkcaldy constituency about the impact of the 2009-10 allocation. There

is an overwhelming need to invest in housing in Kirkcaldy and, indeed, in all mid-Fife. We cannot understand why we are seeing a real drop in investment when other areas are seeing real increases. Given the seriousness of the situation, will the minister agree to an urgent meeting with me and representatives from Fife Housing Association Alliance to discuss the matter?

Alex Neil: For the record, I point out that there has been a 13 per cent increase in the allocation to Fife housing associations this year, and that a further £1.6 million is allocated through the council house second homes fund for investment in affordable housing in Fife. However, I acknowledge the points that Marilyn Livingstone has made and I am more than happy to meet her and the housing associations to discuss the situation.

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): The minister is aware of the representations that I have made to him about the housing need and the level of housing investment to housing associations in Fife. I would be grateful for his assurance that he will carefully consider that need and the level of investment that is required.

Also, will the minister take the opportunity to congratulate Fife Council on acquiring last week the first new council houses in Fife for more than 20 years?

Alex Neil: I am delighted to take the opportunity to congratulate Fife Council on that wonderful announcement last week. I hope that we will see many more such announcements, not only in Fife but throughout the country, during the rest of the year.

I hear what both Marilyn Livingstone and Tricia Marwick are saying, and I am happy to invite both members to a meeting with the housing associations to discuss the situation.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Question 4 was not lodged.

Tenant Rights (Eviction)

5. Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what rights tenants have when facing eviction as a result of their landlord defaulting on a property's mortgage. (S3O-7315)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): If a private landlord defaults on a mortgage, the tenant's rights depend on whether the landlord obtained the lender's consent to the tenancy and on the terms of the tenancy agreement. In any case, there is a statutory obligation on the creditor to notify the occupier of the property by recorded delivery that enforcement action is under way. Failure to do so invalidates the action. The creditor must also notify the local

authority when it takes steps to repossess the property, to allow the local authority to offer appropriate support or advice to the tenant.

Hugh Henry: I thank the minister for that full reply. Will he condemn landlords who collect rent, including rent that is paid through housing benefit, but fail to make mortgage payments, thereby exposing families to eviction? Will he investigate abuses of the data protection legislation whereby mortgage lenders are refusing to provide legitimate information to those who seek to help families who are threatened with eviction?

Alex Neil: I have every sympathy with the points that Hugh Henry makes. I am aware of a particular case in the Paisley area, which was mentioned in the *Paisley Daily Express* last week.

The repossessions working group, which reported earlier this week, said that the problem is complex and that there is a need more fully to evaluate it and potential solutions. One option would be to do what happens down south, which would be to guarantee tenancies for a minimum of two months after a repossession. As part of our consideration of the work of the repossessions working group, we will seriously consider the need for further protection of tenants who find themselves in the situation that Hugh Henry describes.

School Building Programme

6. Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it remains committed to matching the previous Administration's school building programme brick for brick. (S3O-7318)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): Yes. More than 150 school rebuilding or refurbishment projects have already been completed since May 2007. That exceeds by some margin the previous Administration's committed schools programme, which, under the partnership agreement for a better Scotland, was to renew 100 more schools by 2009, following on from what had been delivered up to the end of 2006. We anticipate that 250 schools will have been completed by 2011.

Since May 2007, 50,000 pupils have benefited from moving into new, state-of-the-art classrooms, and further investment will lift another 50,000 pupils out of crumbling classrooms in the lifetime of this Parliament.

Next Wednesday, I will make a statement to Parliament about the next part of our school building programme, which will involve working with local authorities to take forward capital investment through the Scottish Futures Trust, as we said we would. I trust that that will be warmly welcomed across the Parliament.

Andy Kerr: That model will be warmly welcomed, when the cabinet secretary finally comes up with it. She will acknowledge that it will be a public-private partnership hybrid that is closely based on the non-profit-distributing model that was introduced by the previous Administration. Does she still stand by page 19 of her party's 2007 election manifesto, on which it said that it would introduce a not-for-profit trust? I would like a yes or no answer.

In recent times, the Federation of Master Builders, the Scottish Building Federation, the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, the Scottish Council for Development and Industry and the Confederation of British Industry have all condemned the Scottish Futures Trust. To that list we can now add the Scottish National Party councillors and members of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities who have said that the Government's plans "lack substance", that the Government is "not in any position" to fund new projects and that, although it has promised a new way to deliver, it has not yet delivered anything. SNP councillors have said that the Scottish Futures Trust is bust.

The Presiding Officer: Question, please.

Andy Kerr: Will the cabinet secretary acknowledge that the proposal that she will bring to the Parliament next week will involve a PPP hybrid and that it will not measure up to her party's manifesto commitment?

Fiona Hyslop: I think that the statement that I will make next Wednesday will be welcomed. The member is very good at complaining but not very good at congratulating this Government on its £2 billion-worth of investment in schools, which will support tens of thousands of jobs in the construction industry and, more importantly, will give youngsters the opportunity to learn in well-built schools, thereby improving their learning experience.

I look forward to the member's questions next Wednesday. Perhaps he will join us in congratulating the Scottish Futures Trust and COSLA on working with the Government to provide the school estate projects and the school estate strategy that will take us forward in future years.

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): Does the minister's brick-for-brick commitment extend to the planned new Dunfermline high school? In particular, does it extend to the replacement of the swimming pool that is used by thousands of pupils and members of the public every week?

Fiona Hyslop: Quite clearly, decisions about which schools are progressed are for local authorities to take, but we should welcome Fife Council's planned £126 million investment in

schools, just as we should welcome the investment in schools by South Lanarkshire Council of £850 million and North Lanarkshire Council of £180 million, and Aberdeenshire Council's planned investment of £130 million.

Andy Kerr: That is nothing to do with you.

Fiona Hyslop: The £2 billion-worth of capital investment that is being provided to local authorities to support capital projects is very much part of this Government's budget. I distinctly remember that Labour rejected it when the Government put forward its first budget.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): Does the minister agree that Fife Council's decision to renege on its commitment to a new school in Kirkcaldy east is totally reprehensible? Will she make representations to the council on the need for a new school in what is an extremely deprived part of my constituency?

Fiona Hyslop: I am pleased to hear that Fife Council has greatly enhanced the school building programme of its predecessor thanks to the support that this Government has provided. I cannot pre-empt any statements or decisions that any council might make following my statement to Parliament next week, but I think that the prospects for the school building programme in Fife and, indeed, across Scotland will be greatly enhanced by the support that is given by this Government and the Scottish Futures Trust.

Court Fines

7. Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what the total amount of fines imposed by Scottish courts was, excluding those paid by civil diligence, in the past three financial years. (S3O-7292)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The total amount of financial penalties imposed by the High Court and sheriff courts in the past three financial years, excluding those cases in which civil diligence has been ordered, was £55 million.

Bill Aitken: How much of that £55 million of monetary penalties remains unpaid?

Kenny MacAskill: The recovery of fines imposed by the sheriff courts has been consistently high. Over the past three years, 83 per cent of offenders have paid. Of the total figure, including civil diligence, 77 per cent has already been collected for fines imposed since 2005. In addition, 6 per cent is in the process of being collected in instalments; 10 per cent was discharged by a sheriff through alternative sentences such as supervised attendance orders or imprisonment; and 7 per cent is in arrears and will be the focus of targeted sanctions by the

newly brought-in fines enforcement officers, who have a variety of powers to ensure that fines imposed are paid.

National Carers Strategy

8. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will publish the national carers strategy for Scotland. (S3O-7345)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Government expects to publish its carers strategy for Scotland early in 2010.

Alison McInnes: A carers week survey recently highlighted the shocking number of carers who have been pushed to extreme levels of stress and depression as a result of caring. Almost three quarters of carers say they feel that they have reached breaking point.

One of the specified commitments in the local government concordat is that progress will be made towards the delivery of 10,000 extra respite weeks a year, at home and in care homes. Will the minister quantify the progress that councils have made on that commitment over the past two years? Is she satisfied with the current provision throughout Scotland?

Nicola Sturgeon: The Government acknowledges the pressures under which carers operate and the enormous contribution that carers make to providing services in Scotland. That is why this Government has attached such a high priority to improving services for carers.

Alison McInnes is right to draw attention to the Government's commitment to provide an additional 10,000 respite weeks. That is a specific commitment in the concordat, and progress is being made. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities will monitor progress in each of the 32 local authority areas and report to the Scottish Government annually on a Scotland-wide basis.

I assure Alison McInnes and other members that the delivery of that commitment is absolutely crucial. We will be keeping a close eye on it, and we will keep Parliament fully updated.

Legal Aid Rules

9. Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answer to question S3O-6290 by Kenny MacAskill on 19 March 2009, in which he stated that he would be more than happy to have discussions with representatives of Scotland's law centres, including Paisley Law Centre, whether he has now met with law centre representatives, and, if not, when such meetings will take place. (S3O-7299)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): I wrote to Angus McIntosh of Castlemilk Law and Money Advice Centre on 4 June, inviting him and his colleagues from the Scottish Association of Law Centres to meet me. The date of the meeting has not yet been fixed.

Ms Alexander: I notice that the cabinet secretary wrote after my question was submitted, but I am grateful that that has now happened.

In today's press, Mike Dailly suggests that we have only half the solution unless we deal with the issue of access to legal aid. Civil legal aid is required in repossession cases. Will the cabinet secretary undertake to report back urgently to Parliament on the matter? If Parliament is in recess, will he put the outcome of his discussions into the Scottish Parliament information centre as soon as possible?

Kenny MacAskill: This Government acknowledges the problems that many people in Scotland are facing as a result of the recession. That is why we have extended the eligibility criteria for legal aid to record levels—levels that are far superior to anything offered by the Administration of which Ms Alexander was a member, and far superior to what is available south of the border.

This Government is meeting all its obligations to deal with Scots who find themselves in debt and financial difficulties, but we do not have the powers to deal with consumer lending rates. I note that the member does not seem to raise questions with Baron Mandelson. It is scandalous that Scotland remains one of the few jurisdictions in which there is no maximum cap on the lending rate that can be charged. The Government is required to deal with people who suffer through debt and bankruptcy; meanwhile, the Labour Government down south fails to protect people who are targeted by sub-prime lenders or whoever else.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general questions. Before we come to First Minister's question time, members will wish to join me in welcoming to the gallery His Excellency Iztok Jarc, the ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia. *[Applause.]*

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-1764)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): A range of activities to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland. However, I will find time to congratulate the Cabinet Secretary for Justice on the fact that there are now 17,048 police officers working in Scotland. Although there was some scepticism in the Labour Party about such a number being reached, I know that Iain Gray will welcome that.

Iain Gray: Eight months ago, Labour called for specific action to help Scottish families who face repossession of their homes. In England and Wales, Labour introduced a duty on courts and lenders to make repossession absolutely the last resort but, for eight months, the First Minister and his deputy have refused to give Scots the same protection. Only a few weeks ago, a complacent Nicola Sturgeon said:

"I simply don't accept the proposition that homeowners in Scotland are any more vulnerable to repossession than homeowners in other parts of the UK."

Will the First Minister admit that his deputy was wrong when she said that?

The First Minister: Nicola Sturgeon established the repossessions group to advise ministers and to ensure that Scottish home owners and families have the best possible protection. I find it extraordinary that, when Nicola Sturgeon has accepted the recommendation of the group that she established and has bolstered the protection for Scottish families, the Labour Party does not think that that is something to be welcomed and encouraged. It should welcome that, as it should welcome every other scheme that has been introduced by the Government, many of which—I will read out a list, if Iain Gray wants—are substantially in advance of anything that has been done south of the border.

Iain Gray: The repossessions group has concluded that Nicola Sturgeon was wrong; that is why it has made the recommendations that it has made. It has been eight months since Labour called for those measures. In only half that time, 500 families in Glasgow alone have lived through the fear and anxiety of a repossession case in court. That is not scaremongering—that is fact.

Behind every repossession, there is a real-life story of lives turned inside out, children uprooted

and their education disrupted, and couples struggling to stay together. There are now almost 9,000 families in Scotland in temporary accommodation, which is 11 per cent more than last year. In our newspapers, we see house auctions booming. How many of the properties for auction were family homes? Why has it taken the First Minister and his deputy eight months to act?

The First Minister: I will correct Iain Gray on a few things. What happened south of the border was a pre-action protocol. He will be familiar with the words of district judge Robert Jordan, the chairman of the Civil Justice Council's housing and land committee, who drafted the protocol. In a press release in October, he said:

"The protocol does not change the courts' limited powers to deal with these cases."

What has been recommended by the group that was set up by Nicola Sturgeon is a change in legislation that will give Scottish families better protection. I am sure that that will be welcomed across the chamber.

In that atmosphere of cross-party unity, I will resist pointing out that families throughout the country would not be facing repossession if it were not for the manifest failures of the Labour Government at Westminster.

Iain Gray: It is true that, on the letters page of today's *Herald*, Nicola Sturgeon finally promises to take some action. I am glad that the lady was for turning, but she has not turned far enough. The letter next to hers, from Mike Dailly of the Govan Law Centre, explains exactly what is needed: free representation for those facing repossession or eviction and changes to the rules of the mortgage-to-rent scheme to make it work. Mr Dailly describes what could be

"the best prevention of homelessness service in the world."

That would be something to be proud of. Will the First Minister promise to take those measures in addition to the ones that have been promised by Nicola Sturgeon?

The First Minister: As Iain Gray well knows, we have introduced a range of measures to improve the housing position in Scotland, including a new generation of council house building, as opposed to the total of six houses that were built under the previous Labour Administration.

Iain Gray says that we should have the best housing legislation in the world, and I accept that that has been a long-term aspiration of his. In fact, he mentioned it in his leadership campaign last August—he said that his party had introduced the

"the best homelessness legislation in the world, but we didn't build the housing to make it work".

The aspiration of this Government is not only to have the best housing legislation in the world but to build the homes to make it effective.

Iain Gray: I do not know why the First Minister insists on quoting my words back to me. Yes I said it and yes I meant it, but the fact is that we built more social rented houses than he is building. That was still not enough, but it was more. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

Iain Gray: I am sorry that the First Minister will not see fit to take the best possible measures, which Mike Dailly has suggested, but I am glad that he is now committed to changing the law to give families in Scotland more protection when they are faced with repossession. However, eight months of procrastination means that he has not left enough time to change the law before the end of the current parliamentary term. We can argue about the figures, but every day that we delay means that more Scottish families will lose their homes. I do not want that, and—putting party politics aside—I do not believe that the First Minister wants that either. I want to help.

If the First Minister will task his civil servants with preparing the amendments today, Labour members will come back during the summer recess to vote the law through as soon as possible so that we do not have to wait until September. Will SNP members do the same?

The First Minister: We will move expeditiously, and I welcome the Labour Party's commitment to assist with that legislation—a commitment that I am sure will be reflected among members on all sides of the chamber.

I am not surprised that Iain Gray says that he does not want to argue about the numbers, because I have the numbers here: it is an incontestable fact that, in terms of local authority and social landlord housing, more social housing is being built under this Government than in any year of the previous Labour Administration.

Iain Gray did not at any stage in his line of questioning or his criticism of the Government accept in any sense that we have just had elections in Scotland—and I understand why. He quoted Mike Dailly of the Govan Law Centre, but what about the people of Govan who voted last week in the European elections? I know that Iain Gray might have been too busy wondering why the people of East Lothian voted in the way that they did, but the people of Govan gave a resounding vote of confidence to this Government, because we build the houses in Scotland.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S3F-1765)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the Prime Minister in the near future.

Annabel Goldie: There are currently almost 12,500 people in Scotland who have not paid one penny of their fines, and the people of Scotland are currently owed £8 million by fine defaulters. Equally alarmingly, the consistent rate at which the problem is escalating will mean that by the end of the Scottish National Party Government's term in office the taxpayer will be owed approximately £30 million. That does not even take into account the SNP's soft-touch-Scotland approach, which will of course mean more fines. Does the First Minister think that that level of unpaid fines is acceptable? What is he doing about it?

The First Minister: A range of measures are being introduced to assist in the uptake and payment of fines. I point out to Annabel Goldie, as I have done before, that although I do not think that the current rates are satisfactory they are rather better than the rates for the payment of fines under the previous Conservative Administration.

I cannot accept Annabel Goldie's general criticism of the position of the judiciary and the legal position in Scotland. She of all people should be welcoming the record numbers of police in Scotland today; she of all people should be welcoming the fact that we have the lowest rate of recorded crime for a quarter of a century; and she of all people should be recognising the Crown Office's substantial successes in pursuing some difficult prosecutions. The fact that in all these areas Scotland's justice system is working effectively should be welcomed by members in all parts of the chamber.

Annabel Goldie: If the First Minister were to be fined for every occasion he did not answer a question, all our fiscal problems would be resolved in an instant.

The figures show an explosion in unpaid fines over the past two years, and the Government's response has been to send out more than 57,000 warning letters and issue nearly 4,500 court citations and more than 14,000 enforcement orders. Instead of having this vast bureaucracy not collect money at vast expense to the taxpayer, why does the Government not get the money in by deducting fines directly from earnings and benefits? After all, fines cannot be some sort of voluntary, optional IOU to the taxpayer.

The First Minister: I wonder whether Annabel Goldie is fully familiar with the action that has been

taken. We introduced fines enforcement officers in March 2008 as a deliberate policy measure to deal with previous low payment rates. The enforcement sanctions are working; indeed, we are accelerating their use. Already more than 45,000 enforcement orders, more than 3,000 benefit deduction orders and almost 600 earnings arrestment orders have been granted or issued by the courts. If the member is familiar with those facts, why has she not mentioned them and welcomed the substantial action that has been taken to deal with the problem that she has identified?

Of course, if Annabel Goldie contests any of those facts, I will be delighted to debate the issue next week or any suitable occasion. However, given that those are the facts and that that action is being taken, does she not welcome such moves to confront and defeat the problem that she has identified?

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-1766)

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

Tavish Scott: Does the First Minister recognise the serious impact that the loss of Setanta income could have on Scottish football clubs? For some, it could mean the end. Setanta's deal is worth £13.5 million a year to the Scottish Premier League and, for some smaller clubs, the income from television represents more than 60 per cent of their turnover. It means the difference between being a Premier League football club and bankruptcy. What engagement has the Scottish Government had on this important issue?

The First Minister: I am quite certain that, when I meet the chief executive of the Scottish Football Association this afternoon, the issue will be discussed.

Like every football fan in Scotland, I have been following and am extremely concerned by this story, but it is not immediately apparent to me that a Government intervention during the current commercial negotiations will be effective. What the Government has done to support the SFA and Scotland's other football organisations is well documented, including, along with Willie Haughey, being part of the sponsorship of this year's Scottish cup and distributing proceeds of crime money to a variety of football training schemes and development work at grass-roots level. If Tavish Scott can see any way for the Government to intervene effectively in this matter, I will certainly consider it and discuss it with the football authorities.

Tavish Scott: I am sure that the First Minister is aware that the Office of Communications, the broadcasting regulator, is about to release a report on the pay TV market which was undertaken following complaints from Setanta and others about BSkyB's near monopoly. If there is no market, the monopoly pays peanuts, which is bad news for football clubs, players and, above all, fans. If Setanta folds in Scotland, there will be a Dutch auction for the TV rights and the current £13.5 income to Scottish football could drop below £5 million. If that is not bad enough, Clydesdale Bank's sponsorship could also be reviewed if the TV cameras are switched off. If Setanta goes bust, will the Government get involved in making the case for the Scottish Premier League to be broadcast on free-to-air TV? Is such a move not better than pay TV having the rights to the game but using its monopoly to pay next to nothing?

The First Minister: As Tavish Scott knows, I have ventilated my opinions about Scottish international matches being shown on terrestrial television—I think that that is a right and entitlement that people should have. However, I am not immediately aware of how moving the football rights from pay-to-view to free-to-air television will enhance or improve the clubs' financial position.

The reason why the games are on pay-to-view television in the first place is to enhance the clubs' financial position. The issue is of serious import and the concerns are legitimate. I am happy to have discussions and, if Tavish Scott wants to present to me a substantial idea on how to improve the Scottish Premier League's negotiating position or on how to improve the workings of the market to effect substantial revenue into the Scottish market, I commit myself to discussing it with the football authorities. If there is a role for Government in the matter and we can identify it, the Government will not be found wanting in kicking that ball into the net.

The Presiding Officer: Several members want to ask important constituency questions. I ask members to keep the questions and answers as brief as possible, so that I can get as many of the questions in as possible.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Is the First Minister aware that several hundred crew members of Philippine nationality work on boats that fish off the west coast of Scotland, many from the port of Mallaig? What can be done to halt the UK Border Agency's decision forcibly to repatriate Filipino crewmen, which could pose serious consequences for our fishing fleets in Scottish waters?

The First Minister: The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment has written to Phil Woolas, the Minister of State for Borders and

Immigration, to express our serious concerns and request an urgent meeting to discuss the situation. We will press for a sensible period of adjustment so that any changes to the enforcement of the existing immigration laws are managed in a way that does not jeopardise the operation of the fishing fleet.

At the fishing exhibition in May, the cabinet secretary announced the creation of a joint industry-Government new entrants working group, which met for the first time on 9 June. The group will propose ways of better promoting the attractiveness of the industry and communicating more effectively how to access the opportunities across the catching sectors, so that our fleets can become less reliant on Filipino crewmen. The group will also take forward work on the concerns about working conditions in the fleet.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): Given that business, tourism and information technology are central to the Edinburgh economy, is the First Minister as appalled as I am that Edinburgh's Telford College, in my constituency, is talking about axing most of the teaching staff in its departments on those subjects in addition to support staff throughout the college? Will he intervene in that desperate situation, and will he ensure that Telford College gets a fair share of the Westminster consequentials that were announced for further education last week, along with corresponding bursary support, so that more, rather than fewer, students can be taught?

The First Minister: The constituency member is correct that the consequentials were announced last week. They will be distributed by the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council. He will be aware that the tourism sector has been identified in relation to modern apprenticeships and work with colleges, and he will also be aware that colleges have benefited substantially from the accelerated capital investment that the Government has put in place. Although he will welcome that investment and the current situation, like me he will no doubt be looking forward with trepidation to the cuts—whether of £500 million, £1 billion or 2 per cent in real terms—that might well be on offer from a Tory or Labour Government at Westminster. That is exactly why we need political power in this Parliament, so that we do not have that perspective from either of those Westminster parties.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The investigation into Highlands and Islands Enterprise's procurement of contracts from its chairman's own company has resulted in 10 recommended courses of action to address the admitted weaknesses in HIE's systems. Will the First Minister ensure that all quangos in Scotland

follow fair, open and accountable procurement procedures?

The First Minister: Yes, I will. The investigation confirmed that the contracts with Rocket Science (UK) were fully transparent and were awarded following proper procurement procedures. Ministers are satisfied that Willie Roe carried out his role as chair of HIE in a way that is entirely consistent with his terms of appointment. However, to keep the professional and public roles separate and to avoid any perception of a conflict of interest, Mr Roe will step down as chair of Rocket Science and sell any shares by the end of June. That is a sensible way in which to proceed. Any lessons from the investigation of the affair will, of course, be applied throughout the public sector in Scotland.

Lung Cancer

4. Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what plans the Scottish Government has to improve the outcomes for people with lung cancer. (S3F-1782)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Last October, we published "Better Cancer Care, An Action Plan" to improve cancer care in Scotland and outcomes for all those with a cancer diagnosis, including those with lung cancer. We established a Scottish cancer task force to oversee the delivery of that action plan, supported local and national awareness-raising campaigns and provided funding for new quick reference guidelines to support more effective referrals by general practitioners.

The latest statistics show that more than 95 per cent of lung cancer patients who were diagnosed between July and December last year were treated within 62 days of their urgent referral. That means that we are meeting the cancer waiting times target for the first time in the history of the Parliament. Stopping smoking, of course, is the single most important thing that an individual can do to reduce their risk of lung cancer and the Government has made significant progress towards creating a smoke-free Scotland. For example, 50,122 quit attempts were made last year, which is an increase of 14 per cent on the previous year. I am sure that all parliamentarians will welcome that progress.

Ian McKee: I acknowledge the importance of early detection of the disease. The First Minister will be aware that, in the field of cancer treatment, much progress over the years has come by small incremental benefits rather than by the discovery of an instant cure, yet the cost per quality-adjusted life year measurement that is used by the Scottish Medicines Consortium sometimes prevents so-called end-of-life medicines from being made available to patients in Scotland. What assurances

can the First Minister give that the modifiers that the consortium recently announced will be successful in that regard?

The First Minister: The SMC has a two-stage process. In the first stage, the new drugs committee provides scientific examination of the evidence submitted by the manufacturer of the drug in question, with detailed reviews by health economists, pharmacists and clinical expert advisers. It is at that stage that the evidence on the quality-adjusted life year or other health economic evidence is considered.

In the second stage, the full consortium examines the reviews and considers any submissions from the patient and public involvement group, any additional clinical information and current practice in Scotland. It then considers whether any of the modifiers apply. The modifiers are well known, are published on the website and include evidence of benefit to both life quality and life expectancy, focusing on the small increments that Ian McKee just mentioned. Where the submissions provide evidence of benefits at that stage, the modifiers will be used.

Scottish Futures Trust

5. Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government is content with the progress that the Scottish Futures Trust is making. (S3F-1771)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Yes, indeed. Last week saw the publication of the SFT's business plan for 2009-10, which the Scottish Government endorses. The plan sets out ambitious and achievable objectives that the SFT intends to deliver over the coming 10 months, including support for specific projects valued at over £2.7 billion. As the member will be aware, next week the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning will make a statement on the Scottish Futures Trust and the next phase of our school building programme. At that point, Mr Kerr might or—I know him well—might not choose to welcome the progress that is being made.

Andy Kerr: As we all know, the First Minister's contentment knows no bounds. Perhaps less content are the 20,000 construction workers in Scotland who have lost their jobs as a result of the Government's inaction and the 15,000 or so people who face unemployment because of that inaction. They are not sitting at home with supercilious grins on their faces; they are out looking for jobs as a result of this Government's inaction.

I will welcome progress if the First Minister is happy to be clear on the following three points. Does he share the view of his Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, who

described the Scottish Futures Trust as being part of the public-private partnership family? Does he share the views of Mark Hellowell—often quoted by the First Minister—who said that the Scottish Futures Trust model is more expensive than PPP and “a minor variant” of the private finance initiative model? Alternatively, does he stand by the commitment on page 19 of his manifesto, of which I will remind him, that

“we will introduce a not-for-profit Scottish Futures Trust”?

Is that what we will see next week? A simple yes or no would suffice.

The First Minister: I cannot give a “simple yes or no” to three questions. If Andy wants a yes or no answer, he has to ask one question. Let me see whether I can help him. He was worried and asking about the expense of the Scottish Futures Trust. I tell him that it cannot possibly be as expensive as PFI/PPP. I have in my hand what we will call Kerr’s bill or Andy’s account—the list of payments that will have to be made.

The Presiding Officer: First Minister, I must remind you that I have always asked for proper names to be used in the chamber, please.

The First Minister: Andy Kerr’s account is a list of the payments that the Scottish Government and local authorities will have to make to 2041-42. Those payments are already committed to. Labour boasts about building schools and hospitals, but the reality is that it did not pay for a single one of them. The other reality is that we have paid over the odds for every PFI/PPP hospital, as in the well-versed example of Hairmyres hospital, where the profit has been many times the capital investment.

I looked at Andy Kerr’s press release from last week—I had to look at it because there was not much uptake elsewhere. I did not like its selective quotation about the loss of construction jobs, which he mentioned again today. It is clear that construction is under severe pressure—that might be something to do with Gordon Brown’s recession. However, in the past three quarters, the construction industry in Scotland has performed better than that throughout the UK. In the latest employment figures, far from being down by 20,000, construction employment in Scotland as at December last year was up by 1 per cent.

I know that figures are difficult for PFI enthusiasts, but perhaps Andy Kerr will dwell on my answers. Next time round, perhaps he should ask just one question.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The SFT’s website said “coming soon” this morning, so at least something is under construction by the SFT.

Page 17 of the SFT’s business plan, to which the First Minister referred, says:

“SFT does not itself, at this stage, have capital or revenue funding to support infrastructure investment”.

However, Fiona Hyslop told the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee in June 2007 that there would be “futures-trust funded” schools. Will Futures Trust-funded schools be built or was she misleading Parliament?

The First Minister: The cabinet secretary will make a statement next week, but I am delighted by the quotation that the member chose to read out. Let us look at page 7 of the business plan. I agree that the first half of the sentence says:

“SFT does not currently control any of the capital budget or have any of its own sources of funding for infrastructure investment”.

However, it is a pity that the member did not mention the second half of the sentence, which says:

“although this will change as projects, including the schools project, are announced.”

I am sure that people who come to the chamber and quote half a sentence will be among those who, once they have heard the statement next week, will queue up with their local authorities to take advantage of the schools programme that the cabinet secretary will announce.

Class Sizes (Industrial Action)

6. Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): To ask the First Minister what discussions the Scottish Government has had with the Educational Institute of Scotland about the threat of industrial action by teachers regarding the Scottish National Party’s manifesto pledge to reduce class sizes. (S3F-1781)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Government has regular conversations and discussions with the EIS, as members would expect. I remind Margaret Smith that the EIS conference voted for industrial action to be considered in 2004 and 2006, under the previous Administration. Perhaps the difference now is that class sizes are indeed at a record low.

Margaret Smith: The First Minister knows that that was not the manifesto commitment that the SNP gave. He also knows that the EIS’s general secretary, Ronnie Smith, challenged the Government’s record on class sizes last week. It is worth repeating his comments. He said:

“If nationally, parties make manifesto promises, they must have the tools, the means of securing delivery. They cannot hide behind soft, touchy-feely understandings with councils or periodic bi-lateral chats and visitations. It is clear that some councils see themselves as bigger than the government when it comes to running schools and determining education policy”.

Does the First Minister agree with Mr Smith? Does the First Minister share his and our scepticism that the election promise on class sizes will ever be delivered through the discredited soft, touchy-feely concordat?

The First Minister: I understand the frustration of EIS members at the rate of progress towards lower class sizes in some councils, but I cannot believe that Margaret Smith believes that going back to the old confrontation between Government and councils is the way forward. Will she not acknowledge that, when the EIS debated the issue on 10 June 2006 and then voted to consider industrial action, the way forward at that time was not to have an atmosphere of confrontation? There is much more chance of success through the concordat in an atmosphere of co-operation.

At 13.1 pupils per teacher, the pupil teacher ratio is at an historic low in Scotland, and for a second year running. It is also true that the rate is well below the rates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Although, the rate of progress towards the target of 18 pupils per class in primary 1 to 3 has not been as rapid as we would expect in some council areas—indeed, an element of doubt remains over whether some councils believe in lower class sizes at all—nonetheless, there have been spectacular successes, which we should acknowledge. There has been a 15 per cent drop across the country in the number of primary 1 to 3 pupils in classes of over 25. In 2006, when the EIS last voted to consider industrial action, the figure was 38 per cent. Today, it is 23 per cent.

We may not have fully satisfied Margaret Smith as to the rate of progress, but at least she should acknowledge that, setting aside our aspirations for the future, the present situation is fundamentally better—indeed, it is transformed—than it was when she loyally supported an Administration that had much higher class sizes.

Larbert (Heavy Rail Freight)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-4044, in the name of Michael Matheson, on Larbert rail damage. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the serious problems being experienced by residents in the Larbert area as a result of heavy coal freight being introduced to the line; understands that this is having a damaging effect on their quality of life as well as their properties; regrets that to date Network Rail has refused to introduce a speed restriction for freight trains on the line, and believes that the problems being experienced by residents in Larbert are unacceptable.

12:33

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): I thank members who signed my motion and helped to secure time for this debate on what is an important issue for many of my constituents in the Larbert area.

The railway line was first laid in Larbert by Scottish Central Railways back in 1848. Larbert is a community with a long-standing association with the railway. Indeed, Larbert station is one of the busiest in Scotland, with links to Glasgow, Edinburgh and the north of the country.

For many of my constituents in the Larbert area, the railway is part of their lives. They are used to issues that arise from living in close proximity to a railway line. However, towards the end of 2008, residents began to express concern about the problem of significant vibration, the nature and scale of which were in excess of anything that they had previously experienced. The significant change that occurred at that time was the rerouting of heavy coal trains to Longannet power station through the Larbert area and on to the new Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine railway line. The problem that my constituents in the Larbert area were now experiencing had previously been experienced by those in the Falkirk Grahamston area—the problem had switched from one area to the other.

I recognise that there are issues concerning the Stirling to Alloa line itself, and I know that my colleagues Keith Brown and Bruce Crawford have been pursuing those on behalf of their respective constituents. However, I am sure that members will respect the fact that the motion for debate today specifically relates to the problem in the Larbert area.

I understand, as do many of my constituents, that the use of our railway has changed considerably over the years, particularly with the

increasing movement of freight on to rail. Most people welcome the fact that heavy freight is being moved from roads on to rail, as part of a responsible approach to tackling some of the environmental challenges that we face as a nation. As we change the use of our railways, we have to recognise the impact that that can have on communities who live beside them. We have a responsibility to constituents, such as mine in Larbert, whose lives have been badly affected by a sudden change of use of the line there.

To illustrate the scale of the problem, I will run through some of the noise and vibration data that have been collected by Falkirk Council's environmental health department, which were published only last week. The data reveal that coal train vibration readings are higher than those of passenger trains by a significant amount. The average vibration level for a coal train run by DB Schenker Rail (UK) Ltd is 0.075mm per second, compared with 0.025mm per second for a Freightliner coal train. The vibration range for DB Schenker coal trains is more than double that of First ScotRail passenger services or Freightliner coal trains. That raises serious questions about why one coal train operator is causing a level of vibration that is so significantly higher than that caused by another coal train operator, whose length of train is only marginally shorter.

The two extremely high vibration levels that were found by Falkirk Council were 0.091 and 0.097mm per second, and they were both recorded for DB Schenker trains that are classed as fast trains; a level of 0.041mm per second was recorded for a train that is run by the same operator and is classified as medium speed. That, I believe, demonstrates that an acceptable level of vibration could be achieved by reducing the speed of the trains concerned. The comprehensive, manned data that were collected by Falkirk Council demonstrate the extent and nature of the problem that is being caused to my constituents in the Larbert area.

Since the turn of the year, I have been in regular dialogue with Network Rail although, I must say, it has not always been on friendly terms. Its representatives attended a public meeting that I organised for my constituents in the area, and I have also held meetings with representatives of DB Schenker and Scottish Power. All those parties have a responsibility to work to find a solution to the problem and to ensure that the matter is suitably resolved.

I accept that primary responsibility for addressing the issue lies fairly and squarely with Network Rail. I also accept that Network Rail has undertaken some work on the line in the Larbert area. However, I know from the time that I spent at a polling station in Larbert last Thursday, and from

my surgery in Larbert on Monday night, that whatever Network Rail has done over the past couple of months, it has made very little difference. One of my constituents who attended my Monday evening surgery, who is deafblind and who is very sensitive to vibration, explained to me that, if anything, the problem has worsened over the past couple of months.

I recognise that the minister cannot direct Network Rail, as a private company, on what it should do to tackle the specific problem in Larbert. However, I hope that he will agree that Network Rail has a corporate and social responsibility to have the matter resolved. I believe that several options are open to Network Rail to resolve the matter. First, it could reduce the coal traffic speed through Larbert, especially at night, as Falkirk Council's data prove would make a difference.

Secondly, it could renew the track at Larbert and introduce measures that have been shown in research from around the world to mitigate vibration problems and have been used in other railway lines. Thirdly, it could request that DB Schenker use the same type of wagons as Freightliner, which the Falkirk Council data show would make a significant difference.

However, the present situation is not an option. I have constituents whose lives have been made a misery by the trains because they are unable to sleep at night and face potential damage to their property. There is growing anger and frustration in the community at Network Rail's failure to address the problem sufficiently. Unfortunately, I suspect that Network Rail thinks that, as time goes by, my constituents will just go away and will get used to the vibration problems. Let me be clear: they will not go away and neither should be they be expected to accept the problem. Network Rail, DB Schenker and Scottish Power all have a serious responsibility to tackle the problem. As I mentioned, they have a corporate and social responsibility to ensure that the issue is addressed sufficiently, and I hope that the minister will do what he can to ensure that they fulfil that responsibility.

12:41

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I congratulate Michael Matheson on securing the debate, which is important to his constituents and mine. It relates to DB Schenker's transportation from Hunterston to Longannet of coal that was previously transported either across the Forth rail bridge or by road. All who live along the line are affected.

Most people welcomed the development of the SAK railway, which has allowed the transportation of coal from Hunterston to Longannet via my

constituency. Of course, the resulting passenger transportation between Alloa and Stirling and on to Glasgow and Edinburgh has been hugely successful and has exceeded the promoter's expectations by a large margin. However, the coal trains have caused complaints from people in Larbert through Braehead, Broomridge and Riverside in Stirling to multiple locations along the line. That is a real problem. Complaints are about noise and vibration, but there is anger that the freight trains are running at night. Why is that? The original proposals for the SAK line indicated clearly that there would be no night-time running of trains. The disturbance of Michael Matheson's constituents and mine at night is causing the greatest grief.

The original impact report of 2001, which was commissioned by Clackmannanshire Council as the probable bill promoter, excluded night-time running of traffic along the line. Indeed, that report states on more than 13 occasions that the consultants, Scott Wilson, were not asked to consider the night-time running of trains. Transport Scotland must bear the responsibility for acceding to the stated objective of English Welsh and Scottish Railway—now DB Schenker—that freight would not run between 11 pm and 7 am.

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Does Richard Simpson accept that Transport Scotland has no powers to grant or deny such traffic?

Dr Simpson: That is not my point. My point is that the bill was promoted in the Parliament on a fallacious basis. The Stirling-Alloa-Kinross Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee, Clackmannanshire Council, which is in no way a rail expert, and Transport Scotland, which must surely be the expert, allowed the project to proceed on the publicly accepted assumption that there would be no night-time running of trains.

Network Rail—the successor to Railtrack, which existed when the original report was produced—has made it clear that it must allow 24/7 access if it is safe to do so and that it must allow general speed provided that it is safe. It has no requirement to consider the environmental circumstances.

We must ask the minister why there are fewer journeys per week than were envisaged in the original report. It indicated that there would only be daytime running, so why do we have night-time running?

Was a purely selfish commercial decision taken by DB Schenker that chose to ignore constituents? Some of my constituents tell me, as they tell Michael Matheson, that they and their children are frequently disturbed at night and that their lives are being ruined.

The motion refers only to Larbert, but it applies to all the sections before the new SAK line in Stirling. As Michael Matheson said, families have lived alongside the railway for more than half a century and have had no problems. However, they now have problems. They were offered no pre-operational surveys on the new heavy freight, so they do not know what damage can occur, and they cannot prove it.

Why did the minister, in answering a parliamentary question that I lodged, not know that night-time running was proposed in 2008? He said that he did not know about it until 2009, although his officials knew about it at least five months beforehand. Why has he failed to protect the public by not having any consultation on the significant change of including night-time running? He has allowed families in Michael Matheson's constituents and my constituency to be seriously disturbed by what has been in effect a betrayal of public trust by the Government and all the agencies involved.

12:46

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Michael Matheson on securing the debate. As he said, people in Larbert are facing serious problems as a result of the introduction of heavy coal freight on the rail line. It is important and right that we discuss that in Parliament.

The first members' business debate that I secured was on the development of the rail network in the Central Scotland region. The Scottish Government's efforts in that respect are to be welcomed. I refer to the electrification of the line from Glasgow to Edinburgh via Falkirk High—I am sure that Michael Matheson and other members support that—the work on the Airdrie to Bathgate link, and, of course, the opening of the Stirling-Alloa-Kinross line last year, which, as Richard Simpson said, most people welcomed. That development and the rerouting of freight trains on to that line and through Larbert have led to the difficulties that we are debating.

Let me be clear. I support the Scottish Government's efforts to encourage more passengers on to the railways and warmly welcome the reopening of the Alloa line. Indeed, in recent months I have undertaken my own surveys in Central Scotland to determine the levels of support for new passenger railway stations at Grangemouth and Ayr—I know that Michael Matheson has done the same at Bonnybridge. Those ideas have proved overwhelmingly popular, and I am pursuing them with the relevant authorities. I think that there is scope to develop our railways further and to encourage freight traffic.

It is important to increase and improve the use of rail for freight transportation, but that does not have to be done at the expense of the quality of life of people who live near rail freight lines, especially when the introduction or increasing use of freight trains was not anticipated when residents chose to make their home in the area. That seems to be the case in Larbert. Michael Matheson made it clear that people who live in the vicinity of the line there are realistic about what it is like to live next to a railway. People lived next to the line long before freight trains were introduced on it. He also said that it is a long-standing line; its history stretches back to the mid-19th century. The people of Larbert were used to living next to the rail line and then found that the use of the line changed significantly—they think that it has done so to their detriment. That is disappointing.

My understanding is that the problem is not insurmountable. All sides—residents, their elected representatives, Network Rail, Transport Scotland and the transportation companies—need to be willing to work together to find a solution. I know that Michael Matheson has been progressing the matter assiduously on behalf of the people of Larbert, whom he represents, and I wish him well in that task. I am sure that finding a solution that allows freight services to continue on the line and involves greater sympathy for local residents is not beyond the parties involved.

It is important to mention several wider issues. One reason why we want to encourage improved freight transport by rail is that there are obvious environmental benefits. It is ironic that the cause of the disruption that we are discussing is the transport of coal, which is, of course, one of the most polluting forms of energy generation. I accept and agree with the Government's position: we will continue to need traditional power generation techniques until Scotland's renewable potential is fully realised. However, I hope that, in the longer term, the need to transport coal in such a way will be reduced as our dependence on fossil fuels declines. I realise that that will be of little immediate comfort to people in Larbert who are experiencing difficulties at the moment, but the point is still worth making.

I reiterate my support for the Government's efforts to improve Scotland's railways. I restate my belief that further improvements are possible. Although we should welcome increased freight traffic by rail, it should not be at the expense of the quality of life of the people who live along our railway routes. I wish Michael Matheson well as he seeks to resolve the situation in Larbert.

12:50

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Michael Matheson on bringing this

debate to the chamber today. To put the issue in context, it is important to recognise that the transport of freight by trains is vital if we are serious about getting trucks off the roads and reducing congestion and pollution. An increase in freight on our railways is, therefore, generally to be welcomed.

The residents who live along the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine track have long accepted the line and the associated rail traffic. One resident stated that he has lived near the line for 39 years and is happy—as are most people—that the coal that is being transported is coming off the roads. However, the transport of up to 2,300 tonnes to Longannet during a single journey at night has resulted in the worst disturbance that he has ever known. That is the nub of the issue.

Although there is no question of the residents asking the carrier to stop transporting the coal during the day, there is definitely an issue with trains running every two hours throughout the night, despite pledges that no trains would run between 11 pm and 6 am, and at a speed that causes vibrations that have not only disturbed sleep patterns but have even caused whole houses to shake. That has happened despite the fact that an impact assessment that was carried out on behalf of Clackmannanshire Council originally indicated that the timetable to which I referred would be implemented. In addition, Transport Scotland, which funded the project, claimed in a press release when the SAK line opened that the timetable had been developed to minimise early morning and late evening services.

Who is responsible for the fiasco of a night service? The previous Executive, along with the Scottish Government, must accept some culpability, as both, along with Transport Scotland, the Government's executive agency, knew of the problem but have apparently been powerless to prevent the rail operator from requesting and implementing a 24-hour timetable.

Dr Simpson: The member states that the previous Executive was aware of the potential problems. That does not fit with the minister's response to my parliamentary question on the issue, which indicates that he did not know about the night running of trains until February 2009.

Margaret Mitchell: There is certainly a discrepancy. It is for the minister to elaborate on why that is the case.

Network Rail, which operates and maintains UK infrastructure, has said that it is legally obliged, as part of its operating licence, to agree to timetable requests for night-time train paths and that it cannot introduce speed restrictions on the railway network except for matters relating to operational safety.

With compensation claims now live, following the expiry of the time bar, it seems that everyone, including the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland and Network Rail, is running for cover. Meanwhile the problem remains and the residents who live along the SAK line are suffering. It is to be hoped that, in the light of the survey of noise disruption that has been undertaken by Clackmannanshire Council, which reveals peak noise levels far in excess of the 60dB threshold that has been set for England and Wales by the Department for Transport, an amicable solution can be found. All the interested parties should get together to ensure either that the night-time operation ceases completely or, at the very least—as Michael Matheson has requested—that the speed of the freight trains is reduced.

12:54

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Like other members, I congratulate Michael Matheson on securing the debate. However, I do not congratulate him on trying to make the entire blame for the problem fall on to Network Rail and on inferring from that that there is nothing that the Scottish Government can do about the situation. The reality is somewhat different.

The principle that people who are subjected to excessive noise because of night-time rail use are entitled to compensation—or grants for insulation—is actually framed in the Noise Insulation (Railways and Other Guided Transport Systems) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996/428). The regulations not only provide such a right where a new railway is opened, or where an existing line is reopened, but specify differential levels of decibels for day-time and night-time running. Therefore, it is accepted in law that people should not be subjected to such additional forms of night-time nuisance.

Michael Matheson: Will the member give way?

Des McNulty: I will develop the point before allowing the member to respond.

When the bill to reopen the line was introduced, the assumption was that there would be no night-time running, so the line went ahead on the basis that it would not infringe the 1996 regulations. However, without any form of public consultation, the company has now instituted night-time services that disrupt the sleep and peace of local people, especially those who live within 300m of the line. I do not think that that is acceptable, but the legal framework for the railway's construction does not necessarily provide a means of redress.

Michael Matheson: Does the member recognise that, as I mentioned in my speech, the Alloa line is not a new line but has always been the responsibility of Network Rail? In rerouting the

freight, the company has removed the problem from the Grahamston line—my constituents living adjacent to that line experienced a very similar problem—to a line in another part of my constituency. Neither of those lines is new. I accept that the coal needs to get to Longannet, but I want to ensure that Network Rail, which has always been responsible for the two lines in my constituency, does what is necessary to get rid of the vibration problem.

Des McNulty: I agree, and I think that the Scottish Government can help the member to do that. For example, the Scottish Government could implement the Environmental Noise (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (SSI 2006/465), under which it was supposed to introduce, by 2008, requirements on operators to produce noise maps. Such maps are required not just for railways but for airports and other sources of noise and vibration.

Another issue is that individuals might have had the right to apply for compensation—or for support to provide insulation—but do not seem to be allowed to do so because of a time-barring mechanism that was identified in an answer to a question from Richard Simpson.

Stewart Stevenson: The time bar prevents people from claiming only in the first year. People can now claim, as the time bar has been lifted.

Des McNulty: It would be helpful if people were given adequate information about their rights in the circumstances.

The minister could perhaps assist the constituents of Mr Matheson and other members if he was prepared to say what the problem is and what he can reasonably do about it. If he publicised that widely through members and through local newspapers, that might go some way towards defusing some of the anger that exists about the issue.

However, there is a wider issue about noise and vibration that is not confined to the particular circumstances in Larbert but affects my constituents who live near the airport as well as the constituents of other members. We need to take noise and vibration more seriously. Through this Parliament's legislative powers, I think that we can begin to address the problems that Michael Matheson and other colleagues have identified. We should work together to do that.

12:58

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I will first deal with a few of the points that have arisen.

In reference to a written answer in which I said that I became aware of the issue on 6 February 2009, questions have been raised about whether

previous ministers knew about the matter. I answered the parliamentary question, which asked specifically when the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change knew about the matter. I answered only in those terms. Under the protocols that exist between successive Governments, I have no knowledge as to the knowledge state of previous transport ministers, who had different job titles. That might not add light to the matter, but it explains that particular point.

Dr Simpson: Will the minister give way?

Stewart Stevenson: Let me develop a few other points first.

In any event, that matter is not one for which I can be held accountable one way or the other.

It would be useful to acknowledge that the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee said in its May 2004 report:

"It is important to note that the scope of the Bill includes only the construction of a railway between Stirling and Kincardine (via Alloa) together with associated works. It is not within the scope of the Bill for it to be amended to include matters that pertain to the operation of the railway (for example the speeds of trains or the times at which they should run)."

Having said all that, let me pose an obvious question. Do the minister and the Government think that there is a problem? The minister and the Government are perfectly prepared to acknowledge that there is a genuine concern being expressed by all members who have participated in the debate. Therefore, I want to speak in some positive terms about that.

I hasten to add that I speak as someone who, for 30 years, lived 10m from the main Edinburgh to Glasgow railway line, along which a goods train travelled at 3 o'clock every morning—I suspect, however, that that train was of lower weight than those that we are concerned with today. Of course, different people will react in different ways and will make their own accommodations with the circumstances that they are in, so I will not draw on my own experience to make any points.

I hope that the parties with whom the remedies most simply, readily and immediately lie and the parties who have, by their actions—which are legal and legitimate, within the framework in which they operate—caused us to be here are listening to the debate. They should take notice of the real concern that has been expressed by members on behalf of their constituents. I am talking, of course, of DB Schenker, Network Rail and, to some extent, Scottish Power.

Dr Simpson: I do not want to get into who knew what when, but the freedom of information inquiries make it clear that the officials knew about

the situation in September 2008, so there is a gap there.

The minister is quite right to say that we need to find a solution. Will he call a meeting of the agencies involved to try to get them together in order to agree how to alleviate the situation? Everybody is denying responsibility and saying that they will not take action.

Stewart Stevenson: We and Transport Scotland are taking action. Transport Scotland has reviewed the information that Falkirk Council has gathered and believes that there is scope for further research to be done, and work on that will begin next week. We are not using that as an excuse for delay; we simply want to ensure that we have an absolutely standardised approach to understanding what the issues are.

Michael Matheson: Is the minister indicating that Transport Scotland will undertake assessment work in the Larbert area as a result of the findings of Falkirk Council's assessment work?

Stewart Stevenson: Transport Scotland is doing work along the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine line, but there is scope for further work in Larbert. However, we have to remember that the existing line in Larbert is covered by long-standing provisions. Of course, we should also bear it in mind that the issue in Larbert exists because of the trains that are running on the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine line.

Michael Matheson made three suggestions: reducing speed, as there is a clear relationship between speed and the disruption that is caused to people's sleep and quality of life; renewing the track; and having DB Schenker consider the equipment that it uses. It is important that those issues are addressed. Neither Transport Scotland nor I have any direct powers in that regard, apart from the general power to do what Dr Simpson suggested and get people around a table and knock heads together. We are engaged with the parties concerned, and we will remain so.

If we are talking about ministerial responsibility, I would point out that the ministers who are responsible for the railway network, who might have undertaken some consultation, are Tom Harris and Andrew Adonis at Westminster. However, I am not really going to finger them, because we are looking at long-standing issues, and—alas and alack—the responsibility for the framework under which railways operate and the licence that is granted to Network Rail by the Office of Rail Regulation does not lie with this Parliament and is not within the remit of this Government. However, I agree that there is a problem and that we need to gather more information. We already have a considerable amount of information on Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine

and the effect on individual properties, but we can certainly do more to gather information in the Larbert area.

I congratulate those who have gone out and sought to ensure that we are examining the quality of the rails. Some work is already being done to consider whether the freight wagons are of the appropriate quality. The important and interesting thing that has come out of the debate is that different companies are using different kinds of wagons. We should definitely put that into the mix in understand the matter.

We should be absolutely clear that the Government understands the issue. We would certainly like to see what DB Schenker and Network Rail, in particular, can do. A number of members mentioned the speed limits. Network Rail has the power to impose speed limits only in limited circumstances. There might be a case for differential speed limits related to the weight of the train. That might be one way in which Network Rail could usefully examine the matter. I also understand that there are some signalling issues, which cause further disturbance, and Network Rail could usefully examine those.

The debate has been useful. We have not come to a conclusion and there is more to be done on the subject, but the gathering of information is key to understanding the mitigations that the parties who are responsible for creating the problem and fixing it will have to undertake. We will play our part in ensuring that they understand their responsibilities and live up to them.

13:06

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Finance and Sustainable Growth

Boath v Perth and Kinross Council

1. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)

(Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has considered the financial implications for local authorities of the Court of Session decision in the case of Boath v Perth and Kinross Council. (S3O-7287)

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Before I call the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, I point out that, as I am sure members know, the matter is still in the courts and therefore some aspects of it will be sub judice. I hope that members will be careful not to encroach on those aspects.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):

The Scottish Government is engaged with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in a joint review of the operation of the free personal and nursing care policy. The opinion that was recently issued in the case of Boath v Perth and Kinross Council is under consideration as part of that work.

David McLetchie: The decision in the case, which was announced last month, vindicates the many members of Parliament who have known for a long time that there was no confusion in the original law relating to assistance with meal preparation as an aspect of free personal care, despite the fact that the previous Scottish Executive, the present Scottish Government and COSLA all chose to pretend that that was the case. The court ruled that a proportion of the charges that Perth and Kinross Council made for its meals-on-wheels service was illegal under the original law and that the sums involved, when quantified, are to be refunded to Mr and Mrs Boath. Thirteen councils throughout Scotland are in the same situation. On the basis of the refunds from the six councils that have already done the honourable thing, I estimate that the total refunds that are due to pensioners who have been illegally charged for services in the past seven years are in the order of £20 million.

Will the cabinet secretary discuss the financial implications with the affected councils? Will he regard the financial consequences of the decision as a new funding pressure for the purposes of the concordat with local government? Will he do

everything that he can to ensure that pensioners receive the refunds to which they are entitled as a result of the decision?

John Swinney: I acknowledge the sustained interest that David McLetchie has taken in the issue, in the previous session of Parliament and in the present one. I record that point, as he has pursued the issue on several occasions. However, I must correct his narrative, in that it was the present Administration that acted, through the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2002 (Amendment to schedule 1) Order 2009, to establish absolute clarity on the issue and to ensure that there can be no dubiety. As I said in my original answer, the issue is being discussed between the Government and COSLA as part of our consideration of the free personal and nursing care policy. Obviously, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing or the Minister for Public Health and Sport will make the appropriate announcements to Parliament when that work is concluded.

The Government has a regular, on-going dialogue with local government about funding pressures and issues, which is conducted in terms of the concordat. I give Mr McLetchie the assurance that we will continue to operate in that fashion.

Local Authority Services (Budget Cuts)

2. Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive, in light of a number of local authorities announcing budget cuts, what impact this will have on services. (S3O-7323)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): It is for each local authority to allocate the total resources that are available to it on the basis of local needs and priorities, in line with its statutory obligations and jointly agreed national and local priorities and outcomes.

Tom McCabe: Even a cursory examination of Professor David Bell's recent report on the United Kingdom's budget position and its strategic implications for Scotland tells us that the cuts that we have seen so far are as nothing compared with those that are to come. We can play political knockabout regarding who is to blame, but there are no respected commentators who doubt the severity of what is to come. What action does the Scottish Government intend to take to mitigate the effects of the substantial reductions in public expenditure that are to come?

John Swinney: As is always the case, Mr McCabe marshals his arguments before the Parliament carefully and strongly, with substantial evidence. I appreciate the manner in which he advances his point of view because he recognises

as well as I do that, from any reading of the budget red book, the forthcoming perspective on public expenditure is poor, no matter what the outcome of the next United Kingdom general election. In my appearance at the Finance Committee a couple of weeks ago, I endeavoured to set out some of that detail to the committee.

Mr McCabe is absolutely right that there will be great pressures on public expenditure in the period to come. I advised the Finance Committee that, in my estimation, there will be real-terms reductions in the public spending that is available to the Scottish Government through the departmental expenditure limit. That position has been validated by Professor Bell in his analysis and has also been confirmed to varying degrees in the analysis of the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Centre for Public Policy for Regions. That means that we must address the public expenditure challenges that we face in what I hope will be a mature and considered fashion.

To answer Mr McCabe's final point, I am addressing the challenges in numerous different ways. First, the Cabinet is considering the issue actively and will continue to do so in advance of the submission to Parliament of the Government's draft budget in September of this financial year. Secondly, at the suggestion of Mr Purvis and Tavish Scott, the Government established a joint review of public expenditure involving the finance spokespeople of each party, Margo MacDonald and me to look at some of these difficult questions. The group has met on two occasions, and we will continue to meet to consider a programme of initiatives as part of our work. Thirdly, as I referred to in my response to Mr McLetchie, the Government will, of course, be engaged in detailed dialogue with local authorities as significant spenders of public money about the budget position that they face.

In relation to all aspects of the public sector, we have a public expenditure challenge to meet in 2010-11. Whatever way we look at it, we will have less money at our disposal than was planned. We must address those issues in Parliament, and I hope that we do so constructively.

Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): Given the challenges that we face, does the cabinet secretary believe that MSPs should follow the example of councillors in Aberdeen and set aside party differences to back the Scottish Government in its opposition to the £500 million of cuts to the Scottish budget that are planned by the UK Government in each of the next two years?

John Swinney: I certainly welcome that expression of unity of opinion by all members of Aberdeen City Council. We face a significant challenge in 2010-11, and we will address it in

consultation with members of this Parliament and our local authority colleagues.

I say in passing that Aberdeen City Council has had a challenging time in the past year or so. I pay tribute to the way in which the council's administration has worked with such diligence to tackle a difficult financial situation.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): In light of Maureen Watt's clear misunderstanding of the debate at Aberdeen City Council a couple of weeks ago, will the cabinet secretary acknowledge that, in fact, the opposition parties in the council took the view that the Scottish Government ought to do more to ensure that Aberdeen City Council secures its fair share of spending in future? Does he accept that Maureen Watt's proposition is wrong and that there is no all-party position on funding, whether in Aberdeen or anywhere else in the country?

John Swinney: That is a fascinating contribution to the debate and in marked contrast to Mr McCabe's mature contribution. I just wish that the back benchers would influence the front benchers, because if they did I dare say that we would make a great deal more progress on some of these difficult issues.

However, Lewis Macdonald has put his words on the record. He knows that a review of the distribution arrangements is in place. I say without in any way trying to sour the atmosphere with any politics that he also knows that I inherited the distribution formula from the Administration of which he was a member. Tackling all the questions that have been raised cannot have been much of a priority when he was sitting around the ministerial table. However, I assure him that the issues are being dealt with actively.

Banking Inquiry

3. Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will convene a meeting of all interested parties to discuss an inquiry into the banking industry in relation to protecting jobs in Scotland. (S3O-7384)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): At its meeting on 3 June 2009, the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee agreed in principle to hold an inquiry into the banking and building society sectors. The Scottish Government understands that at a future meeting the committee will consider in more detail the inquiry's remit and terms of reference. Identifying how best to undertake the inquiry is a matter for the committee. The Scottish Government will be pleased to assist the committee with its inquiry in any way.

Sandra White: I am grateful that the committee will look into the subject.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the announcement from Lloyds Banking Group that it will axe more jobs after repaying £4 billion to the Westminster Government is a slap in the face for the hard-working staff in the banking industry, and that those job losses are a direct result of the HBOS-Lloyds merger that Gordon Brown pushed through at Westminster?

John Swinney: The financial services sector has many difficulties and uncertainties. I regret very much the loss of employment in any financial services company and in any sector of the economy.

We must recognise that the banking sector must take measures to stabilise its activities. The Government's approach in all such discussions—we have regular discussions with Lloyds Banking Group and other key players in the financial services sector—is to protect employment and to protect the activity of financial services companies in Scotland.

At the same time as job losses are being announced, job gains are being announced. The Government was delighted with the recent announcements by esure and Tesco Personal Finance—the First Minister opened Tesco Personal Finance's new headquarters in Scotland just yesterday. That indicates further confidence in the financial services sector in Scotland, which is evidenced by the strong performance of many companies in that sector, notwithstanding the difficulties that our banks still face.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): In a recent debate on the banking crisis, the Scottish Government said that it would prefer the United Kingdom Government to publish advice to ministers in relation to decisions that the UK Government took. Is the Scottish Government prepared to publish the advice that the Scottish ministers received about HBOS, Lloyds Banking Group and Dunfermline Building Society?

John Swinney: The Government answers a significant number of freedom of information requests. We also publish a colossal amount of information. I do not think that the Government could be criticised for publishing not much information. The last time I looked, we were publishing a hang of a lot of information. On freedom of information requests, we endeavour to publish as much information as we can.

As Mr Purvis well knows, the publication of advice to ministers might affect the commercial operations of organisations and might involve other considerations that ministers must bear in mind. However, I assure him of the Government's

commitment to openness and transparency. We try to issue as much information as we can on all such questions.

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): I am sure that Mrs White agrees that the people of Scotland and the employees of Lloyds and HBOS would have had an even bigger slap in the face if the Government had not stepped in to rescue that bank and the depositors at not just Lloyds-HBOS, but the Royal Bank of Scotland.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that when the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee holds its inquiry, it should spend its time looking forward rather than backward? *[Interruption.]* Oh dear—Scottish National Party members do not seem to be keen on doing something positive. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

David Whitton: The committee should look forward rather than backward, because we know that job losses are coming in the banking sector and that they will involve skilled workers who could be deployed elsewhere in the financial services industry. If we can combine the operation of the partnership action for continuing employment teams with the banks that are involved, I hope that we can redeploy many of the workers who face redundancy.

John Swinney: I am glad that there is nobody in the press gallery for what is about to come: I agree with Mr Whitton on the question that he raised. I hope that the inquiry will be forward looking, because there are many challenges for the financial services sector in the period ahead—*[Interruption.]* Mr Whitton is pointing at the members of the public in the public gallery; I hope that all of them are listening. I am sure that I will get a good going over for what I am about to say. Notwithstanding that, I will plough on.

There are also many strengths in the financial services sector, and we can build on them to overcome the difficulties that we have experienced. I am very concerned to ensure that that, all for the sake of 12 to 18 months when the banking sector took its eye off the ball, we do not undermine 300 years of excellent tradition and expertise in financial services in Scotland.

I hope that the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee will concentrate on those forward-looking perspectives and set out the arguments. The Government remains very ready to listen to the arguments and find ways in which we can more actively strengthen the sector in Scotland.

We recently published the annual report of the Financial Services Advisory Board, in which the board acknowledged the difficulties but then set out an agenda for the way forward. I hope that the

committee inquiry can be taken forward in that spirit.

The Presiding Officer: I am keen to bring in supplementaries wherever possible. If we are to make progress on the number of questions that we get through, both questions and answers will have to be briefer than they have been thus far.

A9 (Improvements)

4. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what budgetary provision it will make for improvements to the A9 over the next five years. (S3O-7314)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The current three-year budget settlement does not extend beyond 2010-11. The planned improvements to the A9 are set out in the Scottish motorway and trunk road programme and published on Transport Scotland's website.

Rhoda Grant: The minister is building overtaking lanes instead of stretches of dual carriageway—overtaking lanes that will have to be dug up when dual carriageways are built. That is a clear indication that the minister has no timescale for dualling the A9, and no money and no plans to do so. *The Press and Journal* reported that, when asked how long it would be before the A9 was dualled, the minister said, "I will be alive." Methuselah springs to mind, but—

The Presiding Officer: Question, please.

Rhoda Grant: In the interests of getting a clearer timescale, will the minister tell the chamber how long he expects to live?

Stewart Stevenson: I realise that I have created a hostage to my future good health in the somewhat off-the-cuff remark that I made that the A9 will be dualled within my lifetime, of which I am absolutely certain. I am, of course, equally certain that dualling the A9 would not have been done within my lifetime if it had been left to any previous transport minister. We are continuing to improve the A9 and to improve safety. Interestingly, the W2+1 sections that we are creating have a substantially better safety record than dual carriageways in some parts of the network.

We are extending the dual carriageway at Crubenmore. I was delighted to be at Carrbridge last week to open a £2.7 million upgrade and, at Bankfoot, there are £2.7 million of junction improvements. The strategic transport projects review has £1 billion of investment for Inverness and the north. That is unprecedented in anybody's lifetime.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): In light of concerns about safety on the A9, will the minister look at the Wellbeck Estate proposal for

small-scale improvements at Berriedale that have the support of the freight transport companies in the far north? In addition, will he consider providing a route around Thurso's town centre to Scrabster harbour in preparation for the likely increase in container traffic?

Stewart Stevenson: I think that the member is aware that I have visited Berriedale. I am very aware of the issues in that regard. A number of options are available to us, and they are being considered.

Scrabster is a key port that faces the prospect of real economic success with the terrific expansion that we expect to see involving tidal power in the Pentland firth. I will engage further with the authorities at Scrabster as is necessary in the coming months and years.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): There are a number of welcome improvement works to the A9, such as the upgrade of Bankfoot junction, although they were all inherited from the previous Administration. When will this Government bring forward new initiatives to improve the A9, in addition to those that are simply a hangover from the Labour/Liberal Democrat Executive?

Stewart Stevenson: Yes.

Murdo Fraser: When?

Energy Efficiency

5. Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to promote energy efficiency. (S3O-7378)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The Scottish Government is developing a range of measures to promote energy efficiency. They will be covered in our energy efficiency action plan, which will be published later this year as a key part of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill.

We are already taking action to help reduce energy consumption across all sectors, including through our funding of the Energy Saving Trust, the Carbon Trust, the energy assistance package and the home insulation scheme.

Alasdair Morgan: Last week, the Scotch Whisky Association launched its environmental strategy, in which energy efficiency plays a large part. However, it was disappointing to hear that the association is finding it frustratingly difficult to deal with Network Rail in attempting to move transportation from road to rail. Similar comments have been made by people in the road haulage industry, who are themselves quite keen to move to rail for longer hauls. What can the minister do to

make Network Rail more responsive to such concerns—within his lifetime?

Stewart Stevenson: Uisge-beatha is of course an important part of extending my lifetime, and I am therefore pleased to have heard about the efforts that have been made by the whisky industry. We have had some notable successes. Our investments at the Needlefield depot in Inverness have led to 400 lorries a week coming off the A9, which contributes to enhanced safety and environmental benefits. That is part of what we want to do.

We recognise the challenge that lies in delivering further schemes—particularly in relation to our understanding of gauge constraints in the network. I understand that there are some shortcomings in the Network Rail database, and that is one of a number of things that we will talk to the company about. We will work closely with Network Rail, as we have a high aspiration to get more freight on to our railways and off our roads.

The Presiding Officer: Questions 6 and 7 have been withdrawn.

Transport (Fife)

8. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when ministers last met Fife Council to discuss transport priorities and what in particular was discussed. (S3O-7302)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Transport matters were raised as part of a general discussion when the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth signed off Fife Council's first single outcome agreement in August 2008.

Claire Baker: I record my thanks to the minister for being helpful regarding the campaign for dualling the A92 around Glenrothes. He has met me and members of the Glenrothes Area Futures Group, and we now have proposals for some minor upgrades at two local junctions. I was disappointed, however, to receive a letter from the minister that seems to close the door firmly on dualling the A92 around Glenrothes. Will the minister confirm that? If so, will he outline when the next opportunity for consideration of that transport scheme will be?

Stewart Stevenson: There are many ways in which road improvements can be undertaken. It was identified in the consideration that came through the strategic transport projects review that the benefits of the proposal that was discussed regarding the A92 were largely local. I am certainly open to continuing to engage with the regional transport partnership and the local council, which I believe continues to consider the issue.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): The minister will be well aware that the Parbroath junction—where the A92 crosses the A913, between Cupar and Newburgh—is one of the most dangerous intersections on the A92, but is the only major intersection on that road, between Kirkcaldy and Dundee, that does not have a roundabout. Does the minister agree that a roundabout is required as a matter of urgency in order to cut down the number of accidents at that well-known accident black spot?

Stewart Stevenson: I may have driven through the Parbroath junction for the first time in 1963, so I am very familiar with it. There have been many improvements to it, and I think that the staggering of the junction has improved safety. If there are remaining issues around the Parbroath junction, that is, of course, something that Transport Scotland would seek to address.

Financial Services Industry

9. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North)

(SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to support the financial services industry in Scotland. (S3O-7365)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Government supports the financial services industry in Scotland through the partnership of the Financial Services Advisory Board, which is made up of key private and public sector interests. On 1 June, FiSAB published its 2009 annual report, which sets out the aspirations to develop the industry to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead. A finance services jobs task force has also been established to co-ordinate efforts across Scotland to retain jobs and skills for the financial services industry and the wider economy.

Kenneth Gibson: Does the cabinet secretary agree with the statement that was made by John Campbell, the chairman of Scottish Financial Enterprise, at the launch of FiSAB's annual report last week? He said:

"we need to remind homegrown, City of London-based, and international companies of the benefits of choosing Scotland as a financial services centre from which to do business.

We do, after all, continue to have many top-class companies within our industry, who are internationally acknowledged as such."

Will the cabinet secretary comment on the recent merger between Clerical Medical and Scottish Widows, which kept the Scottish Widows name because market research found that "Scottish" was still a strong brand name among finance customers?

John Swinney: I agree with John Campbell's analysis and pay warm tribute to his contribution as the industry chair of FiSAB for the previous Administration and this Administration. His term in office is due to end shortly. He makes two strong points: one is the attractiveness and competitiveness of Scotland as a place to do business and the second is the inherent strength of the financial services sector.

Kenneth Gibson also made a fair point on the judgment that a market research exercise made on the strength of the Scottish Widows brand in competition with the Clerical Medical brand, which is a strong insurance industry brand into the bargain. That demonstrates the point that I made to Mr Whitton earlier that we have inherent strengths in the industry and must ensure that we build on them in the future.

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)

(Lab): The cabinet secretary did not answer my point about partnership action for continuing employment teams. Will extra effort be made to get PACE teams into areas where job losses will be experienced in order to ensure that FiSAB's work is progressed as he would like it to be?

John Swinney: I apologise to Mr Whitton. At the FiSAB meeting on 1 June, we heard a report from the financial services task force's chair, who is a representative of Scottish Enterprise. In that meeting, we heard an update to the effect that PACE will be involved in circumstances in which job losses have been announced. However, many of the companies that have made such announcements so far have gone to considerable lengths to highlight their confidence that, through turnover and redeployment, they can avoid large-scale job losses. Although a number of substantial job-loss announcements have been made, the companies involved have tried to avoid any of those losses percolating down into traditional unemployment.

Mr Whitton has my assurance that PACE will be involved.

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): I think I am right in saying that, when Parliament last debated the financial services industry, it resolved that the Government would provide a clear baseline figure for how many jobs there are in the industry, because there was disagreement among Scottish Enterprise, FiSAB and the Government. We also resolved that we would get regular official updates on negative and positive employment changes. How regularly will the Government publish those official figures?

John Swinney: The baseline figures were lodged in the Scottish Parliament information centre as a consequence of the debate—which I think was sponsored by the Liberal Democrats—

and are now available there. I am happy to update those reports, but I had better not commit myself to a timescale today without knowing how frequently we can give the comprehensive picture.

I can also write to Mr Brown on the number of announcements of job losses we have had. However, as I said to Mr Whitton, many companies are seeking to deal with losses through turnover and redeployment. If members would also find that figure helpful as an information base, I will make it available in SPICe.

Fallago Rig Wind Farm (Public Inquiry)

10. John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will publish the decision of the public inquiry into the proposed wind farm at Fallago Rig in Berwickshire. (S3O-7286)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The reporter's findings will be published once the Scottish ministers make a determination. The Scottish ministers are currently awaiting further information from the Ministry of Defence on the Fallago Rig proposal. Once that information is received, all parties who attended the inquiry will be given the opportunity make representations on any new evidence. Ministers will make a determination only after careful and thorough consideration of the material issues, including the reporter's recommendations, in accordance with the relevant planning and legislative obligations.

John Lamont: In this case, the local authority's planning process has been exhausted and a local public inquiry has been held, but discussions are apparently continuing behind closed doors regarding the serious concerns that have been raised by the Ministry of Defence about the wind farm. Both Scottish Borders Council and East Lothian Council have expressed serious concerns about that process. Does the minister agree that the application has highlighted the lack of transparency that can exist in the planning process for wind farm developments, particularly given the Scottish National Party's policy on wind farms?

Jim Mather: I disagree with that fundamentally. Our legal advice, and the advice of the director for planning and environmental appeals, supports our actions on handling further evidence post local public inquiry. We are looking forward to receiving updates from the Ministry of Defence and the developer and moving forward to making the final decision.

Credit Unions

11. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what

role it considers credit unions will play during the economic downturn. (S3O-7336)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Credit unions have an important role during economic downturns as the risk of families and individuals being financially excluded increases. They offer an alternative to the existing banking institutions and, in particular, to doorstep lenders and loan sharks with their excessive interest rates and the resulting cycle of dependency.

The Scottish Government has in place funding and support to help enterprising credit unions grow and develop.

Dr Simpson: Would the minister care to comment on the report from the Westminster Scottish Affairs Committee, in which the committee said that it was

"disappointed to see that ring-fenced funding for credit unions from the Scottish Executive now totals ... £250,000, a sharp decrease from over £2.7 million before 2008"?

Will he comment on the fact that the number of official provident associations, which in themselves already charge high rates of interest but are at least not loan sharks, has reduced considerably, thus putting further pressure on credit unions?

John Swinney: I am always interested in the output from the Scottish Affairs Committee. I have to say that it is not always best informed about what is going on, as is regrettably true in this case.

The Scottish Government took a decision that we would incorporate the third sector credit union fund within two substantial funds—the Scottish investment fund and the third sector enterprise fund—which, in total, have at their disposal £42 million of resources to support the development of social enterprises, third sector organisations and credit unions. Some credit unions have already received support from those very funds.

I express clearly to Parliament the confidence that the Government has in credit unions. We encourage credit unions to come forward to advance proposals under the Scottish investment fund and the third sector enterprise fund. Indeed, I am meeting a credit union this afternoon to discuss those very questions. I hope that that reassures Dr Simpson that the Scottish Government is doing more than the Scottish Affairs Committee was able to discover in its piece of quality analysis.

Local Authority Funding

12. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what advice it is giving to local authorities regarding the reduction

in the Scottish block grant for 2010-11. (S3O-7288)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Under the concordat, the Scottish Government is in regular contact with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on a wide range of issues, including the impact of the United Kingdom Government's decision to reduce the planned expenditure that we had been expecting by £500 million in 2010-11.

John Wilson: In relation to his recent announcement on public sector agency costs, is the cabinet secretary prepared to review the levels of management costs associated with local authority senior officers?

John Swinney: It is essentially for local authorities to determine their management costs: they are self-governing organisations. However, local authorities will be facing many of the challenges that we will all face in respect of public finances. I am sure that the issues that John Wilson raises will be material to those considerations.

Within Government, we are looking carefully at the management costs of all the organisations that are part of the public sector. That advice has been very much to the fore in the recent announcements that I have made on pay policy for members of staff and the chief executives and chairs of public bodies.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): I welcome the cabinet secretary's new language. He talked about a reduction in planned expenditure, which contrasts with his comments about a £500 million budget cut. Of course, Stella Manzie, the Scottish Government's director general of finance and corporate services, has advised that there will be a 1.3 per cent increase in the Scottish Government's budget in real terms.

With regard to Mr Wilson's question, will the cabinet secretary advise me about any three-year comprehensive spending review period under the previous Administration, when the average settlement for local government was a 35.5 per cent share of the Scottish block? The share has been reduced to 33.5 per cent, and fewer resources are going to local government. In addition, uncosted commitments in the Scottish National Party's manifesto are expected to be delivered through the concordat, but no resources are available to enable local government to deliver on those commitments.

John Swinney: I was trying to be helpful and constructive at question time, but Mr Kerr is talking about budget cuts again. Perhaps I will join him and go back to talking about budget cuts, now that

he has decided that that is the appropriate language.

I thought that Mr Kerr might be exhausted by the debate about the share of the budget that goes to local government, because we have been round the houses and I have lost count of the times that I have stood up in Parliament and set out the situation. Local government's share of the budget was 36.6 per cent in 2002-03 and 36.5 per cent in 2004-05. The share then went down to 35.6 per cent in 2005-06, 34.2 per cent in 2006-07 and 33.3 per cent in 2007-08. That was the budget that I inherited. Thanks to the current Administration, local government's share of the budget is going up again. I think that is the buoyant good news that Mr Kerr is seeking.

Rail Freight (Environmental Impact)

13. Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment has been made of the environmental impact of increasing the use of rail freight. (S3O-7372)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Recent assessments that were undertaken to develop the Scottish Government's freight grant schemes demonstrated that transferring freight from road to rail has significant environmental benefits.

Michael Matheson: The minister will, from this morning's debate, be aware of my concern about the level of vibration that my constituents in the Larbert area are experiencing as a result of heavy coal-train freight. During the debate, the minister said that further monitoring of noise and vibration on the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine railway might be required, but it was not made clear whether the Larbert area, which is affected by the problem, would be included. I am keen to ensure that my constituents' problems are not overlooked. Will the minister ensure that further monitoring on the SAK line includes the Larbert area?

Stewart Stevenson: Bruce Crawford, the member for Stirling, has contacted me in that regard. We are considering the appropriate way forward and whether councils or the Government should undertake the work. We acknowledge that our having the appropriate information is key to understanding the response that is needed.

Union Terrace Gardens

14. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with Scottish Enterprise Grampian on the findings of the feasibility study on proposed developments at Union Terrace gardens in Aberdeen. (S3O-7301)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The Scottish Government

is aware of and takes a keen interest in the proposed developments at Union Terrace gardens in Aberdeen. The lead on the project has been taken by Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Future, in which Scottish Enterprise is a partner.

Richard Baker: Does the minister agree that full consultation on all options for redeveloping Union Terrace gardens is needed? What dialogue will ministers have with ACSEF on the potential for Scottish Government funding for the plans at any stage?

Jim Mather: The study has been completed and the board of ACSEF has unanimously agreed that the project should progress to the next stage, which is extensive consultation of the community. Work will go forward, leveraging in the leadership of ACSEF and the stellar contribution of Sir Ian Wood, who has pledged up to £50 million. Momentum has built up behind the work of Sir Ian and others, who regard the project as a mechanism that could make Aberdeen a world energy city, a showcase for the region and—I think this has been said—a Houston of the eastern hemisphere. We are committed to working with partners to leverage in private and public investment to Aberdeen.

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): What potential is there for additional employment in the north-east as a result of the project?

Jim Mather: There is absolutely considerable potential. The project has been revealed to be technically and financially viable. It has excited the ACSEF board, which has given it the go-ahead, focusing on the two options that would leverage in the maximum number of jobs and the maximum amount of further future investment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): That concludes question time.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

I regret that the Presiding Officer has left, because the point of order would perhaps have been better directed at him. I seek your guidance. I am not often drawn in the ballot for themed question time, and I have neither complaint nor entitlement to complain about supplementaries, nor indeed substantive answers from ministers. However, two questions were withdrawn, and we have just reached question 14 on the list. How many of the questions that we have not reached have already been withdrawn, because there may be a connection? Is it possible for the Presiding Officer to give consideration to estimating how far we will get down the list of themed questions? As I said, we have just reached question 14; with two withdrawn, that is 12 questions. Eight other questions were on the ballot paper. Some

members with subsequent questions were not here, and I cannot blame them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is an inexact science. In advance, one does not know how many people will seek to ask supplementary questions to any of the substantive questions. Presiding Officers and their deputies have to strike a balance between taking several members on a question in which members are interested, or simply going on to the next question without taking supplementaries. Either way, I suspect that members will be disappointed. It is just the luck of the draw—there is no exact or perfect answer to the question.

Christine Grahame: Further to that, can we be told how many questions, subsequent to the point that we reached, had already been withdrawn? It is a matter of concern.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That information is not available to me at the moment, but if you care to write to the Presiding Officer, I am sure that he will be happy to oblige by providing you with that information.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): On a separate point of order, Presiding Officer.

On Friday, the Scottish Futures Trust e-mailed the convener of the Finance Committee regarding its business plan. The e-mail indicated that the business plan had been published. At First Minister's question time today, the First Minister said that the business plan had been published. The business plan is not on the Government's website, nor is it on the Scottish Futures Trust's website.

In previous points of order, the Presiding Officer has considered the appropriate way in which Parliament should be informed when major publications are presented. Will the Presiding Officers review that policy with the Scottish Government with regard to the Scottish Futures Trust, which is a limited company that is wholly owned by ministers. It seems to be outwith the normal way in which the Government publishes important documents, such as its operating plan.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

May I try to be helpful to Mr Purvis? The Scottish Futures Trust was invited to submit information to the Finance Committee in advance of the appearance of the chairman of the Scottish Futures Trust at the committee this coming Tuesday. The Scottish Futures Trust decided to publish its business plan by doing what I thought was incredibly appropriate, which was to send the business plan to the convener of the Finance

Committee, Mr Welsh. I understand that that was the arrangement that was put in place on Friday. As far as I am aware—I have followed this approach on numerous occasions—it is appropriate to communicate such decisions to Parliament by writing to the convener of the relevant committee. That is precisely what the Scottish Futures Trust has done on this occasion.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Further to Ms Grahame's point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could I deal with the previous point of order first, please?

I am not exactly sure whether those were necessarily points of order, but I will draw them to the attention of the Presiding Officer, who I am sure will communicate with the members if necessary.

Margo MacDonald: Will you perhaps ask the Presiding Officer whether he could supply us with the criteria that determine his choice of member in supplementary questions? Is it topicality? Is it a campaign that the member may have been pursuing? I, for one, do not know what criteria I am up against when I try to ask a supplementary.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Far be it from me to interpret the thoughts of the Presiding Officer, but I will draw your remarks to his attention, and I am sure that he will respond appropriately.

National Qualifications

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a statement by Fiona Hyslop, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, on national qualifications. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:00

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): National qualifications are one of three key strands of work in implementing the curriculum for excellence. The other areas are curriculum guidance, which has now been published, and assessment policy, which will be published in the summer.

This package of measures will enable our education system to provide improved learning and teaching for our children and young people. After decades of piecemeal reform and separate initiatives, we now have comprehensive reform from age three to age 18. Our children and young people will now benefit from a more rounded education from the early years through to sixth year, with a greater emphasis on developing skills for learning, life and work; a more sustained focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills and an active, healthy lifestyle; and more motivating and challenging learning that promotes breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding to last a lifetime, not just for the next test.

Over the past few weeks, thousands of our young people and adult learners have been sitting exams for the current suite of national qualifications. I am sure that Parliament will join me in wishing all the candidates success.

We need to ensure that future qualifications reflect and support the curriculum for excellence. Our proposals for the next generation of national qualifications will retain the strengths of the current arrangements while addressing some long-standing issues. In particular, we will reduce overassessment, so that there is more time for quality learning and teaching; we will give more professional autonomy to teachers to raise standards of learning and teaching; and we will reduce the current complexity in the qualifications system to make it more streamlined and understandable for parents and employers and to ensure that qualifications relate directly to the world-leading Scottish credit and qualifications framework.

Following the public consultation, the curriculum for excellence management board has provided its advice on the best way forward for qualifications. The management board's membership includes

representatives from local authorities, the main teaching unions, Scotland's Colleges, the General Teaching Council for Scotland, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Learning and Teaching Scotland and Skills Development Scotland. The management board brings together knowledge and experience from across Scotland's education system. Its members know what works well and what needs to be improved, and I am very grateful to them for their work.

I wish to announce my decisions on three main issues: first, the review of national qualifications at access, higher and advanced higher levels; secondly, the introduction of national 4 and national 5, the new qualifications that will replace the present standard grade and intermediate qualifications; and thirdly, the development of national literacy and national numeracy awards.

First, on the review of national qualifications, the consultation has shown that access, higher and advanced higher qualifications are key strengths of our existing system. They will be retained, and we will build upon them by updating them to reflect the values, purposes and principles of the curriculum for excellence.

Secondly, on the new qualifications to replace standard grade and intermediate qualifications at levels 4 and 5 on the Scottish credit and qualifications framework, national 4 and national 5 will be designed to support learning through the revised curriculum and increase the focus on skills development. They will be available in the suite of individual subject areas—for example, people will be able to gain national history 4 or national maths 5 qualifications.

The new qualifications will be unit-based to ensure consistency with other national qualifications. National 4 courses will be assessed by teaching staff, primarily through a course assessment, and will be quality assured by the SQA. The qualification will not be graded, and will therefore free up more time for learning and teaching.

National 5 courses will be a combination of course assessment assessed by teaching staff and quality assured by the SQA, and an exam or other external assessment by the SQA. The national 5 qualification will be graded to help learners to progress to higher qualifications, other areas of learning and employment.

National 4 and national 5 will be designed to be delivered flexibly. Study for the new qualifications will generally begin in secondary 4, with flexibility to take greater account of prior learning than has been the case in the past. Pupils should be able to take up to eight subjects in fourth year, as is currently the case. There will also be an

opportunity for schools to provide for the most able pupils to bypass national 4 and national 5 and begin studying for some highers in S4.

National 4, national 5 and revised access, higher and advanced higher qualifications will be available from term 2013-14 onwards. That will ensure that the pupils who experience the new curriculum in secondary school from their first year onwards can progress smoothly on to a revised set of qualifications. Those pupils are currently preparing to leave primary 6.

The new national literacy and numeracy awards will be available to young people from third year onwards. It is expected that young people will be presented for the qualifications at some point before they leave school. That will give pupils the chance to achieve the qualifications when they are ready and it will give schools greater flexibility in their planning. The awards are intended to recognise the attributes that will be needed for later study or employment. The content of the qualifications will be based on the experiences and outcomes for literacy and numeracy in the curriculum for excellence.

It is clear that Scotland faces a pressing need to improve literacy and numeracy skills among the wider adult population. That is why we want to encourage uptake of the new qualifications by adult learners. The national literacy and numeracy awards will be based on a portfolio of work that is drawn from across the revised curriculum or other aspects of learning, life and work. That will benefit individuals and Scotland's economy in general.

Initially, the qualifications will involve external marking by the SQA. The intention is to reduce the amount of external marking that is required when national standards have been widely shared, understood and verified. The national literacy and numeracy awards will be achievable at SCQF levels 3, 4 and 5 and will profile an individual's skills rather than grade them. The recognition of the new qualifications in the SCQF will help to promote their value to employers and others.

We intend to make national literacy and numeracy awards available from 2012-13. That will ensure that the first pupils to experience learning and teaching through the revised curriculum—those who are currently coming to the end of primary 6—will have the opportunity to achieve the new qualifications from S3 onwards. The SQA will work with partners to agree the precise timing and details of implementation.

The literacy and numeracy qualifications are part of our series of actions to improve literacy and numeracy skills. For example, for the first time, we have given all teaching staff professional responsibility for promoting literacy and numeracy skills at every stage of education. The early years

framework makes it clear that we are committed to tackling barriers to achievement through early intervention, and smaller class sizes in the formative years will help teaching staff to embed literacy and numeracy skills.

Later in the summer, we will publish details of the third strand of the curriculum for excellence, on assessment, which will be informed by the advice of the curriculum for excellence management board. We will publish a policy statement that sets out the key elements of our proposals to support assessment in the curriculum for excellence. It will specify national standards and state what learners are expected to achieve as they progress through the curriculum.

We will also publish an assessment framework that gives more detailed advice. It will include guidance on an external moderation process to support teachers in making their judgments, and it will ensure that breadth and depth of learning are assessed consistently against the national standards. There will also be a refocused Scottish survey of achievement to assess literacy and numeracy. The SQA and its partners will ensure that the new and revised qualifications have rigorous assessment and quality assurance systems that are supported by continuous professional development.

My announcement today sets out a clear direction for our qualifications system. Of course, the precise details of the new arrangements will follow. I am pleased that the curriculum for excellence management board and the SQA will continue to work together to focus on practical implementation and consider how best to meet learners' needs.

We are giving teachers more professional autonomy in order to raise standards of learning and teaching. At the same time, we are reducing the complexity of the qualifications system to make it more streamlined and understandable for parents and employers. The next generation of national qualifications will raise standards, improve learning for pupils and reflect curriculum reform. Most important, the qualifications will equip Scotland's young people and adult learners with the skills for learning, life and work, and the knowledge and understanding, that they will need to rise to the challenges of 21st century society.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. I intend to allow about 20 minutes for that.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): First, I am sure that the minister is aware—if she is not, she should be—that fewer than half of primary 7 pupils achieve the expected level D for reading. That is simply not good enough. In effect, the minister has

taken Labour Party policy on literacy and numeracy in secondary schools, but we have no information or leadership on literacy and numeracy in primary schools, where there is still a massive challenge. Frankly, the minister is shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted. Attempting to tackle literacy and numeracy at secondary level is simply too late. What does the minister intend to do about improving literacy and numeracy in primary schools? Instead of more woolly words, let us have the detail. Is her ambition, like Labour's, to ensure that every pupil can read when they leave primary school?

Secondly, will the new awards for literacy and numeracy in secondary school introduce some form of testing? We have been told that the literacy and numeracy awards will be based on a portfolio of work from across the curriculum. Frankly, that sounds like a lot of wishy-washy educational jargon. I am old enough to remember the language across the curriculum initiative in the early 1990s, which did not work. Does the minister think that parents and employers will trust the new awards? Frankly, I do not.

Fiona Hyslop: I would expect the future of national qualifications for this country to be treated with more respect and not to be used by any party as the subject of a party-political broadcast.

It was important for members to listen to the statement that I have just made, which covered the qualifications period from S3 onwards. The question was about the policy for assessing literacy and numeracy, which formed part of the curriculum for excellence guidelines that were published in April. I said quite clearly in my statement that that will be part of the detailed assessment policy that will be published over the summer.

In response to some of the questions that I think the member asked, I say that the national literacy and numeracy awards at levels 3, 4 and 5 will be externally assessed. If she thinks that external assessment by the SQA, which is carried out, by and large, by teachers who work in the field, is somehow wishy-washy or not worthy of respect, she is letting down the teaching profession, members of which are playing an increasing role in SQA marking.

I cannot emphasise enough that, for the first time, the new curriculum for excellence allows literacy and numeracy to be the responsibility of each and every teacher. The focus on literacy and numeracy is a key aspect of the curriculum for excellence experiences and outcomes, a copy of which I would be more than happy to send to the member, if she has not already read them. It is essential that we get a grip on the issue. If the member wants to reflect on the achievements of children in primary 7, she would do well to

remember that, for the first five years of their education, those children were not educated under this Administration.

I appeal to all members to take seriously our responsibility to think about how we plan national qualifications not just for this parliamentary session, but for the next parliamentary session and beyond. Given that we are talking about creating a qualifications system for the future, the discussion should not be reduced to party-political backbiting.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Thank you for giving us early sight of your statement. You say that you have set out a clear policy, but I do not think that I am alone in being thoroughly confused. You said that the new literacy and numeracy qualifications will involve external marking by the SQA but that, once national standards have been widely shared, understood and verified, the intention is

“to reduce the amount of external marking that is required”.

Will you please explain what that means?

Secondly, you said that you are intent on reducing the current complexity of qualifications and making them

“more streamlined and understandable for parents and employers.”

I hope that you meant to mention pupils and teachers as well. You said that an announcement is to be made about highers and advanced highers, but there is no such announcement.

Are you still intent on adding a Scottish baccalaureate award in science and languages but not in the arts and social sciences? In the light of your comment on 27 November 2008, when you said that the Government and the SQA had been “overwhelmed” by the interest that had been shown in the Scottish baccalaureate, can you confirm how many local authorities and schools have agreed to introduce it in 2010?

Finally, what action is your Government taking in the local authority concordat to ensure that as full a range as possible of higher and advanced higher courses is open to all our brightest pupils, to deal with the concerns that exist in some parts of Scotland that the career choices of pupils are being compromised because of cutbacks?

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

Fiona Hyslop: There were a number of questions there. It is clear that external assessment means external assessment by the SQA. That was clear from my statement.

There were initial concerns among members of the teaching profession that internal assessment would lead to overburdening in a variety of qualifications. For example, national 4 will be internally assessed. People want confidence, and we have seen from consultation that the national literacy and numeracy awards have been warmly welcomed by parents, pupils and business. The external verification assessment that the SQA can provide will give people confidence. Once we have attained the necessary standards and abilities, I would like us to move towards internal assessment. However, that will not happen immediately.

Having a variety of SCQF levels at standard and intermediate grade has created a complex system, but having a national 4 and a national 5 will certainly simplify things.

Tomorrow, I will visit Forth Valley College, which single-handedly will be supporting more than 60 baccalaureate projects in science. Elizabeth Smith will know from earlier comments that we are considering expanding the baccalaureate into the arts and social sciences, such is the interest.

We are retaining highers and advanced highers. I also make clear to members that more pupils than before are taking highers and advanced highers in a range of subjects. There is more choice and more availability, and we are in a strong position. Our responsibility is to ensure that that strong position is maintained in future.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): Today's announcement is very important. The topic is wide ranging, therefore I would welcome a debate in Government time, because 20 minutes will not allow us to do it justice. The cabinet secretary said that precise details will follow. I hope that those details will provide the answers to some of our questions. For example, there was no answer to one of Liz Smith's questions, on how many local authorities have agreed to offer the baccalaureate.

It is essential that parents understand and support the suggested changes to national qualifications. What plans are there to engage directly with parents on those changes? The conversation so far has been wide ranging, but it has been driven by professionals. It is essential that parents are involved.

We seem to be settling into a situation in which young adults are coming out of our schools at S4 with no qualifications that have any grading attached to them at all. Will the cabinet secretary address that point? Is she content with it? My recollection is that 51 per cent of respondents to consultation thought that there should be grading, but that 43 per cent disagreed. I accept that those figures did not give a clear steer, but will the

cabinet secretary give us a little more information on why she has decided to go against that small majority view?

Who will decide whether able pupils can bypass nationals 4 and 5 and begin studying for highers in S4? What would you—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, you really have to stop there.

Fiona Hyslop: I will try to address those questions. We promised that we would set out the qualifications framework before the end of this school term, before the summer holidays, but students have been sitting exams, so it was important not to make announcements while they were doing so. However, we will clearly return to the issue, as Margaret Smith has suggested.

The views that came out of the consultation were polarised. We have tried to take on board not only the comments from the teaching profession but the comments from people in the wider community and from young people, particularly on national literacy and numeracy awards.

As far as grading is concerned, the teaching profession produced some strong arguments for having no gradings at all at national 4 and national 5. I have taken the view that it is important that grades are provided, particularly for national 5, as that will help progression and will help employers to understand the qualifications. It will also help colleges and universities to identify the different levels that people have achieved. Having steered a route through this, we have determined that national 4 will be ungraded but that national 5 will be graded.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If even a proportion of the members who want to speak are to be able to do so, questions will need to be very brief.

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): The importance of young people being able to sit standard grades at general and foundation levels or at general and credit levels in the current system was raised in the consultation. That allows pupils to aim high while running much less risk of missing out entirely. Will there be flexibility between national 4 and national 5, so that pupils do not have to play it safe and perhaps sell themselves short?

Fiona Hyslop: I return to a point that Margaret Smith made. A dialogue currently takes place between pupils, parents and schools about the different levels and courses that pupils will take. Yes, it will be possible to take national 4 and national 5 in combination. For example, a pupil may want to take history at national 4 but maths at national 5. Ensuring that we have a qualifications system that is responsive to the needs of

individuals is an important part of the whole direction in which we are heading with the curriculum for excellence.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): My first question is on the same subject. Am I right in thinking that national 4 and national 5 will be taught in common classes? If that is the case, what will pupils who are assessed as achieving national 4 have to do if they want to stay on at school? They will not be able to jump to highers. Will they be expected to repeat the course?

Secondly, how will we manage to teach eight subjects in one year that used to be taught in two years? The cabinet secretary said that pupils should be offered eight subjects. Can she guarantee that they will be offered eight subjects or, at the very least, seven?

Fiona Hyslop: A lot of the operational issues around timetabling and common classes that Ken Macintosh is talking about will be addressed in the discussions with teachers and schools to ensure that individual schools are able to respond to the particular needs of their pupils. A big theme in not only the curriculum for excellence but our lifelong learning skills strategy is the ability to progress from one level to another. Part of that will be about ensuring that pupils have the opportunity to study at the level at which they want to study while still being able to take things forward. I cannot determine the timetabling in any particular school. The important thing is to ensure that there is the possibility of progression.

The measures build on the S1 to S3 experience in the curriculum for excellence, so the breadth and depth that will be achieved in S1, S2 and S3 should prepare pupils well going forward into the qualifications. The problem with the current situation is that somehow everything is put to one side after S1 and S2 because everything has to be fixated on the content of the qualification examination over a two-year period, which means that we are losing the continuity between S1, S2, S3 and the qualifications. The new system should build on levels 3 and 4 of the curriculum for excellence to ensure that the breadth and depth can be carried on as the pupil progresses into qualifications. Time and time again in Parliament, we have heard that the qualifications should serve the curriculum, not the other way round. That is something that Peter Peacock said with which I agree.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): There is genuine confusion about some of the details. We need to get more information from the cabinet secretary today, if possible, about what it all means. I seek clarification on one point that I may have misunderstood. It appears that the national 4 qualification, which is intended to be a replacement for standard grade, will be neither

graded nor externally tested. Does that mean that somebody will be able to leave school at 16 with a qualification that has not been graded or externally tested? If that is the case, how will employers be able to have confidence in such a qualification?

Fiona Hyslop: To help progression, there will be external verification by the SQA of the assessment procedures for the qualifications system, which will give the robustness that Murdo Fraser rightly suggests that employers need. The assessment framework proposals that will be released in the summer will identify how we can ensure that we give pupils, parents and employers confidence that the assessment that takes place in schools meets national standards and has the robustness that we all require.

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): First, the cabinet secretary said that she wants to encourage uptake of the new qualifications by adult learners. How will she do that?

Secondly, will the professional responsibility of all teaching staff for promoting literacy and numeracy skills cover all subject areas? Will it be included in the SQA marking guidelines?

Fiona Hyslop: I have only just announced the framework of the whole system, so I am afraid that I cannot give details of the marking guidelines yet. The member is right to identify that the new qualifications are important for adult learners. If we are to maximise the skills and potential of the workforce as we move forward into recovery, it is essential that we recognise people's achievements in literacy and numeracy in the workplace. We want to ensure that that is supported.

I feel strongly about workplace learning. I met the Scottish Trades Union Congress lifelong learning members this week to discuss how we can take it forward. The recent announcement that we have extended the eligibility criteria for the individual learning account 200 to cover people who earn up to £22,000 rather than £18,000 means that half of the workforce throughout Scottish is now eligible to receive funding support for training. We have a great opportunity to work with trade union learners and colleges to ensure that there are opportunities in the workplace, and that the qualifications become part and parcel of Scotland's lifelong learning strategy.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): Members on all sides of the chamber and many people outside it have welcomed the new certificates in literacy and numeracy. Will the cabinet secretary explain whether the teaching of those units will form part of English and maths or run alongside those subjects?

Fiona Hyslop: Maths and English will continue to be taught as separate subjects by specialist

teachers. With regard to literacy skills, for example, the study of English will develop deeper understanding of the complexities of language through the study of literature. With regard to maths, the study of algebra will help to build on numeracy skills. That will, if anything, enhance the teaching of English and maths, bearing in mind the fact that literacy and numeracy will become part of the early development support—certainly at primary level—and will continue through the curriculum as the responsibility of every teacher at secondary level.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for restating her commitment to improve attainment through early intervention. Which early interventions does she believe must be taken to ensure that our children are functionally literate and numerate? Is she relying solely on smaller class sizes? Is she content that class sizes in primary 1 to primary 3 will not reduce until the turn of the century? What new money is available for the interventions and the implementation of the early years strategy?

Fiona Hyslop: Today's statement is about qualifications from S3 onwards, but the member's questions are about literacy in the early years.

Our proposals include the early intervention strategy, which runs from pre-birth to eight as part of the early years framework and ensures that literacy and numeracy skills can be embedded, aided by smaller class sizes. There is a focus throughout the curriculum for excellence on literacy and numeracy. The emphasis on experiences and outcomes from age three to 18 will, for the first time, embed and exemplify the ways in which literacy and numeracy can be developed and supported, which is to be welcomed.

It is clear, however, that my statement today is about the qualifications framework and how we take it forward throughout Scotland.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will remember the difficulties that the previous Administration ran into in making the transition from the higher to the higher still system in 2000-01. Will she explain how the transition from the current qualifications system to the new one that she has described will operate in order to avoid the confusion and upset that teachers and pupils faced last time round, at a time when pupils in particular need a stable learning environment?

Fiona Hyslop: It is clear that the introduction of any new qualifications system, and the transition, must be carefully managed. The new and revised qualifications will be introduced from 2013 onwards: the revised national access courses and national 4 and national 5 will be introduced in 2013-14; new highers will be introduced in 2014-

15; and advanced higher will be introduced in 2015-16. We will work carefully on and take the SQA's advice in the planning and presentation of those awards. Lessons have been learned from the introduction of previous qualifications systems, and they will be taken on board to ensure that there is smooth progress in implementing the new qualifications system.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I associate myself with many of Margaret Smith's questions to the cabinet secretary. Can we have a full-day debate on education? We need much longer than normal, so that—apart from anything else—members can absorb the new terminology.

I also suggest to the cabinet secretary that, when she is publicising all this to parents, teachers and folk like me who are too old to remember exactly what everything has been called, she uses flow charts and pathways through it using pupils—

Members: Mind maps!

Margo MacDonald: I am being patronised, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that the question is getting a bit long. We are almost out of time.

Margo MacDonald: It was them.

Fiona Hyslop: Margo MacDonald's point is well made. For example, I took O grades; other people have taken other Scottish certificates, standard grades and so on. In communicating these matters, we must remember that points of reference are different for different generations.

Obviously I cannot present it in a parliamentary statement, but we have produced a table that shows the progression in the Scottish credit qualifications framework from access level through the national, higher and advanced higher grades to the higher national certificate, the higher national diploma and on to degree level. That simple table will help to explain what it all means in old money—if I can use that expression—while setting the reference points for the parents and pupils who are currently in the system.

As for having a full debate on the issue, that is a matter for the Parliamentary Bureau. However, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss this complex area of curriculum reform. This is, after all, the biggest change for a generation and, as some of the issues that I have had to explain in this statement show, it can be quite technical. Indeed, the forthcoming assessment framework could well engender a whole day's debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the statement.

National Waste Strategy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-4348, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on the national waste strategy. As the debate is oversubscribed, members must stick rigidly to or come in under their time limits.

15:32

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): I am pleased to open this debate on our forthcoming national waste management plan. The debate gives the Parliament a say on the plan, although members will have further opportunities to contribute when we carry out the written consultation.

Waste management accounts for around 4 per cent of Scotland's climate change emissions. Of course, provisions in the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill are designed to help Scotland move further on its journey towards zero waste. Although climate change emissions from waste management have fallen and although we put less into and capture more gas from landfill, there is no doubt that we can do far more to reduce landfill even further.

Climate change is the main environmental challenge facing Scotland and the world, and zero waste helps us not just to tackle that problem but to meet renewable energy and heat targets. Moreover, moving to zero waste helps to drive environmental awareness. More than 80 per cent of Scottish households now participate in some form of recycling activity, which is a major advance on the position 10 or 20 years ago. The fact that that has been achieved by making it easier for people to recycle is a valuable lesson that we can learn in seeking to encourage other forms of environmental behaviour.

Delivering on zero waste will also bring economic benefits for Scotland by creating jobs in the collection of material for recycling, in the sorting of material and in the reprocessing of material into new products. Jobs will also be created in waste treatment plants to deal with the waste that cannot be prevented or recycled. Finally, waste reduction can often help with the household expenses. After all, food waste is a high-profile issue at the moment, and reducing such waste means that we have spent less money on food that we have simply thrown away.

Our new zero waste plan will set out how we can achieve high recycling rates. Of course, such a plan is required by the European Union and, as the current plan dates back to 2003, it is time to prepare a new one. We will start consulting in July and finalise the plan by February 2010.

However, in some cases, we want to go further and faster than EU requirements. We are particularly ambitious about waste prevention. In that respect, we have put in place many measures including our love food, hate waste campaign; subsidised home composting bins; work on reducing unwanted mail; advice to business on waste prevention and resource efficiency; and work on eco-schools and packaging. I am sure that many members have visited the eco-schools in their constituencies.

Recent figures suggest that growth in municipal waste has stopped. However, we are calling on all of Scotland to build on that good foundation. The new plan will have a reuse framework, which will emphasise the importance of reusing materials such as furniture, building materials and packaging.

As members will know, to tackle packaging, the Waste and Resources Action Programme, or WRAP, currently has a voluntary agreement with retailers—known as the Courtauld commitment—which has stopped growth in food packaging and reduced food waste. The commitment is being renewed and will go further. Scotland's new plan will encourage more voluntary agreements with industry. WRAP will work with the home improvement and do-it-yourself industry to reduce waste. WRAP has also established a commitment to halve the amount of construction, demolition and excavation waste going to landfill by 2012. We can announce today that the Scottish Government is signing that commitment, so that we can play our full part.

We want to have more influence on how products are designed. We have prepared a report on that, which will appear with the consultation draft of our plan. Clean and sustainable design is at the heart of zero waste, as it is about encouraging products that are longer lasting, capable of being repaired or reused and recyclable at the end of their lives. All of that also means jobs. Influencing design is likely to be best achieved at an EU level, so the Government will press for that.

Good design increases the capacity for recycling. We have gone from a recycling rate for municipal waste of about 5 per cent in 1999 to 33.5 per cent by December 2008. Of the 32 local authorities, 25 have recycling rates of 30 per cent or more and eight have reached 40 per cent or more. Those achievements are the result of hard work by local authorities, the private and community sectors and delivery bodies such as the Waste and Resources Action Programme, Waste Aware Scotland and Remade Scotland. That is all made possible by superb participation from the public.

Our long-term aim is a recycling rate of 70 per cent by 2025, which would make us one of the best performers in the world. However, if we are to achieve that, everyone needs to play their part. That means collecting more materials more of the time, including materials that we have only just begun to tackle, such as food waste and plastics.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I have a question on the future. Has the Government already decided—before its consultation—that local authorities will be excluded from using anaerobic digestion as an option for some elements of mixed waste? If so, is the minister aware that that is of significant concern to Scottish Borders Council, which is currently testing the market with private sector operators, with anaerobic digestion being within the proposal? If that option is excluded, there is a potential for considerable additional cost.

Roseanna Cunningham: There is currently a consultation taking place on whether that is a possible way forward. I know that there is a specific interest in the issue in the member's area. No final decision has been made on that.

Food waste makes up about 17 per cent of the average household bin, and plastics make up about 8 per cent. Therefore, about 25 per cent of the average household bin is made up of those two materials that we have found it difficult to deal with in the past. One barrier is a lack of treatment sites for both materials. That is why we fund capital grant schemes that are run by WRAP for in-vessel composting plants and anaerobic digestion plants to treat food waste. The Scottish Government is also tackling plastics. WRAP is running a £5 million capital grants project for us, which closes on 26 June. The aim is to provide financial assistance towards a facility, or facilities, that can sort, recycle and reprocess a minimum of 20,000 tonnes of plastic waste a year. Such a facility would put Scotland at the cutting edge of plastics reprocessing.

In respect of education and awareness, Waste Aware Scotland has been working with a number of authorities on a recycling adviser model. The aim is to provide in-depth support to householders to encourage them to do more recycling and to tackle any barriers that they might face. Recycling must become the norm for everybody, at home, at work and in public places. The Government will do more to promote recycling in public places. We want to build on existing work by local authorities and the private sector. We will have a round-table meeting with retailers and others to discuss and agree what more can be done to improve recycling outside the home.

I want to cover the role of residual waste treatment. Although landfill is better regulated and better run than ever before, Scotland must move

further away from it. That is not a criticism of those in the private sector and local authorities who have worked hard to get us to where we are. One of the recommendations from our zero waste think tank was to ban more materials from landfill. Through WRAP Scotland, the Scottish Government has commissioned a research project that extends across the whole of the UK to look at the practicalities of landfill bans.

The other main form of residual waste treatment is energy from waste. The issue attracts controversy and I know that there will be a variety of views in the chamber. Many people argue that there should be a larger role for energy from waste while others want it to be reduced. The issues were debated at the Government's waste summit in 2007 and the Government's position was outlined on 24 January 2008: no more than 25 per cent of municipal waste should be disposed of in that way. All energy from waste plants should have high levels of efficiency and our eventual aim is that such plants should capture heat as well as energy. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency has published thermal treatment guidelines to encourage higher efficiency plants and to keep them to tight requirements.

The national waste management plan will reflect Scotland's opportunity to view waste as a valuable resource to be exploited rather than a problem to be solved. The move to treat waste as a resource has major benefits for climate change, the environment and the economy. The plan will also need to cover in detail how the work will be delivered. The original national waste strategy was published in 1999; the current plan dates from 2003 and the new one will be finalised in 2010. Over the years, we have learned more about what needs to be done.

Now we must concentrate on delivery. That means more recycling collections, more composting plants and plastic reprocessing facilities. We all need to deliver the vision. The Government is providing leadership and we need to continue to build on existing work, do more and do it faster. I look forward to Scotland becoming a zero waste society.

I move,

That the Parliament notes Scotland's achievement of its share of the 2010 landfill diversion target 18 months early; encourages the Scottish Government to continue working with stakeholders to further improve recycling rates, increase reuse and do more on waste prevention, and looks forward to the forthcoming consultation on the new National Waste Management Plan, which will help Scotland further along the path to becoming a zero waste society.

15:41

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): The national waste management plan regulations that require

ministers to have a waste management plan and enable them to modify it were passed on 22 March 2007. On 25 January 2008, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment made a statement to Parliament in which he announced a review of the national waste strategy of 2003. That resulted in a consultation paper on potential legislative measures to implement zero waste that was issued in July last year. Some of those measures appear in the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, which was considered at stage 2 this week.

Some 18 months later, we have another consultation. Why has it taken so long—from 25 January 2008 until now—to get to this stage? Why could the consultation on the waste plan not have been launched shortly after the ministerial statement at the beginning of last year and why do we have to wait until February 2010 to see the new national waste management plan?

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The member might recall that the previous Administration also took a few years to get its first national waste plan into place. It is quite a task and a lot of partnership working throughout Scotland is required to get the consultation document in place.

Elaine Murray: Indeed, but the Government already had in place a fairly good national waste plan to build on, so I do not know why it has taken so long this time.

I am a little disappointed that we are debating the subject without the consultation document, because we do not know what questions it asks. All that I have been able to determine about the present consultation is from a remark on the Scottish Government website, something like six layers down, which says:

"The consultation will consider amongst other things, delivery options and ask what support local authorities, organisations, businesses and householders require to deliver practical actions to meet the Zero Waste vision."

I wonder whether it might have been more useful to have this debate after we had the results of the consultation so that we could know what stakeholders are saying.

Richard Lochhead: I give an assurance to the chamber that we will bring the debate back to Parliament after the consultation has closed. However, the purpose of today's debate is to hear views from across Parliament as to what should be in the consultation document.

Elaine Murray: I thank the cabinet secretary for his reassurance that we will return to the debate.

The Labour amendment notes the launch of the consultation on the waste plan, but I do not feel

that I have enough information about it at the moment to welcome it. Our amendment also proposes to leave out of the Government motion that the waste management plan

“will help Scotland further along the path to becoming a zero waste society”.

Although I certainly hope that it will do that, until we see more of the content it is difficult to make that judgment.

The Labour amendment refers to the revised EU waste framework, which requires to be transposed into law by 12 December next year. That must be taken into account in the new waste plan. Indeed, the minister referred in her statement to the waste hierarchy, which is crucial to the waste strategy. The waste hierarchy starts with prevention, which is followed by reuse, recycling, recovery and disposal. Prevention is the most desirable strategy and disposal—such as landfill or inefficient mass-burn incineration—is the least desirable strategy. The existing national waste plan of 2003 recognises that hierarchy, which will be essential to the new plan.

Any strategy that describes itself as zero waste—that is of course an aspiration—must deliver a significant absolute reduction in the waste that is generated. As waste prevention is the most desirable outcome, the strategy must demonstrate success in reducing the volumes of waste that are generated. What thoughts have ministers had about targets and timescales for waste reduction? Will views on that be included in the other issues for the consultation?

On Tuesday, I proposed stage 2 amendments to the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill on the basis of the situation in Flanders, which has been extremely successful in achieving a recycling level of 70 per cent—that is even better than the best Scottish councils’ rates. Measures such as selective bans on incineration and landfill and waste reduction schemes have been introduced in Flanders. On Tuesday, the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change assured me that the Government has the necessary statutory powers to implement selective landfill and incineration bans. Will ministers consult on how they might use those powers?

My colleague Marlyn Glen tells me that Austria, which took early action to reduce waste to landfill and to encourage the recovery of value from waste, has developed innovative methods of waste recycling and recovery. My colleague Lewis Macdonald will elaborate on examples of international good practice in his speech.

Under the headline of waste reduction, several local authorities have introduced measures that have been extremely unpopular with householders. That is often because householders

suspect—perhaps rightly—that the principal motivation is reducing costs rather than waste. For example, South Ayrshire Council has introduced charges for special uplifts, as has Dumfries and Galloway Council, which refuses to empty wheelie bins whose lids are open and which removes additional refuse only if it is in special bags that have been purchased at considerable cost from the council. I believe that Fife Council proposes to have monthly bin collections. Given that people perceive bin collection as one of the most basic services for which their council tax pays and that they tend to resist penalties for using the service, another option might be to introduce rebates for people who produce less waste.

Energy from waste sometimes has a bad press, partly because it is confused with mass-burn incineration. The revised EU directive makes the distinction clear. In January last year, the Government capped the generation of energy from domestic waste at 25 per cent of waste. However, the new waste plan needs to make the distinction between waste that could have a viable use other than as a fuel and waste that is at the end of its life cycle and would otherwise end up in landfill. Of course, the waste hierarchy prefers prevention. It would be most undesirable if energy recovery, recycling or reuse became an excuse for not controlling and reducing the amount of waste that is produced in the first place. As the hierarchy places reuse and recycling above recovery, waste materials that are capable of being reused or recycled should not be used for energy recovery if at all possible.

The minister mentioned anaerobic digestion of food and farm waste, which is one example of energy from waste that attracts widespread interest and support. Earlier this week, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs made some £10 million available for five projects that are to be built by March 2011 to demonstrate how such technology can be developed. Wasting food should be discouraged, but when food or agricultural waste is unavoidable, we can use anaerobic digestion to derive energy from the greenhouse gas, methane. Anaerobic digestion also has the benefit of being more energy efficient than mass-burn incineration. The emphasis should therefore be not on a blanket ban on energy from waste, but on applying the waste hierarchy and on using and developing technologies that capture the maximum amount of the heat that is generated.

As the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee heard when taking evidence during stage 1 consideration of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, waste recycling and reuse infrastructure urgently needs to be improved if we are to fulfil our obligations and if we are to ensure that

commercial and industrial waste is included in the waste plan and does not simply end up in landfill.

The Audit Scotland report “Sustainable waste management”, which was published in September 2007, noted the previous Administration’s estimate that the former strategic waste fund would have to increase from £89 million per annum in 2005-06 to £289 million in 2019-20 to meet the landfill directive targets. It also noted that the cost of supporting residual waste treatment would have to grow to about £79 million per annum over the same period.

I will comment briefly on the other amendments. I agree with much of the content of the Conservative amendment, but I am concerned that recovery is not included in the list and that it includes the word “disposal”, an option that is at the bottom of the hierarchy along with landfill and incineration. I look forward to hearing more from the Conservatives on the interpretation of their amendment.

In their amendment, the Liberal Democrats talk a lot about the issues in the Audit Scotland report. I will listen carefully to what Liberal Democrat members say about their concerns about recycling and funding.

In January last year, the cabinet secretary stated that he was introducing

“a new direction for waste policy in Scotland.”

I am disappointed that we are still only at the consultation stage. That said, I am hopeful that the delay does not reflect the lack of priority that the Government gives to this important matter. I will be very interested in the results of the consultation. I was pleased to hear the cabinet secretary say that he intends to bring back the matter to the chamber. I look forward to the development of the strategy.

I move amendment S3M-4348.3, to leave out from “, and looks forward” to end and insert:

“; recognises however that the provisions of the EU-revised *Waste Framework Directive (2008/98/EC)* are required to be transposed into Scots law by 12 December 2010; notes the forthcoming consultation on the new National Waste Management Plan, and believes that the new plan must fully address the waste hierarchy of prevention, reuse, recycling, recovery and disposal, as described in the *National Waste Plan 2003* and the revised EU framework directive.”

15:50

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I welcome the debate on the forthcoming consultation on the new national waste plan, and I too congratulate local authorities on reaching the landfill diversion target 18 months early. I commend to members the efforts of South Ayrshire Council and East Ayrshire Council in recycling and composting well

in excess of 40 per cent of their municipal solid waste. Both councils are well on the way to achieving the Government target of 70 per cent by 2025.

I am aware that the early progress that has been made is equivalent to picking the low-hanging fruit and that it will be harder in future to drive the figures upwards. Scottish Conservatives believe that it is vital that we change mindsets and end our reliance on landfill. Indeed, we need to design waste out of the system and the product wherever possible, preferably at the drawing-board stage.

In thinking of the consultation, we have to look beyond municipal waste disposal and start to deal with the elephant in the room: commercial and industrial waste. We all support efforts to achieve a zero waste society, but the immediate barrier to achieving that is a lack of infrastructure. Several witnesses highlighted that fact in evidence to the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, most notably Dirk Hazell of the Scottish Environmental Services Association, who said:

“There is nowhere near enough waste infrastructure anywhere in the United Kingdom to comply with existing European obligations ... we need to accelerate our transition from a disposal to a recycling society, but to do so requires more infrastructure.”—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs and Environment Committee*, 28 January 2009; c 1361.]

I say to Elaine Murray that I identify myself with those sentiments. It will not only be a financial challenge, as John Ferguson of SEPA noted, but a challenge to our planning system. There is an urgent need for Government to encourage the public and private sectors to create more of the infrastructure that is needed if we are to reduce the amount of commercial and industrial waste that is sent to landfill. There is a real opportunity for the private sector to deliver such needed infrastructure.

I turn to another opportunity: the need for temporary storage and stockpiling of recyclates, particularly plastics, until such time as markets—the Chinese market in particular—return for those products. It makes little difference whether the storage of recyclable products is carried out by local authorities or the private sector—the indisputable fact is that many of those products represent future resources. They must not be consigned to landfill simply because of a temporary lack of demand due to the recession.

I turn to food and farm waste, which is another area in which waste products can be turned into an asset—in this case, energy. The methane that is produced by anaerobic digestion could and must be used to supplement our dwindling natural gas reserves and lessen our dependency on imports from Russia. Jeremy Purvis referred to that.

In addition, heat and energy must also be derived from other types of waste product. Why should energy from municipal waste be capped at 25 per cent? If it is a good idea and there is the safe technology to do it—I accept that such technology did not exist in the past—why pluck an arbitrary figure of 25 per cent from the air? Perhaps the cabinet secretary will explain in his summing up—or now—how the figure was arrived at, particularly given the shortage of landfill and lack of markets for recyclates.

Richard Lochhead: I thank the member for the opportunity to clarify the point in an intervention. We consulted the Sustainable Development Commission and SEPA, and we held a waste summit involving Scotland's local authorities and other agencies. It was felt that the target for energy from waste was at an appropriate level. Otherwise, there is a danger that everyone in Scotland will take their eye off the ball as regards the waste hierarchy, which Elaine Murray referred to.

John Scott: I thank the cabinet secretary for that explanation.

Self-evidently, a number of different types of waste processing facilities need to be created to deal with different types of waste. Given the complexities of the planning system, the sooner the process is started, the better. Using up precious landfill is no longer a sustainable or morally acceptable option. Given the strictures of the EU landfill directive, we are running out of both time and landfill capacity.

If I heard the minister correctly, I believe that she intends to reduce the volume of construction waste to landfill by 50 per cent by 2012, which would of course be welcome. Perhaps she could clarify that—I did not catch what she said.

Scottish Conservatives will support the Government motion, and I urge members also to support our amendment. I reassure Elaine Murray that Conservatives are as enthusiastic about recycling as she is—the lack of the word “recycling” in our amendment was merely an oversight, and I thank her for pointing that out.

I move amendment S3M-4348.2, to insert at end:

“, and notes that, in order to meet medium and long-term targets, the issue of developing further waste infrastructure must be tackled, as a priority, to better address the management, reduction, recycling and disposal of commercial and industrial waste in Scotland.”

15:56

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): Liberal Democrats, too, welcome the debate. It is disappointing that, 18 months since the cabinet secretary's announcement on the zero waste

society, we are still awaiting publication of the new draft national waste management plan. However, I accept the cabinet secretary's comments that the debate can help to inform the shape of that plan. I hope that ministers will now ensure that the new draft is published as early as possible, and I look forward to future debates on the matter.

I was struck by the uncharacteristically downbeat tone of the Government's motion. Scotland achieving a target ahead of schedule, in this case one on landfill diversion, would normally be the cue for a triumphant welcome. On past form, one might reasonably have expected the full weight of the First Minister and his press office to be unleashed in celebration of the sheer historic significance of it all—yet we are asked simply to note the achievement. That perhaps reflects the fact that it flows from the actions that were taken under the national waste plan that was launched in 2003, following the efforts of my colleague Ross Finnie, who was then the minister responsible.

In 2001, Scotland's recycling rate stood at an anaemic 7 per cent. By 2005, it had already risen to 25 per cent and, since then, it has continued to climb steadily to more than 30 per cent. Although that rate of progress and the change in public attitudes are impressive, the Government's sombre mood might still be entirely justified in the context of international comparison, where Scotland still lags too far behind what many other countries are achieving in the reduction and management of all forms of waste, and as a reflection of the scale of the job that is still ahead of us.

All the more sobering is the fact that meeting successive future targets will become progressively more costly. For that reason, I question the wisdom of the Government's decision not only to abolish the strategic waste fund but to reduce the overall level of funds that are available to local authorities and the zero waste budget by £26 million. I acknowledge that the shortfall has since been reduced to just over £12 million, but the reduction in funding still seems a retrograde step, particularly given Audit Scotland's concerns about the achievability of the more challenging longer-term waste management targets and the scale of the investment that will be needed to meet them, which was alluded to by Elaine Murray.

It is not just me saying that; the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, then chaired by the current Minister for Environment, expressed similar concerns in its 2007 report. The committee also drew attention to changes in the distribution of funding, which it felt could penalise certain councils, often those most in need of support. That said, I agree with the cabinet secretary's decision to suspend fines associated with the landfill allowance scheme. That stick might need to be

kept in reserve, but at this stage a more supportive approach is needed—although the figures for Glasgow City Council are of particular concern.

I will touch on some of the issues relating to waste that arose during the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee's consideration of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, as referred to by Elaine Murray and John Scott. Considering the waste hierarchy, the need for the Government's new plan to address the requirements of the waste framework directive is clear, as Elaine Murray's amendment says. Concerns were raised by the Scottish Environmental Services Association in its evidence to the committee, not just about the wide-ranging nature of the enabling powers that are sought by ministers but about the bill's level of consistency—or lack of it—regarding EU law and definitions of recycling and recovery.

A number of witnesses stressed the importance of having better baseline data before embarking on decisions about targets and infrastructure investment. SESA pointed out that

“significantly better capture of data from waste producers and from sites exempted from waste management licences”

is needed, possibly under regulations, consistently across the United Kingdom.

Likewise, I echo the sentiments that were expressed by John Scott and which are reflected in his amendment. Commercial and industrial waste was identified to the committee as an area on which a great deal more could be done, but investment in infrastructure is key.

It is worth noting the concerns that the waste industry and local authorities raised about decisions taken on, for example, deposit-and-return schemes that could skew existing waste streams and undermine existing investment. One highlighted risk was that setting up infrastructure for a range of different waste management processes may not be the best means of tackling waste, achieving our targets and deploying inevitably scarcer public resources over the coming years.

The final amendment this afternoon, in Robin Harper's name, presents me with a little difficulty. Along with Elaine Murray—I associate myself with her comments on the distinction between the different types of waste—I agree that reduction, reuse and recycling are the optimal routes for us to follow in dealing with waste, but entirely ruling out the option of large-scale waste-to-energy plants seems impractical. In my constituency, much of our waste is still shipped north to Shetland for incineration at no little cost, and the case for building a waste-to-energy plant is increasingly gathering momentum.

I agree with Friends of the Earth and others who argue for waste-to-energy plants to be subject to tough standards on the use of the best available technology. I also welcome Friends of the Earth's calls for a greater focus to be placed on efficient technologies, such as anaerobic digestion, to which Jeremy Purvis and John Scott referred. Having seen for myself the benefits of such a process—albeit on a small scale—in Westray in my constituency, I believe that it can play more of a role in helping us to achieve our waste and emissions reduction targets. Earlier today, I joined colleagues from various political parties at a briefing from Arup, at which we heard of the role that algae can play in carbon capture. In effect, they eat carbon as emissions are passed through pipes, after which the algae are anaerobically digested, turned into fertiliser and returned to the ground.

Much of what the cabinet secretary set out in his zero waste announcement last year was welcome. The plan and, most importantly, the programme for its delivery is now needed as a matter of urgency. The Liberal Democrats welcome the debate. We are proud of our record on the issue in government. We are also proud of Mike Pringle's and Jim Hume's efforts to reduce plastic bag use and excess packaging. We look forward to engaging in future debates on the measures that are important not only for the environment but for green-collar jobs.

I move amendment S3M-4348.4, to insert after “early”:

“, made possible by the success of the first National Waste Plan; recognises that meeting each subsequent target will become progressively more challenging and that Audit Scotland has raised serious concerns over the ability of local authorities to meet their obligations under the 2013 landfill directive; notes with concern the decision to cut the budget for recycling and the removal of incentives for local authorities to collaborate over waste management plans”.

16:02

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I draw Liam McArthur's and Elaine Murray's attention to the amendment that I lodged. It reads that we believe

“that, given the good progress being made so far, there should be no necessity for any large-scale waste-to-energy plants to be built in Scotland and that reuse, reducing waste creation and recycling are the best way forward.”

I am inviting the Parliament to acknowledge that if, some time in the future, we have made enough progress through recycling, reducing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and redesigning—and we may well do—we will be able to say that we will not create any more waste-to-energy plants. That, indeed, is the track that we should follow. The amendment does not call for a blanket ban, which was the frightening—to some people at least—prospect that Elaine Murray raised. Of course we

would like there to be a blanket ban at some time in the future, but I invite the Parliament to take a view right now.

Here are some of the reasons. Coal and oil are both fossil fuels; we want to reduce their use, ideally to zero. Plastic is oil derived and, because of its major calorific value, would still be the major component of the fuel for any waste-to-energy plant. It is fundamentally impossible to have waste-to-energy facilities and a zero waste policy, but zero waste is an objective that the Government says it shares. My amendment simply acknowledges that steps have been taken along the path of achieving that aim—successful steps, which should negate the need to build any more large-scale incinerators in the country.

In January last year, when announcing the zero waste plans, Richard Lochhead made clear his Government's opposition to large inefficient energy-from-waste plants by stating

“Such plants could easily become white elephants”—

which John Scott mentioned. I thank John Scott for explaining what his motion means, and I assure him that I shall vote against it.

Richard Lochhead continued:

“They require excessive transportation of waste and could also crowd out recycling and waste prevention.” [*Official Report*, 24 January 2008; c 5494.]

Excessive transportation is one aspect of large-scale incinerators and energy-from-waste plants that is fundamentally anti climate-change mitigation. However, planning applications for enormous incineration projects continue to be lodged and granted by councils throughout Scotland. I fear that the Government's perception of what constitutes large-scale incineration might differ somewhat from ours.

East Lothian Council is considering a planning application for an incinerator to deal with 300,000 tonnes of waste every year. Last month, North Lanarkshire Council granted planning permission for a plant that will incinerate a further 300,000 tonnes of waste every year. I wonder what the Government's response would be to the residents of Perth, who, while still fighting the development at Binn Farm, now face the threat of another incinerator being granted permission in the area.

Be in no doubt: energy from burning waste is not renewable energy and the Green position is that incineration has no place in a zero waste society. Continued reliance on that technology, even if capped at 25 per cent—which in our opinion is still too high—will discourage the advancement of other cleaner, greener and more efficient technologies. Incinerators on the scale that the Scottish National Party appears to support tie local authorities into providing a guaranteed waste

stream for the long term—up to 25 years—which puts pressure on them not to reduce waste in their area by other means.

Incineration of waste is a see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, short-term approach—in effect, it is landfill in the sky. It is a cop-out, and we all know that we can do better.

The fact is that, given the progress that we are already making in waste prevention, reuse and recycling, there should be no need for any of the wholly unwelcome incinerators that are currently proposed by many local authorities. Waste is not the hardest environmental issue to resolve. To allow us to burn up to a quarter of it, as the SNP seems to suggest, is a failure of the imagination.

I shall reserve the rest of my remarks for my summing-up speech.

I move amendment S3M-4348.1, to insert at end:

“, and believes that, given the good progress being made so far, there should be no necessity for any large-scale waste-to-energy plants to be built in Scotland and that reuse, reducing waste creation and recycling are the best way forward.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Before we move to the open debate, I remind members that speeches should be a tight four minutes long.

16:07

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I want to home in on the issues surrounding how each local authority area reduces the amount that we put out as waste and how they deal with each part of that.

In the case of Highland Council, I have to question whether there is any kind of strategy in place for the council to do that job. It is of long-standing concern to me that officers in councils like to find big solutions to solve problems. One incinerator can deal with an awful lot of problems, but it creates large problems, too. Unfortunately, we are completely unclear what the strategy of the Liberal-led Highland Council is.

To illuminate that further, I will provide an example. Since 2000, the Golspie Recycling and Environmental Action Network has ensured that it has had the highest level of collection and recycling of waste from kerbsides of anywhere in Scotland. That has been supported by several tranches of the council. The network offers recycling to 75 per cent of east and central Sutherland residents and has achieved an 82 per cent participation rate. It provides 17 full-time jobs and two part-time jobs, some of which have gone to people who would find it hard to get employment otherwise. It brings in £400,000 to the

local economy every year, which, for 2,500 people, is very important. It extends its work so that the range of items that it recycles is greater than the range of items that the council collects at present. It can offer a similar collection service for businesses.

We must ask whether, if the proposed incinerator at Invergordon, some 20 miles from Golspie, is built, Highland Council will immediately cancel its arrangement with GREAN, because a stream of waste will be needed to fill the incinerator. We must ensure that councils, including the one in whose area I live, do not replace best practice with a far worse option. Councils need to consider what voluntary bodies and social enterprises can do that councils have not been able to achieve. Such thinking is fundamental to our ability to take forward a low or zero waste strategy.

If 25 per cent of waste in Scotland is to be dealt with in modern incinerators—the idea has the support in principle of the Sustainable Development Commission Scotland—where should those incinerators be? There are proposals to build incinerators in Peterhead, Invergordon, Dunbar, Irvine, Glenfarg, Elgin and Dumfries. What is the strategy behind the proposals? Have those towns gone for the idea because it seems to be a commercial possibility?

As the consultation on the national waste management plan is developed during the summer, we must ask questions that enable us to ensure that recycling and reuse groups such as GREAN, and not incinerators, are the top priority.

16:11

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): It is gratifying that Scotland has achieved its 2010 landfill diversion target 18 months early. I represented the ward in Glasgow that receives the bulk of Glasgow's waste for recycling, and I was very aware of the impact of extensive landfill on my constituents. We do not want such an approach to continue elsewhere in Scotland, and we have a strong vested interest in making more progress.

There is an unresolved issue to do with finance. Exhibit 10 in the Audit Scotland report, "Sustainable Waste Management", showed clearly that levels of public participation in recycling vary by council area. The variations do not seem to be reducing. That is partly to do with socioeconomic circumstances—participation levels are lower in Dundee, Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire—but it is also to do with housing types. In areas that have tenement and shared housing, there are fewer kerbside collections and it is more difficult for authorities to improve recycling rates than it is

in areas where the houses have front and back doors.

The problem is that, under the previous national waste strategy, funding was handed to the authorities that were most willing to pledge to make significant improvements. The authorities that got resources were the ones that could make the most rapid progress—the areas that have houses with front and back doors and that do not face the problems that Dundee, Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire and Inverclyde face.

The shift in funding arrangements from a targeted, application-based system to a formula-based system has left the authorities that face the biggest problems in a difficult position. They did not have funding to take the necessary steps in the first place, and now they are stuck with a formula that does not meet their requirements. I have raised the issue a number of times with the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, but I am not sure that he understands the mechanism that has left authorities in the adverse situation that I described.

The issue is not just the authorities' problem; it is Scotland's problem. Authorities cannot choose to put more money into waste because that would deprive of money other vital services, such as education and social work, which also face problems. We need the Scottish Government to realise that authorities have different starting points and different problems and to put in place financial arrangements that can address the situation.

Richard Lochhead: Does the member at least recognise that the formula for funding through the local government block grant and the zero waste fund that is allocated to local authorities was agreed with local authorities? Surely those authorities that felt that it was a huge problem would not have agreed to that method of allocation.

Des McNulty: The minister will find that all authorities are dissatisfied with aspects of the funding formula. My point relates to its practical application.

The Audit Scotland report highlighted that there was significant low-hanging fruit—things that could be done relatively quickly—but that increased resources would have to be invested in order to achieve the targets. It is not a question of keeping the funding at the same level: increased funding needs to be put in. Among the measures to achieve zero waste that were identified in the responses to the consultation document, the Government seems to have taken action on those that have the potential to deliver the least and to be unwilling to take action on those that have the

potential to deliver the most. Ministers must look again at what they do and establish whether they can address some of the real problems that exist.

16:16

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I have a couple of comments before I come to the main content of my speech. First, I am sure that all of us who visit schools have been heartened by the enthusiasm and interest that primary and secondary pupils display for this hugely important topic. They are way ahead of where our generation was at that age, which is great cause for hope for the future.

Secondly, it occurred to me during the minister's speech that encouraging composting—it is right and proper that we should do that—goes hand in hand with gardening and the provision of allotments. It is a notion that perhaps cuts across departments. Will the minister consider co-ordinating with those departments that take an interest in horticulture and allotments?

I echo what Rob Gibson said about Golspie Recycling and Environmental Action Network. Like Rob Gibson, and indeed Robin Harper, I have visited GREAN many times. We know what goes on there. Rob Gibson quoted some of the statistics. Here is another one, which, when we think about it, is quite extraordinary. GREAN recycles 0.02 per cent—that is one fiftieth of 1 per cent—of all the plastic that is recycled in the United Kingdom. That is a staggering amount. Further, GREAN provides 17 full-time jobs and two part-time jobs. It has enormous support in the community. Fergus Morrison, the manager of GREAN, told me that it is becoming something of a tourist attraction. That may be rather a strange thought, but it is true that people come to Golspie and take a genuine interest in what is being delivered by Fergus Morrison and his dedicated team.

Fergus Morrison asked me to mention two points that he felt were pertinent to the operation of GREAN. I mention them because what is happening at the sharp end, with real people, really recycling, is important. First, he found that the reduction in ring fencing of council money—whatever the rights and wrongs of it—had made difficulties come GREAN's way. GREAN has had to get into a much more tortuous negotiation with Highland Council. Negotiations have spanned the previous and present administrations of Highland Council. At the same time, Fergus Morrison asked me to give the councillors of Highland Council a pat on the back for what is being achieved. I hope that the minister finds the time in her diary to come up north to my constituency to visit GREAN, because she would be very heartened by what is happening there. There is a model there that could

be replicated—I might say, to tempt the minister, that that could be done at fairly minimal cost because it cleverly assures additionality. The minister would be more than welcome.

The debate about waste to power is important. It is a real shame that Dave Thompson is not here, because before he was an MSP he was a director of protective services at Highland Council. When I was a Highland councillor, I can remember going to presentations—of which Dave Thompson was a part—about why waste to power was a good idea. It is right and proper that we have a debate—perhaps at the Government's hand—about the issue. It is important; as Rob Gibson has pointed out, it divides communities.

Rob Gibson: Does the member agree that an incinerator is not a good idea for the Invergordon area?

Jamie Stone: I am saying that waste to power was being sold to Highland Council by highly qualified officials, such as Dave Thompson, more than 10 years ago. There were strong arguments in favour of it. I think that it is time to revisit those arguments, and I think that Dave Thompson's contribution would be crucial. I hope that he will join us the next time that we have a debate of this nature.

16:20

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will recall that, on 7 May, I asked him how much of a role energy from waste would play in reducing the amount of waste that is sent to landfill. He said, as Roseanna Cunningham repeated today, that he would cap that contribution at 25 per cent of municipal solid waste. However, he also agreed to consider support for district heating schemes as part of any future proposals for energy from waste. I welcome that as a step in the right direction, although I was concerned that Roseanna Cunningham left any mention of energy to the very end of her opening remarks.

My question to Richard Lochhead was prompted by my visit to Denmark and Sweden as a member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee as part of our inquiry into Scotland's energy future. While we were there, we visited a number of different generating stations—biofuel and coal-burning facilities, offshore wind farms and an energy-from-waste plant at Nordforbrændingen, near Copenhagen. The important point about that plant is that it combusts large quantities of waste as the fuel supply for the local district heating system. It serves one of the most prosperous and articulate communities in the country, it is located at the heart of that community and it appears to be entirely accepted by local residents in a country in which environmental impacts have been taken

seriously for many years. It is not an incinerator in the traditional sense of a plant that burns municipal solid waste in order to dispose of it, nor is it a power station in the traditional sense of a plant that is designed simply to produce electricity and in which more energy escapes to the atmosphere than is put to good use. Instead, it produces combined heat and power, making use of 90 per cent or more of the available energy. In doing so, it reduces inefficiency, limits carbon emissions and saves the customer money.

The Danish experience requires us to be extremely careful about ruling out waste that is a potential source of energy in the future, as does the experience of countries such as Austria, whose innovations in waste management were showcased in Edinburgh yesterday and presented to today's meeting of the cross-party group on waste management. Austria, with a population of 8 million, has more energy-from-waste plants than not only Scotland but the whole of the UK. Denmark has a network of 29 plants that serve all the major centres of population as part of a nationwide network of district heating schemes that supply the majority of Danish homes. It is those models that should inform the debate about waste in the context of climate change in Scotland and elsewhere.

Closer to home, there is a good example of combined heat and power generation in the Aberdeen CHP schemes that serve high-rise housing at Seaton and Stockethill in my constituency. In this week's meeting of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, which was considering the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill at stage 2, I argued for the business rates burden on CHPs to be reduced so that other parts of Scotland could follow Aberdeen's good example. If Scotland does indeed choose to develop district heating and CHPs, we need ministers to send out positive signals in support of such schemes by strengthening rather than diminishing the profile of energy-from-waste schemes in the waste hierarchy and by joining up waste policy with policies on energy and climate change.

The Institution of Mechanical Engineers produced a report on the subject last year, in which it argued that waste needs to be seen as a resource to be used, not just as a problem to be solved. It is, of course, both those things and, for many waste products, reuse or recycling offers clearly the best opportunities for using them as a resource.

For waste streams that do not offer those options, recovery of energy should be recognised as a far better outcome than disposal to landfill. That recovery may be by anaerobic digestion, gasification, pyrolysis or combustion, as long as it

meets the highest air quality standards, and makes the most efficient use of the energy recovered. The waste hierarchy makes that approach explicit. There is broad support for that, and for low-carbon generation of electricity. The challenge is to join up those policy areas and to miss no opportunities for a low-carbon future for succeeding generations.

16:24

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Forty-five years ago at the University of Edinburgh, I took as a special subject urban life and growth in Victorian Britain—otherwise known as “Geoffrey Best's drains”—so there is little about waste that I do not know, and the fouler, the better.

Untreated waste kills. Glasgow had a good sewage system because the city is inland, and if inland cities did not look to their sewage, it got mixed up in the water supply and people died in various unpleasant ways. Of course, Glasgow has used various abusive terms to refer to Edinburgh, and at the time of the Edinburgh festival in 1947, a Glaswegian voice was heard to declare, “What Edinburgh spends on powdering her nose, she saves by not wiping her bottom.” Even in 1966, Edinburgh was still pumping her stuff right out into the Forth. The notion of being killed in a fortnight has a marvellously concentrating effect on people's decisions.

We now face the carbon bill for our own future. Longannet power station produces 15.5 million tonnes of CO₂ a year, and we only burn 5 million tonnes of coal a year there and at Cockenzie. Longannet is only 36 per cent efficient. That is just one of the burdens that the younger generation will face. From time to time, that makes me moan and say, “At least I won't be around when they have to face it.” That is a rather depressing position in which to start.

The situation is partly our own fault. My local town, Galashiels, is a typical enough post-industrial town. It used to weave tweed and knit sweaters, which meant fulfilled sheep, happy farmers, skilled workers, a rich local culture, and crates of sweaters waiting to leave Gala station bound for aa the airts. Now, we have Tesco, Asda, and Marks and Sparks at one end of the town and, on the site of various tweed mills at the other end, a charnel house of scrapped cars piled in rows three or four high. They are unlikely to move from there because there is no longer a Scottish steel industry to recycle them.

Numerical targets will bring results. The SNP Government has certainly been more proactive than its predecessor was in tightening and meeting waste reduction targets and reducing the

amount of biodegradable waste that goes to landfill. That is useful, but we must start with individuals, families and communities. I will give some examples.

First, we should eat what we need and no more. Joanna Blythman of the *Sunday Herald*, in that great book "Shopped", reckons that we throw away 45 per cent of the food that we buy. There are too many two-for-the-price-of-one offers, which are part of a strategy to extort the maximum spend from the car-borne shopper, and too many just-in-time foods, which are too boring to eat. Bottled water, which was unknown 20 years ago, is now a huge, presumably profitable and utterly useless industry.

When the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee visited Denmark's ministries and power stations—Lewis Macdonald was there—I was struck that we were never invited to use the lifts in the buildings. We were instructed by powerfully built, energetic young scientists who would leap up the stairs two at a time.

My second point is that we should avoid polluting technology. We dispose of batteries all over the place without any notion of where they are going. On the continent, batteries are usually classified as dangerous rubbish and destroyed in special ways.

Thirdly, we have massive amounts of giveaway literature, from the forgettable *Metro* to all the gorgeous brochures from libraries and universities that drop into our wastebaskets. Waste that is not created does not need to be recycled.

I end with another Scottish city joke, which comes from a German diary. A notice in an Aberdeen hotel bedroom stated: "If there is anything missing, please phone the proprietor and he will show you how you can do without it."

Thank you and good day.

16:29

Robin Harper: In a truly green economy, waste should be designed out of the system. Products should be made to be easily reused and recycled and resources should be used as efficiently as possible. In a green economy, community recycling and reuse projects would be expanded, which would create local jobs in recycling and refurbishing projects and give communities better access to resources that would otherwise be wasted.

I, too, express my admiration for GREAN, which Rob Gibson and Jamie Stone mentioned; I also express my admiration for the similar project in Campbeltown and others throughout the country. They deserve the Government's full support, as do little companies such as Hopscotch Theatre

Company, which tours schools in Scotland, particularly eco-schools, to talk about rubbish. I was invited to talk rubbish with it on Monday at Dean Park primary school.

In a green economy, reuse should be given the prominence that it deserves, for in a zero waste society reuse is far more important than recycling. Reuse cannot be easily measured and it is often not valued as highly as it should be. When I was a student, we reused milk bottles and got tuppence deposit when we took our beer bottles back. We did that for 20 years after 1945. We have done it before, so we can do it again.

Reuse is vital in the development of community businesses, as it encourages refurbishing skills and creates jobs. I am delighted that the attempts by the Conservatives to remove from the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill provisions on regulations relating to deposit and return schemes and those by Labour to remove provisions on regulations dealing with charges for carrier bags failed in committee last Tuesday. Will the minister confirm that the Government will use those provisions to introduce regulations? Can she, for example, give me a timescale in which that will happen? How does the Government envisage that the relevant sections, and the others that deal with waste, will work with the new national waste management plan?

The Green party believes that those measures will have an important role to play in helping Scotland to achieve its zero waste ambition. Let me be absolutely clear: my amendment welcomes the work that the Government has done on recycling and waste reduction, but it is not an endorsement of its policy on incinerators; instead, it is designed to allow the Parliament to press the Government to think extremely carefully about the policy on incinerators in the waste management plan as it is redeveloped.

I turn to points that other members have made. Instead of using the term "waste to energy", we should say, "resources to energy". We should start to think of what we call waste as resources. We should consider rolling out not a waste management plan, but a resource action plan. We need to change the language. The more we talk about waste, the more we are prepared—on certain occasions, at least—simply to waste what we are talking about. If we use the term "resource" all the time, we will think about the issue differently.

Jamie Stone: Does Robin Harper accept that we need to be careful, because the plant in Fife that burns chicken dung is generally thought to be a good thing—as is the plant in Wick that burns wood to create power for houses for people in the poverty trap—but waste to power is not? We must be tidy in our logic.

Robin Harper: That is precisely the point that I was going to wind up with. The content of waste that goes to energy-from-waste plants will have a large proportion of plastic in it. Plastic is not a renewable. It is oil derived and it is an extremely valuable resource. More than four years ago, it was worked out that if we were to take a tonne of average municipal waste and burn off the fraction that can be burned—I used these figures in a speech that I made to the Royal Society in November 2004—that would give us £26-worth of electricity. It would probably provide us with about £70-worth of heat, if we tapped into that, but that is not being done in Scotland and, as far as I know, there are no plans to do it in any of the plants that are being rolled out. There is no case for waste-to-energy plants that simply create electricity, because £600-worth of recycled goods could be created from that tonne of waste instead of £26-worth of electricity.

16:34

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): The Liberal Democrats have long been associated with very good green credentials and my colleague Liam McArthur was quite right to highlight that Scotland improved its recycling rate from 7 to 25 per cent between 2001 and 2006, under the stewardship of a Liberal Democrat minister. By anyone's standards, that was a good basis for progress. I am pleased that we are progressing with the landfill diversion targets, which have been mentioned during the debate, but I am not complacent.

The importance of waste management cannot be overestimated. It is clear that we need to reuse, reduce and recycle, and I believe that our culture is making strides towards that. However, there is no room for complacency.

Exactly to the day, a year has passed since my members' debate on excess packaging. The Government fully supported the motion. Indeed, in his summing up, the now removed Minister for Environment, Mike Russell, said that:

"We must take action",

and he added:

"Binding packaging reduction targets could be a way forward."—[*Official Report*, 11 June 2008; c 9586.]

Twelve months on, we have yet to see such reductions.

However, excess packaging is not the only issue that we still have to address. When he sums up, I hope that the cabinet secretary will confirm that, by 2020, growth in municipal waste will be at, or below, 0 per cent. That was the claim made by the cabinet secretary in a statement in January 2008, which Elaine Murray mentioned. Will the cabinet

secretary also shed light on what his department is doing to create business and enterprise from recycling? Having tangible evidence of what is being done to create green jobs, particularly in the current recession, would be a good indicator of the Government's focus and its commitment to the issue.

Des McNulty mentioned a Labour-led council that is the worst local authority in Scotland for its recycling of municipal waste. However, I am sure that the council will be addressing that point as I speak.

The Liberal Democrat amendment highlights key areas and timings that should concern this Government. I sat on the Audit Committee when Audit Scotland's report on sustainable waste management was published. There is a serious risk, if we do not meet our 2013 targets, that we will suffer EU fines. The Audit Scotland report highlighted clearly that the risk was high and that the 2013 target would be the most difficult to meet. That view was shared by three quarters of our councils. Of course, there is ambiguity over who would pay the fines—the United Kingdom Government, the Scottish Government, or local government—but I fear that the buck will be passed down the chain. Local authorities will end up paying, and therefore local people will end up paying.

The Government has been well warned that it must stay focused on the target; it must not keep on taking sums like £26 million out of its own waste budget while advocating a zero waste Scotland.

Elaine Murray and Lewis Macdonald mentioned the Austrian delegation and yesterday's working lunch, which was organised by Marlyn Glen. Robin Harper and I were there, too. We can, of course, learn from other EU member states that are far in advance of where we are.

Audit Scotland reckoned that we would need to treble our spending on recycling in the lead-up to 2020. Increased recycling rates lead to increased costs per tonne on waste. John Scott said that the low-hanging fruit was the easiest to fetch, and Audit Scotland put some figures on such ideas. It reckoned that there would be a cost of £120 per tonne to recycle at a rate of 30 per cent, but £217 per tonne for a rate of 40 per cent. The previous Liberal Democrat Administration recognised that the strategic waste fund budget would have to treble between 2007 and 2020. That is a serious matter and I fear that the Government may not be allocating enough resources to it.

Audit Scotland also thought that it was difficult to see how the Government could meet its own targets and the EU legislation targets if we did not invest more. I hope that the Government is content

that local authorities will have the resources to meet the impending targets in 2013 for landfill reduction and recycling. If ministers want recycling rates to be increased and waste levels to be reduced, it is vital that local authorities have adequate funding to do that.

The Liberal Democrats, of course, have very good green credentials. As I said, we quadrupled recycling rates in five years in government. We also introduced bills on carrier bags, and there was my motion on excess packaging, which Liam McArthur mentioned. We remain committed to a Scotland that is economically sustainable; tackling economic growth without ensuring sustainability would lead to that growth declining. The two ideas go hand in hand.

The debate has highlighted concerns over the incineration of waste. Dunbar in East Lothian, in my own patch, has been mentioned by many members. We must consider the opportunities that anaerobic digestion can offer.

I was a little disappointed to hear Christopher Harvie criticising Galashiels and pointing out the negative parts of it. We must remember that Borders College leads the world in textiles expertise. I will not mention the hypocrisy of Christopher Harvie criticising bottled water when he had a bottle of water right in front of him.

I welcome any advance in Scotland's green credentials, but as I said, we cannot be complacent. The Government has real challenges to face if we are to meet our 2013 European targets, which have been set under the landfill directive. I therefore welcome our Liberal Democrat amendment, which highlights the challenges that we face and should send a clear message to the Government to stop cutting budgets to address waste management.

16:40

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):

This has been a useful debate that should have given the Government some pointers to inform the consultation on its new national waste management plan. We look forward to debating the outcome of that in due course.

As councils have struggled to cope with growing mountains of waste in our throwaway society and landfill sites have become increasingly scarce, Government has, over a number of years, had to face up to the need for a national strategy to reduce waste by reducing the unnecessary use of raw materials; by reusing products when possible; and by recovering value from products at the end of their usefulness through recycling, composting or energy recovery.

Elaine Murray: Our concern is that the Conservative amendment talks only about recycling, reduction and disposal and does not refer to reuse and recovery, which seem to be left out of the intention of an otherwise agreeable amendment.

Nanette Milne: As John Scott said, that is an inadvertent omission. In fact, we include all those things implicitly.

Scotland has done well to achieve its share of the 2010 landfill diversion target 18 months early, which should be acknowledged. However, there are still some councils that are nowhere near recycling or composting 40 per cent of their municipal waste. The figure for Aberdeen City Council and Shetland Islands Council is around 23 per cent, and the figure for Glasgow City Council is even less than that. Efforts must be stepped up if the worthy aspiration of Scotland becoming a zero waste society is to be achieved in the long term and if we are to reach the targets of recycling and composting 70 per cent of household waste and reducing to 5 per cent by 2025 the amount of household waste that is sent to landfill.

The issue has been brought into sharp focus during consideration of the waste measures that are proposed in the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, which aim to reduce waste and improve recycling as part of the action that is needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. As we have heard, witnesses who gave evidence during the stage 1 consideration of the bill highlighted two key areas of concern that must be tackled. The first is the lack of infrastructure that would allow a more rapid transition from disposal to recycling. The second is the urgent need to focus on reducing the amount of commercial and industrial waste that goes to landfill.

It is particularly concerning that, in the two years between 2004 and 2006, construction and demolition waste increased by 61 per cent according to surveys that were carried out by SEPA. I was pleased to hear the minister say this afternoon that there is a determination to reduce that waste significantly by 2012. I wonder whether more encouragement should be given to social enterprises such as Wood Recyclability in Aberdeenshire, which is well known to some members, and the Wood Works in Edinburgh, which does an excellent job of reusing and recycling waste wood from demolished buildings and the like.

In recent years, most of the focus has been on household waste, and relatively little has been done by councils to encourage businesses to divert their waste from landfill. However, the current infrastructure is insufficient even for municipal waste, and council officials in various

parts of the country consider the long-term recycling targets that have been set to be unrealistic and impossible to achieve without thermal treatment of waste. Therefore, although we will support Robin Harper's amendment—we hope that he is right in his assertion that there may be no need for large incineration plants in the future—I think it right to flag up the concerns that are being expressed.

The Government's recently announced proposals to reduce the amount of packaging that is produced are welcome. It is clear from the briefing that was sent to us by the Scottish Retail Consortium that there is a commitment from the retail sector to co-operate with the Government to find ways of reducing packaging, encouraging recycling and educating consumers to understand food date labelling in an effort to reduce food waste, which is currently a massive problem, as Christopher Harvie described. The SRC makes the point that facilities are needed that are capable of handling mixed plastics and that functioning markets need to be established to drive an increase in recycling rates. Therefore, John Scott's suggestion that temporary storage should be sought for recyclates—especially plastic—until the market for that product returns is a good one, which I feel should be followed up.

Lewis Macdonald: Does Nanette Milne recognise that her comments about the Conservatives' support for Robin Harper's amendment appear to contradict the positive comments that John Scott made about the recovery of energy from waste and add to Labour members' concerns about the meaning and content of the Conservative amendment?

Nanette Milne: I do not understand my remarks to mean what the member interprets them to mean.

I have a bee in my bonnet about the packaging of children's toys. Not only does it seem to use an inordinate amount of plastic material, it often requires ingenuity and brute force to get into it. That takes away from children the excitement that my generation derived from opening presents, because nowadays adult assistance is usually required. I hope that pressure will be put on toy manufacturers to simplify the packaging of their products, and I look forward to the day when they do that.

We look forward to the forthcoming consultation on the new national waste management plan, and we welcome the Government's intention to work with stakeholders in pursuit of a zero waste strategy. However, we feel strongly that a clear focus on commercial and industrial waste management is needed, as it is currently not given enough attention, and that the fundamental issue of infrastructure must be tackled if any of the

targets are to be achieved in the medium to long term. To that end, I hope that our amendment will be supported at decision time; we will support the Labour amendment.

16:46

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): Elaine Murray was right to say that we were hoping that the Government would have made further progress along the tracks, given the statement that was made in January 2008, but we have had a good discussion on the issue today. If we go through the discipline of thinking through the waste hierarchy, a good pointer for the consultation is that every level of the hierarchy needs to be fleshed out in detail through the questions that are asked on the strategy when it is produced by the Government.

It is clear, from listening to colleagues on all sides of the chamber, that there are some fundamental choices to be made and questions to be asked, regardless of how the vote goes tonight. I have the sense that it will be one of our scrappier votes, in which members—although they might agree with other members' speeches—try to work out what is meant by the wording of each amendment. We should not regard today's vote as the final point of the debate, because the nature of the issue means that the words are important when we are considering the waste issue.

Roseanna Cunningham made some good points about the importance of waste prevention. Although prevention will not soak up the most money, changing attitudes and culture and how we view waste and resources must be a fundamental part of any national waste strategy. Her comments about providing advice to businesses and the importance of home composting were crucial.

Chris Harvie made some fundamental points about food waste. In a time of recession, we must communicate those ideas to people in a way that does not put them off but which rewards them and makes them think that they are doing the right thing by not throwing food away and not buying too much food in the first place. There are lessons for some of the retailers in relation to buy-one-get-one-free offers; they are great for tinned food, but not so useful for strawberries, because unless you have a big family or are having a party, they will not all be eaten and will go in the bin. A dialogue needs to take place on that issue, but it is not the most expensive part of the equation—it is about how we think it through.

Many members mentioned eco-schools, with which I absolutely agree. I was at High School Yards nursery's green flag celebration this week, but getting from the nursery level right through to

the senior years in secondary school will involve changing our whole culture. We need to give political support and leadership to that initiative. Prevention must come first.

I am disappointed that there has been little talk today about reuse, which is the second level of the hierarchy. It is a difficult issue because, as Nanette Milne said, many small local groups that are involved with it have lost out through the change in funding arrangements for local authorities. When the money was ring fenced, local authorities had a degree of certainty and they felt that they could give some of their money to somebody else. Now that the money is buried in the big budgets and not ring fenced, it is much harder to see where it will come from. Local authorities always fund their own projects first, particularly when they do not have enough money in the first place. There are some real problems. I would like reuse to be given much greater prominence when the report is put out for consultation.

Many colleagues have talked about recycling and the key funding problems. Elaine Murray made the point, which was repeated by Des McNulty, that the Audit Scotland report stated that funding for recycling needed to rise from £89 million to £289 million. That is a huge gap, which needs to be addressed.

I also suggest to the minister that the strategic approach that was taken during the eight years of the previous Executive had its benefits. After all, not every local authority can do exactly the same thing and the strategic waste fund was designed to allow authorities not only to do what suited them best but to negotiate and work with one another. Moving from a strategic to a local approach without ring fencing any money is almost the worst of both worlds for local authorities, which do not have enough money and find it difficult to co-operate with one another. Moreover, waste is not at the top of every authority's priority list; schools and transport have much more importance and, without ring fencing, local authorities will find it hard to do anything about the issue.

In an intelligent speech, Liam McArthur focused on funding, and I would like the cabinet secretary to address that issue in his winding-up speech. Hardly anyone in the chamber thinks that the funding system is working in local authorities; indeed, it is the number 1 issue for authorities at the moment. If, as we all think, they have done only the easy bit with recycling, they will need funding to tackle the hard bit.

Quite a few members mentioned new ways of tackling the waste that it is difficult to deal with. In that respect, we need to rethink what we do with that waste and, although we agree with the sentiment behind Robin Harper's opening and

closing speeches, we have a fundamental problem with the comment in his motion that

"there should be no necessity for any large-scale waste-to-energy plants".

What would that mean in practice? The issue certainly needs to be considered when the Government's next strategy is published. We do not want to rule out the potential of waste-to-energy plants and in any case what constitutes a large waste-to-energy plant is surely a moot point. In what communities would it be appropriate or indeed totally inappropriate to build such a plant? We need to find the best available environmental option, which not only is a matter of funding but involves the consideration of issues such as supply chains, traffic on the roads and the provision of heat to local communities. Such factors cannot be ruled out by that part of Mr Harper's motion.

Robin Harper: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No—I have only about four seconds left.

Des McNulty's comments about ring fencing and the funding problems that are faced by local authorities are crucial and, as I have said, I hope that the cabinet secretary will focus on such issues in his closing speech. However, not only is there a lack of funding, there is also uncertainty. People simply do not understand what the cabinet secretary really meant in the statement that he made last year.

The debate has been good in flushing out what some of us think about this issue and in highlighting areas where there might be political consensus. Although it would be good for us to reach some consensus, the wording and detail of the consultation will be crucial. We all have to sharpen up our act, think through the measures that we will support and use the consultation to frame our views on this matter.

In summary, we want the cabinet secretary to say more about waste-to-energy plants and funding in his winding-up speech. If we do not think through those two crucial elements of the equation and get them right, we will not solve the zero waste problem which, after all, is about trying to reduce the waste going into the system and using what is left much more intelligently.

Finally, one issue that has not been mentioned this afternoon and which must be covered in the consultation is procurement which, for example, covers the product design issues that Roseanna Cunningham rightly highlighted in her speech. Developers need to think more intelligently about the design of products and their packaging; indeed, this week, Hilary Benn made an important announcement about packaging in the UK.

Procurement also comes into service design. For example, it might mean ensuring that more recycled material is used in any roads that are procured and that certain buildings are recycled and reused properly instead of simply being knocked down. The issue of procurement design is fundamental, but no member has mentioned it.

The debate has been a good run round the houses, but it is absolutely not the last word on this subject. Like other colleagues, I am very much looking forward to the consultation, and it would be good if the minister could publish it next month.

16:54

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I, too, agree that the debate has been constructive and that some helpful speeches have been made, with not too many recycled or reused ones, at least not from my party's members. As I outlined in an intervention during the opening speech from the Labour Party, the reason for having the debate was to listen to the Parliament. In a few weeks, we will publish the consultation on the next national waste plan. Before we do so, we will genuinely take on board many of the comments that we have heard today. I give an assurance to Parliament that, when the consultation closes, we will bring the issue back to the Parliament for debate before we publish the final plan. One question that has been asked is why now. Labour members have talked about a delay in producing the plan. The Labour amendment, which we will support, refers to the European waste framework directive, which came into force only in December 2008. We had to wait to find out what that was about before we could produce our consultation document, to ensure that it takes into account the EU perspective.

We should congratulate the Parliament on the fact that, since its establishment in 1999, it has taken recycling in Scotland from about 5 per cent to about 33.5 per cent today. That is a massive increase and a vindication of the setting up of the Scottish Parliament, which has allowed us to look after our environment. The EU has also played a role. It is not good at everything, but it is good at working with member states and with Scotland on environmental policy. We hope that it will work with us to take Scotland down the road towards being a zero waste society.

Most members have acknowledged that we have made good progress. We have reached the 2010 landfill target 18 months early and waste growth in Scotland is now stabilising, which is a massive step forward, given that we all believe that the key is prevention and not producing waste in the first place. We are making progress on recycling, too. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I know that members want to go home, but it would be nice to listen to the minister—at least it would be polite.

Richard Lochhead: I agree, Presiding Officer.

There have been many firsts in the past two years. The capital grants scheme for recycling plastics in Scotland is under way. None of us wants our plastics to go to recycling centres and then to be shipped to China; we want to keep it in Scotland and deal with it on our doorstep. We have made progress on carrier bags. More people in Scotland are using bags for life than ever before and we have engaged retailers on that, too. Many members have referred to the waste provisions in the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill and the relationship between waste in Scotland and reducing Scotland's emissions. Liam McArthur and others referred to the need for better data. One provision in that bill will ensure that we get better data from the commercial sector.

In the past few months, the first reverse vending machines have been put in place in supermarkets in Scotland. We also have the love food, hate waste campaign, which reminds us that 17 per cent of the average household bin is made up of food waste. About 0.5 million tonnes of food goes in the bin each year, which costs each household on average £400. We also have the food grants, which help companies, particularly in the food and drink sector, to reduce food waste. There are a range of other activities.

We agree with Lewis Macdonald that we must build our zero waste concept into all our policies. We are doing that across the board, from our policies on climate change to those on energy and food. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order. Could members who have just come into the chamber please be quiet?

Richard Lochhead: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

All members agree that the only way in which we will make progress is through partnership between the Scottish Government, local government, individual households, the private and public sectors and others. The Scottish Government is showing leadership. The consultation on "Making the most of packaging: A strategy for a low-carbon economy", which was launched this week, is not only the responsibility of Hilary Benn, as it is a joint consultation by the Scottish and UK Governments. We recognise that 800,000 tonnes of waste in the waste stream in Scotland comes from packaging. This week, the Scottish Government has signed a commitment to halve the amount of construction waste that goes to landfill from Scottish Government projects by 2012.

We need the public's support, and they are showing an appetite for making progress on the agenda. There is a range of evidence of that, including the figures on participation by households in recycling. As many members have said, community organisations are important, too. I tell Jamie Stone that I have visited GREAN in Golspie and that I was impressed by its good work. The community sector in Scotland has a big role. The Scottish Government has a funding stream to support community organisations. There is increased funding of £7.5 million, over £5 million of which has already been committed to community organisations the length and breadth of Scotland. Rob Gibson, too, highlighted the importance of the community sector.

On the private sector, Scotland's retailers are on board through their waste policies. That is important, particularly in relation to issues such as packaging. Last week, I visited the Coca-Cola Enterprises factory in East Kilbride for the launch of its new waste strategy, through which it aims to stop sending waste to landfill by the end of 2011. A recycling rate for factory waste of 93 per cent has already been achieved.

On the same day, I attended the launch at Our Dynamic Earth of the Scotch whisky industry's environmental strategy. As one of Scotland's biggest economic sectors, the industry has agreed to match the Scottish Government's climate change target of reducing its emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. In addition, the industry aims significantly to reduce the average weight of packaging and to eliminate the sending of waste from packaging operations to landfill sites.

The Presiding Officer: Order. I again ask members who have just entered the chamber—and, indeed, those who have been here for a while—to be quiet, please.

Richard Lochhead: The private sector, like the household sector, now recognises that tackling waste is a good way of cutting costs. It makes good business sense as well as environmental sense.

Of course, we need the support of our local authorities, which many members congratulated on making so much progress. Eight local authorities in Scotland have already broken the 40 per cent target for recycling. Those authorities are leading the way and are showing the rest of our councils that headway can be made. Local authorities are engaged in many new initiatives, including all sorts of kerbside trials and fortnightly collections. Some authorities are talking about moving to monthly collections and some, such as Glasgow City Council, are setting up recycling zones in our high streets. Of course, the Government is committed to ensuring that recycling zones are available for the public when

they are out and about. The provision of such zones in every high street in every town and city in Scotland is an issue that we are about to start discussing with local authorities and private sector companies. Just last week, I met council leaders in Glasgow to press home the message that we need to move forward to a zero waste society. We need everyone in Scotland to work together towards that aim.

However, as many have mentioned, some significant challenges lie ahead. For instance, we need to turn more attention to commercial and industrial waste. In the past, a lot of emphasis has been put on household waste, on which we are making good progress. The consultation will put a lot more emphasis on commercial and industrial waste, which, after all, makes up 70 to 80 per cent of the waste stream in Scotland.

The debate on energy from waste will no doubt continue to be contentious in the Parliament and elsewhere. We welcome Robin Harper's amendment. We might differ on the definition of "large-scale" in terms of the size of energy-from-waste facilities, but we certainly agree that we need to look at the waste hierarchy. Energy from waste might have a role to play, but we must not take our eye off the other ways in which we deal with waste reduction.

Finally, funding was highlighted by many members, particularly those on the Labour benches. I find it bizarre that, on the one hand, Labour members support massive funding cuts for the Scottish block from Westminster while, on the other, they keep calling on us to give more and more money to many causes in Scotland. They cannot have it both ways. They should stand up with the Scottish Government so that we can keep the funding here to help us to achieve our environmental and other aims in Scotland.

Funding will continue to be an issue, but it is not right to say, as the Lib Dem amendment claims, that funding has been cut. Funding has not been cut, although it might now be delivered to local authorities in a different way. Through the zero waste fund—which is worth £154 million over three years—and the block grant, local authorities are receiving record funding. We all need to work together to ensure that local authorities treat waste as a priority.

Let me conclude. Jamie Stone mentioned the enthusiastic way in which our schoolchildren back recycling and other environmental initiatives. That reminds us that this is all about culture change. Moving towards a zero waste society is about recognising that waste is not simply waste but a valuable resource that we need to protect for future generations. The debate is about saving our planet, saving costs and creating new jobs. It is about creating a greener Scotland as we move

towards a zero waste society and make Scotland a greener nation.

I ask Parliament to support the motion as well as all the amendments, apart from the Liberal Democrat one.

Point of Order

17:03

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Before we move to decision time, I would welcome your advice on an exchange that took place earlier this morning. In his closing speech for the Scottish National Party, Michael Russell became rather upset with myself and other Labour members for claiming that the SNP had been guilty of helping to bring down the Callaghan Government in 1979.

Mr Russell said:

“What has been said is an outrage because it is wrapped in a lie. We have heard repeated again and again in the chamber the lie in which that outrage is wrapped.”

To disprove what he claimed was a lie, Mr Russell quoted an extract from the memoirs of the then Prime Minister Jim Callaghan:

“Michael Cocks, the Chief Whip, had spoken with some of Labour’s Devolution rebels. In his view the difficulty within the Party was much greater than any from the Scottish National Party and the Whips’ judgement was that the Government could not rely on the votes of Labour Members from Merseyside or the North”.

As if to prove the point, Mr Russell added, “Labour brought itself down.”

Members: Hurray!

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

David Whitton: I am delighted to hear members cheering. They will not be laughing in a minute.

Members: Oh.

The Presiding Officer: Order.

David Whitton: Presiding Officer, you have voiced concern about members using the words “lie”, “lying” and “liar” in commenting on other members’ speeches. If I thought that I was guilty of misleading the Parliament, I would of course retract any misleading statements. To be accurate, I have checked the House of Commons records. I can also rely on an article that was written by Roy Hattersley, the former deputy leader of the Labour Party—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

David Whitton: Roy Hattersley was in the Commons on that fateful night, unlike Mr Russell. He reported that every Labour member except one—the terminally ill Sir Alfred Broughton, who was not brought to the House of Commons—voted with the Government. I can rely further on an article from the *Kingman Daily Miner*, which reported that when the vote came, 279 Conservatives were joined by five Ulster Unionists,

three Ulster Independents and 11 Scottish nationalists, one of whom was Mr Andrew Welsh, who is now a member of this Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: Could you come to the point of order, please, Mr Whitton?

David Whitton: I am doing so.

Members: Hurray!

David Whitton: History also records that 13 Liberals supported Thatcher's Tories that night—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

David Whitton: They included a former member of the Parliament—Sir David Steel. Is it not amazing how history is about to repeat itself?

Presiding Officer, I would welcome your guidance on whether it is in order for Mr Russell to claim that Labour members were guilty of telling lies and of attempting to mislead the Parliament when historical records show clearly that Labour did not bring down the Callaghan Government. We told the truth—we were brought down by the unpalatable actions of the Scottish National Party and the Liberals.

The Presiding Officer: First, I point out that, strictly, members have three minutes in which to make a point of order. Mr Whitton's speech was 15 seconds longer than that—I recommend against that in future.

Nonetheless, I thank Mr Whitton for giving me notice of his point of order, which has allowed me carefully to consider the transcript of this morning's debate, when I was not in the chair. I simply remind all members of my previous ruling that the words "lies", "lying" and "liar" should not be used in the chamber in relation to other members—and preferably not at all. I am disappointed that the word "lie" has been used again today more than once. There is something of a growing tendency in that direction. I simply ask again that all members cease that practice forthwith.

All that I can say in reply to Mr Whitton's second point is that, as I have said many times before, it is not my role as Presiding Officer to establish the veracity or otherwise of statements made in the chamber by any member, be they a minister or otherwise.

Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Since I have been mentioned, I will say that I was the SNP's chief whip in 1979. It might help if I point out a factual matter.

The Presiding Officer: Do you have a point of order, Mr Welsh?

Andrew Welsh: I do indeed. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Andrew Welsh: Mr Russell has been accused of being inaccurate. I delivered the motion of no confidence to Michael Foot, who was the then Leader of the House. If Labour had delivered its policy, the vote on the motion of no confidence would not have taken place and Labour could have avoided the defeat. That is a matter of fact.

I accept the Presiding Officer's judgment on the point about parliamentary language, but the fact is the same—Labour could have avoided the vote and the defeat.

The Presiding Officer: The member has made a point, but I am not clear about whether it was a point of order for me. His fact is now a matter of public record.

Decision Time

17:09

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S3M-4344, in the name of Annabel Goldie, on Scotland needs a general election, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: I did not think that we would be. There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

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)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (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)
 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)
 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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whittton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 78, Against 42, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that the interests of Scotland and the United Kingdom would be best served by holding a general election for a new House of Commons as soon as possible.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer—and I will not take three minutes. Will you advise the chamber what the practical effect is of the vote that we have just taken?

The Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order. The vote was a vote on a motion that was debated properly in the chamber.

The next question is, that amendment S3M-4348.3, in the name of Elaine Murray, which seeks to amend motion S3M-4348, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on the national waste strategy, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-4348.2, in the name of John Scott, which also seeks to amend motion S3M-4348, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on the national waste strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)

Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

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)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (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)
 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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 78, Against 40, Abstentions 2.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-4348.4, in the name of Liam McArthur, which also seeks to amend motion S3M-4348, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on the national waste strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

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, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)

McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 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)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, 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)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)

Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 56, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-4348.1, in the name of Robin Harper, which also seeks to amend motion S3M-4348, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on the national waste strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)

Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 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)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 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, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 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)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 54, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-4348, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on the national waste strategy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)

McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)

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)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (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)
 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)
 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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 79, Against 1, Abstentions 39.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes Scotland's achievement of its share of the 2010 landfill diversion target 18 months early; encourages the Scottish Government to continue working with stakeholders to further improve recycling rates, increase reuse and do more on waste prevention; recognises however that the provisions of the EU-revised *Waste Framework Directive (2008/98/EC)* are required to be transposed into Scots law by 12 December 2010; notes the forthcoming consultation on the new National Waste Management Plan; believes that the new plan must fully address the waste hierarchy of prevention, reuse, recycling, recovery and disposal, as described in the *National Waste Plan 2003* and the revised EU framework directive; notes that, in order to meet medium and long-term targets, the issue of developing further waste infrastructure must be tackled, as a priority, to better address the management, reduction, recycling and disposal of commercial and industrial waste in Scotland, and believes that, given the good progress being made so far, there should be no necessity for any large-scale waste-to-energy plants to be built in Scotland and that reuse, reducing waste creation and recycling are the best way forward.

Anne Frank Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S3M-3698, in the name of John Park, on Anne Frank day.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that 12 June 2009 is Anne Frank Day, the 80th anniversary of the birth of Anne Frank; welcomes the establishment in 2008 of Anne Frank Scotland as the new education programme for the Anne Frank Trust UK; further welcomes the work carried out by Anne Frank Scotland with young people to develop an understanding of positive citizenship and human rights; further notes that the programme is focussed on Glasgow, Edinburgh and Fife and supports the expansion of the programme across the whole of Scotland; looks forward to the opportunity for the Parliament to host the travelling exhibition, *Anne Frank: A History for Today*, which is the centrepiece of the programme; understands that the exhibition uses Anne Frank's story and the history of the Holocaust to address contemporary challenges and discrimination in Scotland, and hopes that all MSPs sign up to the Anne Frank Declaration to mark this anniversary as a recognition of the millions of children and young people who have been victims of persecution and to challenge the prejudice and hatred that harms us all.

17:16

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I almost did not think that we were going to get here this evening—decision time took a bit longer to conclude than I had expected.

It gives me great pleasure to open this evening's debate on a motion that I lodged a number of weeks ago and which, I am pleased to say, has received an excellent level of support from across the political spectrum in Parliament. That has happened because the story of Anne Frank means so much to many people. Anne's diary, which was given to her on her 13th birthday, tells of her life between 12 June 1942 and 1 August 1944. During her all-too-short life, she must have faced levels of upheaval, discomfort and strain that are almost unimaginable today. Unfortunately, that was all too common at that time in Europe.

Anne Frank was born in Frankfurt 80 years ago tomorrow, on 12 June 1929. In 1933, after the Nazis had gained power in Germany, her family moved to Amsterdam. Following the outbreak of the second world war, her family were trapped in Holland during the German occupation. In July 1942, as the threat to the Jewish population increased, her family went into hiding in the hidden rooms of the Amsterdam office building of her father, Otto Frank. After two years—most people will remember this element of her story—the group was betrayed and transported to a concentration camp. Almost seven months after her arrival, Anne Frank died in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, shortly after the death of her sister, Margot.

Anne's father, Otto, the only survivor of the group, returned to Amsterdam after the war to find that a diary had been saved. His considerable efforts led to its publication in 1947. It was translated from the original Dutch and was first published in English in 1952. Most members here in the chamber will not only have read it but will be acutely aware of the meaning behind the story.

I first visited the hidden rooms in 1985 as part of a primary school visit to Amsterdam. The visit brought home to me the reality of the conditions in a way that no book, film or television programme ever could. The thing I recall most from the visit is how quiet and well behaved we were as primary 7 schoolchildren—a clear indication that we were very much taking it all in. The story of Anne Frank certainly inspired me then, as it still does, which is why I have been pleased to support the work of the Anne Frank Trust UK and Anne Frank Scotland over the past year.

Anne Frank Scotland and the Anne Frank Trust draw on the power of Anne Frank's life and diary to challenge prejudice, to reduce hatred and to encourage people to embrace positive attitudes, responsibility and respect for others. The travelling exhibition "Anne Frank: A History for Today" is used in schools and community venues and acts as a focus for educational programmes for young people. More than 13,000 people have seen the exhibition and about 5,000 young people have participated in the related workshops and training. The feedback from staff, pupils, venues and the public has been first class, and people have expressed how much they recognise the importance and relevance of the work, even today.

It has been a busy year for the project officer, Heather Boyce. We are fortunate to have in the public gallery this evening visitors from Holyrood secondary school, St Mary's Kenmure, Turnbull high school and Strathclyde Police. All have worked alongside Heather and other members of Anne Frank Scotland on intensive projects to make them a success. I am pleased that they are here.

None of that would have been achievable without the funding that the trust received from the Barcapel Foundation Ltd. That funding comes to an end in 2010. We have Keith Brown, the Minister for Schools and Skills, with us this evening. I would appreciate his saying in his closing speech whether he would be prepared to meet Anne Frank Scotland and the Anne Frank Trust to discuss potential future Scottish Government assistance on funding beyond 2010.

I am sure that, over the past few days, many of us have reflected on last week's European election results. It is important that the Scottish Parliament continue to show vigilance and strength in challenging racism, bigotry and

intolerance in all its forms. We all—each and every member—must shoulder that responsibility. Scotland has not been without its own problems, particularly sectarianism, which has been described as Scotland's secret shame. Anti-Irish racism is a strand within that we all have concerns about. Although great steps have been made, much work can still be done.

I have genuine concerns about the extremists who exploit differences in our communities and workplaces. We have seen that recently, particularly in the wildcat action that took place at oil refineries in Scotland and throughout the UK. That action was not about people being concerned about migrant workers, but was in essence about unscrupulous employers undermining the rest of the workforce by bringing in migrant workers on different terms and conditions and creating sensitivities between communities and groups of workers in a way that we in the Scottish Parliament must challenge. Understandably, we have concerns about such sharp employment practices.

A great number of MSPs signed the Anne Frank declaration today at lunch time in the garden lobby. I appreciate the time that they took to come and do that, as does Anne Frank Scotland. I hope that it gives members an opportunity to engage with the organisation in the future. The words of the declaration are important, so I will remind members of them. It says:

"I will stand up for what is right and speak out against what is unfair and wrong

I will try to defend those who cannot defend themselves

I will strive for a world in which our differences will make no difference—a world in which everyone is treated fairly and has an equal chance in life".

As politicians, we have our differences on policy and along party-political lines, but I am sure that members agree that, at all times, we should work towards the aims of the declaration not only in what we say, but in how we act and what we do.

17:23

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):

I congratulate John Park on securing the debate and on his excellent opening speech.

Today, we remember and celebrate Anne Frank's life and we welcome the establishment in 2008 of Anne Frank Scotland as the new education programme for the Anne Frank Trust UK. The altruistic work that the organisation carries out in Anne's memory is heartwarming, inspirational and poignant.

The trust works under four clear and separate headings. The first is major public exhibitions. Its travelling exhibitions are a highly effective way of

drawing people to Anne Frank's story and the contemporary social issues that are connected with it.

The second heading is schools and communities. Positive voices is a project that the trust launched in 2006 and that is designed to deliver Anne Frank's story to schools and youth clubs. It targets in particular communities that suffer from deep divisions, and its success in tackling those divisions has increased with each passing year.

The third heading is work with offenders. The trust has visited more than 40 prisons in a little over five years. That work entails displaying exhibitions, running workshops and allowing the prisoners and staff to hear a Holocaust survivor tell his or her story.

The final heading is awareness raising. The trust is committed to breathing life into Anne Frank's story so that her memory continues to flourish and keeps inspiring future generations. Undoubtedly the mission of the Anne Frank Trust UK is commendable and should be supported here in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom.

I will relay to members some of the comments that have been made regarding the positive voices project by quoting from a document that was given to members earlier.

Iain Campbell, headteacher of St Margaret's primary school in Polmont, said:

"As far as the exhibition is concerned ... this was a tremendous success for the school.

The timing of the exhibition which coincided with parents' evenings allows us to open the event to the parent community who attended in force. The pupils who acted as guides came back to school on both evenings and really enjoyed showing parents around. These particular pupils not only gained considerable knowledge of the Anne Frank story but gained in personal and social skills by being guides.

Five classes attended the exhibition and teachers felt that they gained a great deal from it which allowed further discussion in class.

Parents who visited the exhibition spoke very positively of the experience and thought the guides had done an amazing job. One parent took time to write in to say how moved she had been and how important she felt the exhibition had been for the children reminding them of atrocities of the Second World War.

I would like to thank you for this opportunity as I strongly believe we all gained a great deal from it."

Anne Frank Scotland works closely with young people and delivers an important message about understanding positive citizenship and human rights, which undoubtedly provides a valuable service to Scotland and its citizens.

Anne Frank Scotland has proved to be a tremendous success in Glasgow, Edinburgh and

Fife. One of the first major exhibitions that it undertook was a major, month-long workshop programme at Celtic Football Club's learning centre. More than 2,000 students took part in the project and developed a key understanding that every form of racism and discrimination is wrong and cannot be tolerated. Contemporary issues relating to those matters were also discussed. Proposed plans for the coming year include a month-long programme at Porthlethen library and Porthlethen academy; maintaining the great work that is being carried out in Edinburgh, Fife and Glasgow, while simultaneously working harder in areas of higher need; and continuing to develop the role of Anne Frank ambassadors and seeking funding opportunities. I, for one, welcome and support the expansion of the programme throughout Scotland and fully expect the positive message to be embraced by all Scots.

The centrepiece of Anne Frank Scotland and the Anne Frank Trust UK is the moving assortment of memorabilia entitled, "Anne Frank: A History for Today". The exhibition traces Anne's incredible life from her childhood to early teens, set against the background of the rise of Nazi power and the persecution of the Jewish people in the Holocaust. Implicit in the exhibition are the themes of racism, ethnic cleansing, genocide, bullying and anti-Semitism. The most powerful element of the exhibition is that it challenges viewers to look for ways to resolve differences without violence and to learn about human rights laws and standards, which are outlined by documents such as the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It challenges viewers to implement that understanding by taking an active role in their communities and in government. The exhibition is admirable and moving and I look forward to the Scottish Parliament hosting such an event.

The Anne Frank declaration is a message of hope, truth and positive human endeavour. It is a most worthy document and I had no hesitation in signing it. I am confident that all colleagues feel the same way.

Anne Frank graced this world with her presence for only 15 short years before dying of typhus in Bergen-Belsen. During her short life, she endured more traumatic experiences and harrowing journeys than any of us could possibly fathom, as did many other Jewish children during the war—more than 1 million of whom perished. After her family and the four others hiding with them were betrayed, they were sent to Auschwitz before being sent to Bergen-Belsen a few weeks later. Only Anne's father Otto survived the war. Her sister Margot, her mother Edith and the other four people who shared their Amsterdam hiding place for 25 months were murdered.

Anne Frank's diary has been translated into 67 languages and is now one of the world's most read books. She is remembered for her literary skills, courage and resilience. That is testament not only to her, but to the entire human race and the undeniable truths that out of the dark comes light, and that the human spirit can tolerate any evil that is thrust upon it.

17:28

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): I, too, congratulate John Park on securing the debate. Without hesitation, I applaud the establishment and success of the Anne Frank Trust UK and Anne Frank Scotland and subscribe to the Anne Frank declaration.

In the weeks leading up to the commemoration of the 65th anniversary of D-day, I was struck by the fact that, even in the few years since the 60th anniversary of the event, awareness among young people of the enormity of the second world war has declined further. That lack of understanding about the rise of fascism in Germany and the gradual but inevitable path that led to the world's most destructive conflict is complemented by a more encouraging understanding of the Holocaust, although, among far too many, there is the belief that it was the Holocaust that led free nations into war with Nazi Germany—it was not. The final evidence of the Holocaust was understood by the wider public only when the war itself was over, and it has been rightly condemned ever since. However, the truth is more prosaic: Governments at the time did come to appreciate the horror that was being perpetrated, but chose to suppress the knowledge and to do little, if anything, to disrupt it. Perhaps they had no choice, if the ultimate objective—the absolute defeat of Hitler—was to be achieved at the earliest date. However, with notable and wonderfully honourable exceptions, there was little appetite for accommodating widespread Jewish immigration into other nations before the war.

At question-and-answer sessions over the years, I have routinely been asked, "Could it happen again?" That is surely a false question: it has happened again. It happened in Stalin's post-war Soviet Union, in Pol Pot's Cambodia and in Rwanda. Perhaps people mean to ask whether it could happen again in Europe. The answer is, again, that it has happened, in post-Soviet Balkan states. It can happen, it has happened, and I say with profound regret that it will probably happen again; therefore the work of the Anne Frank Trust UK is vital in engaging the minds and securing the commitment of every new generation.

The trust's work must be complemented by an understanding of everything that happened in the lead-up to the events that Anne Frank described in

her diary. The lessons of history must be understood if history is not to be repeated. Whatever recompense there might be in our actions to honour the people who died, at the heart of what we do must be a recognition that a collective lack of popular international will in the 1930s—a collective lack of will and action on the part of people just like us—resulted in the ruthless extermination of millions of disabled people, Romany folk, homosexuals and, above all, Jews.

The experience of Anne Frank and her family engages hearts and minds because her diary encapsulates what happened in a timeless way and enables us all to relate to her experience. The recent BBC dramatisation illustrated afresh how everyday the nuances and complexities of Anne Frank's family life and relationships were. It also showed us how vivid were the assorted personalities with whom she shared her final years in confinement. Her experience moves us to tears in memory of all the people who died because it makes tangible the terrible statistic of 6 million murdered people.

Prejudice and hatred are not inherited. A song in Rodgers and Hammerstein's "South Pacific" succinctly captures a truth—members should not fear; I will not sing it. The lyric goes thus:

You've got to be taught to hate and fear
You've got to be taught from year to year,
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a different shade,
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught before it's too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate,
You've got to be carefully taught

How welcome it is to read the testimonials from people who have seen the touring exhibition, to learn about the discussion that the exhibition has stimulated, and to witness the leadership and engagement of so many young people—the very six, seven and eight-year-olds whom we can carefully teach to think and act quite differently.

The lesson of the 1930s and Anne Frank's life and death is that we must not just be vigilant across the world but set an example by fighting prejudice and hatred at home. We must stand ready to accept willingly all people who come here under genuine threat of persecution. We must counter ignorance. We must directly and personally tackle people who seek advancement by encouraging fear and suspicion of other people. In a week when, to the collective dismay of us all, the British National Party succeeded in doing exactly that to secure the election of two MEPs who will represent our country it is clear that we

need to do far more. Politicians face a real and personal challenge.

I will stand up for what is right and speak out against what is unfair and wrong. I will try to defend those who cannot defend themselves. I will strive for a world in which our differences will make no difference—a world in which everyone is treated fairly and has an equal chance to life.

More power to the Anne Frank Trust UK in promulgating that declaration. I thank John Park for affording me the opportunity personally to affirm it today.

17:33

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): I, too, thank John Park for enabling us to debate, in Anne Frank week, the valuable and important work of the Anne Frank Trust UK.

The work that has informed the trust's exhibition is critical to our understanding. Members who, like John Park, have been to the Anne Frank House will have realised under what pressure the people must have been who spent two long years in that confined space. Although there has been an extension to the museum, which Stephen Spielberg generously provided, it is easy to sense what a claustrophobic atmosphere those people must have endured.

If we do not learn from history, we are doomed to make the same mistakes again and again. In that regard, the work to raise the profile of the horrors of the Holocaust must be carried forward. As Jackson Carlaw indicated, we can look at the statistics, but the single story of a young girl brings the issue home.

The issue has not gone away. It is about the discrimination that we see in the world around us and the persecution of people for no reason other than that they are different. We need look no further than the Balkans and Darfur, and perhaps even the 750,000 children incarcerated in Gaza, to see the necessity of the work of the Anne Frank Trust UK and all organisations that highlight the consequences of our lack of tolerance. Much closer to home, we listen to the sectarian chants from the terraces of our football clubs and we realise that those issues are not remote and are not reserved to other parts of the world—they have the potential to be very real in our country.

I am pleased that I have been part of the debate and that all the contributions thus far have been so positive about the work of the Anne Frank Trust UK. However, we must recognise that much of that work would not have been possible, and Anne's story would not have been known to the wider world, were it not for the commendable efforts of her father, Otto Frank. He found, edited

and published—under some duress—her diaries in the form that we know them. We should take the story of Anne Frank as a lesson in how negative things can be done to small communities simply because they are different. I urge all members to take that message throughout the country. Let us bring an end to the discrimination, sectarianism and racism that we all face in various ways.

17:37

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Keith Brown): Like other members, I congratulate John Park on securing the debate and giving the Parliament the opportunity to mark Anne Frank day. It gives us a chance not only to commemorate the life and tragic early death of a remarkable young woman but to stand united against racism, discrimination and intolerance in all its forms. A number of members have mentioned how present that threat can be, for example in the results of the recent European elections, not just in this country but, sadly, even in Holland.

Anne Frank's 13th birthday, on 12 June 1942, was the day on which she began to keep a diary. One of her first entries, on 20 June 1942, reads:

"It seems to me that later on neither I nor anyone else will be interested in the musings of a 13-year-old schoolgirl."

Since its initial publication in 1947, Anne's "musings" have inspired, moved and educated successive generations of young people and adults. She lived a short but dramatic life, suffered an early and tragic death, and left a first-hand testimony of the hardship of life under Nazi rule, including an invaluable record of the daily tribulations, hopes and fears of two years in hiding.

Like other members, I applaud the work of the Anne Frank Trust UK in bringing her story to Scottish schools. We want our young people to grow up with an understanding of the world and their place in it. We want them to understand what it means to be Scottish but at the same time to admire and accept the identities of others. That means taking a stand against racism, discrimination and intolerance in all its forms. Educating young people about the Holocaust can contribute greatly to that aim.

Holocaust education is important not only in its own right but because it opens windows to wider aspects of citizenship education. It provides rich opportunities for analysis, discussion and debate. Holocaust education sits well with the Government's policies in the curriculum for excellence, which has as its aim the idea that young people should become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and, crucially, responsible citizens. Pupils will be able

to learn across the traditional subject divides and benefit from learning experiences inside and outside the classroom. As a counterpoint to Jackson Carlaw's point, in addition to Holocaust education, children nowadays visit world war 2 battlefields much more frequently, which helps to educate them on the consequences of war.

Learning about the life of Anne Frank and reading her diaries can not only open young people's eyes to a different world but help them to reflect on the problems and challenges that they and their society face today.

The Government is giving the Holocaust Educational Trust annual funding of around £214,000 for the next two years to run the lessons from Auschwitz programme. We also run a number of other initiatives, some of which I will mention shortly. On the point that was made about meeting the Anne Frank Trust, I can confirm that Scottish Government officials will meet the trust on 23 June.

Through that funding, around 400 senior pupils each year will be able to visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. Government funding will enable pupils to travel to Auschwitz for only £49 each. I speak from personal experience when I say that those visits are a profound experience for those involved. I went to a night that was organised by Beaconsfield school in my constituency to hear two young women talk about their visit to the death camp. Many people were there—parents, local politicians and others—and no one was left in any doubt of the impact that that trip had had on them and on those at the school who heard about it.

Each participant in those trips will share their experiences with their school and the wider community. That is the point—the trip is not just for the individual themselves. On 16 June, the First Minister will speak at a gathering of previous participants who have gone on to become student ambassadors for Holocaust education.

We have also been working closely with the Holocaust Educational Trust to ensure that those visits benefit pupils from across Scotland. We want to ensure, as I have mentioned, that the visits are closely aligned with the curriculum for excellence and the work of Learning and Teaching Scotland, through which the funding that I mentioned earlier is disbursed.

The Scottish Government—the present Administration and the previous Administration—has supported Holocaust memorial day every year since 2001. The most recent event, which was in Paisley on 27 January 2009, attracted Government support of £25,000. Learning and Teaching Scotland has enabled teachers who are involved in Holocaust education to go on

professional development study visits to Amsterdam and Berlin. Those trips have included visits to the Anne Frank museum in Amsterdam and Berlin's Anne Frank Zentrum, an educational museum.

We have also funded "Testimony", an exhibition about the Holocaust that features the personal recollections of Scottish survivors. That exhibition can be used in schools and communities to support Holocaust education.

As is evident from the speeches this evening, people remember the Holocaust and all the victims of Nazi atrocities with the positive aim of preventing anything like that from happening again. Tragically, however, nearly 65 years after the end of the second world war, genocide remains a threat in—as Hugh O'Donnell mentioned—places such as Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur. Like most people, I believe that education is one of the keys to ensuring that genocide is not allowed to take place again. We must ensure that young people grow up with an understanding of the events of the Holocaust and of how and why it was possible for it to happen. Therefore, we welcome the contribution of organisations such as the Anne Frank Trust, the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Trust, and I encourage them to work closely together, along with Learning and Teaching Scotland, to ensure that all of our young people receive a clear and consistent message about identity, tolerance and respect for others.

I would like to give the last word to Anne Frank, who was born, as we have heard, on 12 June 1929 and who died in March 1945. Three months before her 16th birthday, she wrote:

"what are you supposed to do if you become part of the suffering? You'd be completely lost. On the contrary, beauty remains, even in misfortune. If you just look for it, you discover more and more happiness and regain your balance. A person who's happy will make others happy; a person who has courage and faith will never die in misery!"

She also wrote:

"It's difficult in times like these; ideals, dreams and cherished hopes rise within us, only to be crushed by grim reality. It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart."

Meeting closed at 17:44.

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