

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Thursday 10 September 2009

Session 3

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## Scottish Parliament

*Thursday 10 September 2009*

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

### Fire and Rescue Framework

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Good morning. The first item of business this morning is a debate on motion S3M-4810, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the fire and rescue framework.

We have a little leeway in the debate, but members should stick broadly to the times that they are given. Thirteen minutes is your guideline, minister.

09:15

**The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing):** The Scottish Government requested this debate to give the Parliament an opportunity to discuss our continued commitment to ensuring that Scotland has an efficient and effective fire and rescue service during the period of public consultation on a new fire and rescue framework.

Before proceeding, I will take this opportunity to note on the floor of the chamber the tragic death of firefighter Ewan Williamson while he was attending the incident at the Balmoral bar in Edinburgh on Sunday 12 July. That sad event was a salient reminder of the debt that each of us owes to front-line firefighters. It is also a reminder of why all the partners who are involved in the fire service must work together to ensure that firefighters and the public have a service that is fit for purpose. As you will appreciate, Presiding Officer, the incident is still the subject of a police investigation, so it is neither appropriate nor possible for me to discuss any issues in relation to it today.

I am aware of the public support for the bravery and commitment of firefighters to be formally recognised. Whereas the awarding of the Queen's gallantry medal is a decision for other bodies, I and the Scottish Government support an appropriate form of lasting recognition. I ask members to join me in extending our condolences to Ewan's family and to his colleagues.

In October 2005, the previous Administration published the first "Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland", as required by the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005. That framework set out a new vision for Scotland's fire and rescue services and placed expectations on the service and on the Government. It reflected the historic shift of putting fire prevention on a par with intervention, and it

gave individual services more freedom to manage their local risks.

A huge amount has been achieved in the past four years, and it would be impossible to mention everything, but I would like to pay particular tribute to the commitment of everybody who works in Scotland's fire service and of all others who support them in the cause of making our communities safer. We have seen the commitment of our firefighters throughout Scotland in recent days, particularly in the parts of Moray that have been affected by the most serious recent flooding.

Here are just some of the highlights of what has been achieved over the past four years. Integrated risk management planning has been introduced, and so has a new £37 million firelink communications system. A community fire safety regime has been introduced. There are now additional duties in relation to road traffic incidents and flooding, with an enforcement role for commercial fire safety. More than £25 million has been invested in resilience capability to enable the services to deal with the consequences of terrorism and extreme weather—and that capability has been formalised. We moved quickly to resolve uncertainty for staff and fire and rescue services about the number of control rooms in Scotland, and we moved to address anomalies around firefighter ill-health retirement. Today, I am pleased to announce to Parliament an additional £6 million of funding to support the backdating to 2006 of firefighter pension commutations.

Earlier this year, I visited each fire and rescue service in Scotland, because I wanted to see for myself how much the service had changed. I saw some excellent examples of innovation, investment and collaborative working. In Tayside I saw investment in information technology systems, and in Dumfries and Galloway I visited a shared maintenance facility. Strathclyde Fire and Rescue is working on a state-of-the-art training centre in collaboration with the Scottish Government; Fife Fire and Rescue Service is a key part of a strong community planning partnership, which includes youth engagement; Central Scotland Fire and Rescue Service has established strong collaborative working with the Scottish Ambulance Service—and I could go on. Most important, the key indicators are generally heading in the right direction. The number of primary fires is continuing to fall, as are the long-term trends in fire fatalities and injuries.

A great deal still needs to be done. In spite of the long-term downward trend, Scotland continues to have the unenviable record of having more fire-related deaths per million population than any other part of the United Kingdom. Too many Scottish businesses and homes are devastated by fire, which brings personal tragedy as well as

economic damage. The fire and rescue services need to stay focused on reducing the figures. Audit Scotland and others have highlighted key areas of concern, which need to be addressed. For example, the removal of national standards of fire cover in 2005 and their replacement with the integrated risk management plan—the IRMP—has been helpful, but concerns are being raised regarding the disbandment of the Scottish Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council and the perceived lack of consistency in the way in which IRMP is applied across Scotland. We want to see local solutions to local risks, but we do not want a postcode lottery in fire cover.

We need to address unnecessary duplication in non-front-line areas, such as human resources, training facilities and IT systems. I am sure that none of us wants scarce resources to be diverted away from the front line unless it is strictly necessary. There is no point in doing something eight times if desired results can be achieved by collaboration. More could be done by fire and rescue services and their police and ambulance colleagues to encourage collaborative working. That could help to reduce costs while sharing knowledge, infrastructure and capabilities. More needs to be done to exploit the enormous potential of the 3,600 retained duty service and volunteer staff and to ensure that those personnel are trained effectively and deployed more creatively.

The biggest challenge over the next few years will be financial. Our fire and rescue services cost some 30 per cent more per head of population than their equivalents in England. Some of that difference can plainly be justified by our geography and other factors, but we are now facing public expenditure cuts on a scale that has not been experienced for decades. All areas of the public sector will have less money to spend, not just next year but probably for several years to come. Fire and rescue services will be competing within the local government settlement with services such as housing and education, and local government generally will be competing with health. The need for further efficiency across the services is inescapable, but I would urge those who will have to decide how to make those efficiencies to do so with care. As I have already said, I and many others believe that there is scope to make significant savings while protecting the front line.

I do not want to get diverted at this point into speculation about the structure of the service in the future. I am well aware that many people have questioned whether having eight services is too many. As far as the Scottish Government is concerned, that is a second-order question; the main priority is to ensure that the desired outcomes can be delivered in a manner that is consistent with best value. If a structure or a

process gets in the way of the desired outcomes, it should be regarded as expendable—it cannot become an end in itself.

There are opportunities. Against the background that I have set out, the Scottish Government—working with our partners in local government, particularly colleagues in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—believes that a new fire and rescue framework represents an opportunity to give the fire and rescue services a new vision and direction for the future. The “Draft Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2009”, which was published for consultation in June, reflected constructive discussions over many months among the Scottish Government, local government and unions. I am delighted that the draft was endorsed by all stakeholders. It sets out our collective expectations of the services and the outcomes that we want to be achieved. I commend our collective desire for

“A Scotland which is free of all preventable fire-related deaths, injuries and damage.”

That is at the heart of what we are all about.

The draft framework sets out the roles and responsibilities of all the key players. We all need to be clear about what we are doing to help to deliver the desired outcomes. Most of the delivery is the responsibility of local government, but the Scottish Government plays an important role in developing and setting national standards and in running national facilities for the benefit of local government, such as the new firelink radio system and the Scottish Fire Services College in Gullane.

Of course, I am ultimately accountable to the Parliament for the performance of the services and their contribution to national resilience. That is why members will see that a common theme runs through the new draft framework: partnership. It is also why we have placed the ministerial advisory group, which is our principal forum for matters of strategic importance, at the heart of the new arrangements. The group, which I chair, provides an opportunity for all stakeholders to be involved in regular dialogue about progress towards desired outcomes.

The draft sets out plans for specific projects that will help to flesh out the principles. I will touch on four areas of activity in which we are making progress. First, since the introduction of the first framework we have moved our focus from rescue and firefighting to a more risk-based approach. We have supported such risk reduction through the introduction of integrated risk management plans, which are underpinned by a focus on the protection of people rather than property. IRMP has allowed individual fire and rescue services more effectively and efficiently to allocate resources to meet specific risks.

Although the approach has worked well, it is only right that after three years we should review it, to ensure that it will continue to meet its objectives and that there has not been too great a shift away from national standards.

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** As part of the review, will the minister ensure that IRMP is not just about cost cutting, but does what it is supposed to do?

**Fergus Ewing:** During the past three years there has been an increase of 12 per cent in revenue funding, which I think we all welcome. I assure the member that cost cutting will not be the aim of the review of IRMP, which we have just initiated, and I hope that all members will contribute to the review.

As Minister for Community Safety, I want to convey the Scottish Government's recognition of the important community safety work that is undertaken by the 9,000 people who are employed in Scotland's fire and rescue services. During the past year alone, the services have registered almost 50,000 home fire safety visits. However, much more needs to be done. As part of our commitment to reducing fires and fire deaths, I have asked Brian Sweeney to report on what more can be done to reduce such instances. His report will be published shortly, and I look forward to hearing what he has to say.

In the Scottish Fire Services College we have an enviable national approach to the workforce. The Scottish Government's commitment is represented by a £6 million annual investment in core and specialist training. Following initial training, the development and maintenance of a firefighter's skills is managed by the FRS, which, at watch or station manager level, is best placed to monitor and address the training needs of firefighters. As is outlined in the new framework, we are assessing the training needs analysis that is submitted by each FRS. In partnership with COSLA and the services, we will agree future training—including realistic fire training—strategies for all firefighters in Scotland.

I focus for a moment on our retained, volunteer and community support firefighters. Some 3,600 individuals serve our rural and island communities and many other parts of Scotland. They crew 75 per cent of all fire appliances in Scotland, and they attended 34,000 incidents last year alone. Without them we would not have an effective fire service in many of our rural and island communities. I pay tribute to them. Our commitment to the retained service was highlighted when we worked with colleagues in Westminster to defeat proposed changes to the European working time directive. That legislative issue highlighted why we must continue to work with partners to deliver fire cover that is designed to meet local risks and is flexible

enough to ensure that we are ready to meet challenges, wherever they arise.

The draft framework underlines our commitment to working in partnership with local government. Our firefighters are among the best in the world. They serve the people of Scotland with skill and professionalism, they display a tremendous enthusiasm for their work, and they help many youngsters to develop and grow in confidence. The new framework is designed to ensure that our fire and rescue services focus on what they are best placed to deliver: reducing risk, responding effectively to incidents, supporting national resilience and improving the safety of our local communities.

I am happy to move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to a fire and rescue service that is modern and effective, with the principal aim of reducing risk, effectively responding to incidents and improving the safety of local communities; notes that the consultation document, *Draft Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2009*, has been developed in a spirit of partnership with COSLA and all key stakeholders, and notes that the Scottish Government is committed to working with local government to protect the public from fire and to reduce Scotland's poor record of fire fatalities.

09:30

**Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):** I concur with the minister's remarks in respect of the late Ewan Williamson, and on behalf of my party I send our condolences to his family during this difficult time.

The Scottish Labour Party welcomes the debate and the opportunity to recognise the crucial role that fire and rescue services play in our communities. I can think of many examples in my constituency of the integration of the fire service into the local community—I am sure that members can think of examples in their areas. I was delighted to attend the Springburn fire station open day a couple of weeks ago, and I commend the service for giving the community access to its local fire station and for providing the all-important home safety advice to which the minister referred.

We are debating the draft fire and rescue framework because the Government has a legal requirement under the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 to report to the Parliament and to advise on relevant authorities who are acting in accordance with the provisions of section 36(1). We will support the motion. We have lodged an amendment to the motion, and we will also support the amendment in the name of Robert Brown.

It is of fundamental importance that the Government has an open mind on issues that have been raised by stakeholders who have an interest in the framework. The Fire Brigades Union

provided a helpful briefing, which sets out a number of issues. First, on governance and structures, many words have been said over the years about the need for local fire services whose priorities are set locally. We should embrace that principle, but we should acknowledge that on occasions the setting of national priorities will have an effect on our ability to deliver local services. The FBU made a fair point when it said that ministers must be in a position to set national standards when that is required. It would be helpful if we could hear feedback from the minister on that point.

The 2005 act requires community planning partnerships to establish local single outcome agreements. It has been refreshing to witness the enthusiastic way in which my local fire service has engaged with community planning. In the past we failed to realise how important it is that the fire services should be key stakeholders in our local communities. We need to recognise that partnerships are key to providing benefits for our communities. I hope that the minister will continue to encourage such partnerships.

People who attack our firefighters while they carry out their important duties are a blight on our communities. The Parliament was right to deliver the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005, which gave our firefighters more legal protection. The minister mentioned the work that is done with young people in particular, which I welcome—although it is not only young people who attack firefighters. Visits to local schools, for example, promote positive links with young people and are welcome.

In my and many other members' experience, the vast majority of people support firefighters and have done so for many years, and only a tiny minority view firefighters as a target for antisocial activities. We need to ensure that the 2005 act is doing what it is meant to do, by providing our prosecutors with a sentencing tariff that sends a clear message to people who will not listen to reason. We also need to be convinced that firefighters are reporting attacks and that they feel that the authorities are willing to act on those complaints.

I also welcome the fact that the key stakeholders document refers to supporting our local economies. During difficult economic times some businesses may feel under pressure to cut corners. The fire service can play a crucial role in providing advice on issues related to fire safety. We all recognise that fire safety legislation can sometimes be complex and bureaucratic, and it is a benefit to any business to have the fire service on its side with helpful and valuable advice.

It is widely acclaimed that our firefighters are trained to a very high level. The Scottish Fire

Services College provides that training, and I am sure that we all agree that it is of high importance to ensure that the safety of our firefighters is given priority. It is important that resources and time are spent on ensuring that that high standard of training is provided throughout Scotland. Labour believes that it is important that we get best value from the training that is delivered across Scotland and that standards are consistent.

It is important to highlight the concerns that have been raised by the FBU. Although it recognises that the Scottish Fire Services College provides a high standard of training, it is concerned that there appears to be less consistency in the training provided by local fire service authorities on what are identical training modules.

We all respect the fact that there will be different training requirements throughout the country, and of course there should be local flexibility in what is provided on many of those courses, but there is a need for the courses to be consistent throughout Scotland. It would be welcome if the minister, perhaps through an intervention or a comment in his closing speech, could advise us on how he wishes to take forward this issue that the FBU has raised.

When we passed the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, we did so with the support of all the main political parties and based on the principle that we wanted to improve the way that fire services are delivered throughout Scotland. At the same time, we wanted to promote equality and fairness. I believe that all of us would have signed up to that principle, so I was surprised to learn that there appears to be a fragmented approach towards discipline, grievance and dispute procedures. In particular, I note that only one fire authority provides employees with the right of appeal. The basic right to fairness in the workplace should always include the right of appeal.

I would be grateful for clarification of the Government's position on the issue. I hope that the minister agrees that when we passed the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 it was certainly not with a remit to remove the right of an employee to an appeal during a grievance procedure. It is important that we consider that issue in the context of fairness.

A number of wide-ranging and important issues will be raised in today's debate, and many key stakeholders have a number of views on them. We all recognise the important role that our fire and rescue services play in our local communities and their professionalism, which I would argue is recognised throughout the world. It is important—I have made this point throughout my speech—that the Government shows a willingness to have an open mind on how we shape the document that is before us and how we take forward many of the



issues that members who contribute to the debate will have to consider.

I hope that the Government can show leadership in that respect by recognising that, as the minister said, some difficult decisions will have to be taken. Those decisions must be taken for the right reasons, and in doing so we must embrace the principle that we will work together. I hope that members in other parties will be minded to support my amendment and Robert Brown's amendment.

I move amendment S3M-4810.1, to insert at end:

"and recognises the tremendous contribution and crucial role played by firefighters in Scotland and the need for consistent and rigorous enforcement of health and safety standards in fire and rescue services right across Scotland."

09:39

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** We will support both the motion and Labour's amendment.

I listened carefully to the minister's comments, and I am grateful for the insight that he gave the Parliament into the developments in the service over the past year or two. I also endorse many of Paul Martin's comments on the training college, on the appeal issue in particular and on the principle that attacks on firefighters be taken very seriously.

Let me begin, as the minister did, by paying tribute to the work of the fire and rescue service right across Scotland. I pay tribute to Ewan Williamson and to other firefighters who over the years have fallen or been injured in the line of duty.

For most of us, most of the time, the fire service and fire officers are there in the background; the fire service is an accepted and reliable service for emergencies that we hope do not affect us. We see fire engines racing by or we are curious spectators at a fire or other emergency. As an elected member I have—like other MSPs—occasionally seen the fire brigade operate at closer quarters. I saw their dedication and heroism at the time of the Stockline tragedy, when Strathclyde fire chief Brian Sweeney—I think that he was the depute at that time—became something of a media star but, more particularly, gave a public face to the fire service's image of compassionate competence. I have been to a number of open days at Cowcaddens and elsewhere and to events at schools where the fire service has put on a display or allowed children to look over a fire engine. Those are all important aspects of the new face of the fire service.

I have also engaged in another way with the fire service over the perennial issue of falling water pressures due to vandalised fire hydrants, and I have wrestled with the question of how to secure

those vital hydrants against damage while keeping them operational and accessible for fire crews.

As has been said, behind the scenes there have been substantial changes and great challenges. The high number of fire-related fatalities, which the minister mentioned, is an extremely important issue. Among the challenges has been the effect of the European Union working hours directive on Scotland's retained firefighters, to whom the minister rightly paid tribute.

**Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP):** I appreciate that the member acknowledges the importance of the work that retained firefighters do. In that light, can he explain why the only Lib Dem member of the European Parliament from Scotland voted to end the flexibility available to retained firefighters?

**Robert Brown:** I think that I am right in saying that my colleague, the former member of the European Parliament for the Scottish Liberal Democrats, took a particular view about the effect of the matter rather than the principle of it, which was strongly pushed by the Liberal Democrats throughout Scotland in a very significant campaign to retain the right of the retained firefighters to operate and to carry out essential services. In April the potential problems fell away for the time being, but it would be helpful if the minister could update the Parliament if any issues continue to arise from that matter.

The changes have centred on the more local arrangements for managing the fire and rescue service that resulted from the 2005 act. It is right that the needs of different areas should be recognised, but there is a balance to be struck between local control and sensitivity and the need for certain national standards throughout Scotland.

The briefing from the Fire Brigades Union suggests first that there is a gap in the structure as the ministerial advisory group does not in practice establish and enforce national standards and strategies under the 2005 act. Secondly, the briefing suggests that the lack of common national standards can make it more difficult for brigades to operate together if they have their own equipment, policies, procedures and response standards. One can certainly see the point in that regard.

The issue has existed under Governments of different political hues, but I would appreciate the minister's views on where the divide lies between local control and national standards. I know that there is a section on that in the Government's draft document, which lists the roles that are given to central Government and to local brigades respectively, but I am not sure that that really identifies the principles involved as adequately as it might, or gives us insight into what happens in

practice, which is necessary for clarity on those important matters.

The FBU raises a third issue on which I would particularly like clarity. It says that, under the 2005 act, fire and rescue authorities require to be inspected by Her Majesty's fire service inspectorate for Scotland, but that that has not happened since 2005. The body was renamed as the Scottish fire and rescue advisory unit in January 2008 by the present Government. The 2005 act empowers ministers to appoint fire inspectors, but there appears to be no obvious requirement for inspections on any particular timescale. We need to know exactly how the minister envisages the 2005 duty being carried out and what inspection of local brigades is planned by the advisory unit.

My final point is on community protection, which the minister rightly touched on. We have all noticed the change in the fire service's approach in that regard. In 2007, 4,925 primary fires were deliberately set—a stark figure—and those fires resulted in 10 fatalities and 377 non-fatal casualties, to say nothing of the property damage that was caused and the fire service time that was used up. That is a staggering fact, and one that is worthy of closer study. Indeed, it points to a tale of mayhem and arson across the country, which is hugely damaging. I would be particularly interested to find out from the minister what strategies are being adopted to tackle and reduce that problem, given that, as far as I can see, the framework document does not see it as a key issue.

The fire and rescue services fulfil a vital part of the duty of Government. We as a Parliament require to support them properly by providing the highest standards of national strategy and appropriate standards, training and support. As the minister said, the fire and rescue services must be fit for purpose. I hope that the minister will take on board suggestions from members of all parties in what is a well-timed and well-merited debate, which I thank the Government for holding.

I move amendment S3M.4810.2, to insert at end:

“; recognises the vital work of fire and rescue services across Scotland, including the contribution of those firefighters on the retained duty system who provide a flexible and cost effective community service, particularly in rural, remote and island parts of Scotland; welcomes local flexibility in service delivery but notes the concerns of the Fire Brigades Union Scotland at the lack of strategic direction for the fire and rescue services, supported by clear and enforceable standards and responsibilities, and calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that the Fire and Rescue Advisory Unit and the Ministerial Advisory Group work effectively with fire and rescue authorities to deliver effective compliance with agreed and consistent objectives under the national framework.”

09:46

**John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire)**  
(Con): I endorse the comments of the minister and others on the tragic loss of Ewan Williamson.

The Scottish Conservatives welcome the publication of the “Draft Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2009”. Many changes have been made to the responsibilities of our fire and rescue services since publication of the first framework in 2005 by the previous Government, not least because of the events that unfolded at Glasgow airport in June 2007, when we suddenly became aware of how vulnerable we all can be in the face of a terrorist attack. The way our fire and rescue services responded to that situation was testament not only to the bravery and selfless commitment of their workers, but to the efficiency and adaptability of those services.

Not long after my election to the Scottish Parliament, I spent a day with firefighters in Hawick in my constituency. It is a day that I will not forget, partly because I was able to fulfil a long-standing ambition to wear a fireman's hat. More important, I was able to experience first hand the dedication of the men and women who are concerned to do their job. Their work involves daily risking their own lives to save others, and it is both physically and emotionally demanding.

Alongside the stories of the people who are directly involved in the fire and rescue services are those of their families and the impact that working shifts or responding to pagers can have on family life. A friend of mine whose father was a firefighter in Glasgow spoke of how, as a young child, she would wake up in the night worried about her dad on night shift. As she got older, she would check the news each morning to find out whether there had been any big fires that he might have had to respond to. As we thank and pay tribute to all the men and women who work in the fire and rescue services, we should not forget their families.

Each of the eight Scottish fire and rescue services has its local needs, so I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment not to micromanage all the services. It is easy for me to compare the differences between the fire and rescue services in my more rural constituency with those in the city centre of Glasgow. If I remember correctly from my student days—which were not all that long ago—no Saturday night was complete without a 4 am call-out by Maryhill fire brigade to Murano Street halls because a student had decided to have toast after a night out. Each of the 388 fire stations or volunteer units in Scotland, which range from city centre multipump stations to remote rural volunteer units where equipment may be stored in a small garage, needs to have flexibility. It is important that we do not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach.

As I have already said, the roles and responsibilities of the fire and rescue services are constantly evolving. No longer do firefighters' duties amount to responding to fires and occasionally getting a cat out of a tree. Fire-raising is an area of recorded crime that continues to rise—it has risen by 88 per cent over the past 10 years. Fire and rescue services now have to deal with fire-related crimes and antisocial behaviour, so we welcome the Scottish Government's continued emphasis on community safety education and awareness campaigns, and its development of a range of initiatives to help the public understand not only the dangers but the consequences of fire-setting.

Another way in which our fire and rescue services have had to evolve is that they must be ready to deal with major incidents that result from terrorism or extreme weather. I am reassured to see that a review of existing resilience capabilities is being undertaken, with a view to enabling the Scottish fire and rescue advisory unit to assess regularly the total level of resilience capability.

Although I have emphasised the importance of flexibility and of local services being adjusted to local needs, there are some matters in which it is important that we take a national approach. We must be assured that if another major incident were ever to take place in Scotland, the eight authorities would have a consistent and joined-up approach. Eight fire and rescue authorities doing things in eight different ways could create major difficulties and compromise safety.

We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to ensuring that high-quality training and support are provided, but those training opportunities must be rolled out across Scotland and must not be focused only on particular authorities. We need to be sure that when new recruits begin their work, their training and development is continued and supported to the same standards, regardless of where they are located.

In March this year, I lodged a motion on the FBU's report "In the Line of Duty". I am pleased to say that it rightly received cross-party support. The safety of our fire and rescue services is an issue that should bypass party politics. The report said that because different definitions and recording methods are used across the UK, it is nearly impossible to create an accurate record of on-duty firefighter fatalities. That has meant that very little analysis has been done of the figures, and that there has been little by way of an attempt to understand or evaluate the causes of those fatalities. Standardisation in recording and investigation of fatalities and injuries to firefighters could prevent future deaths. It is important that our fire and rescue service authorities communicate

with one another, not just across Scotland but across the UK.

The Scottish Conservatives will support the Scottish Government's motion. We agree with the principles of reducing risk, responding effectively and improving the safety of communities, which can be done more effectively by giving fire and rescue services the freedom to address local needs and by looking at where the services can work together and learn from each other.

**The Presiding Officer:** We come to the open debate. I repeat that we have some flexibility with time, so members should feel free to take interventions.

09:52

**Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I associate myself with the minister's remarks on the tragic death of Ewan Williamson. I know that the thoughts of all members go out to his friends, his family and, of course, his colleagues.

I welcome the minister's opening speech and, in particular, his announcement on the extremely difficult issue of pensions. It is a great credit to the Government that uncertainty about that has been removed, and I am sure that his announcement will be welcomed by members of the fire and rescue services across Scotland.

I also very much welcome the fact that the great uncertainty surrounding fire control rooms, which swirled around for years under the previous Executive, has been removed by this Government. As someone whose final two years of employment prior to entering Parliament were spent working for Strathclyde Fire Brigade at the Strathclyde fire control room in Johnstone, I am only too aware of the anxiety that that uncertainty caused the staff there.

I want to move on to some of the issues that concern me about the future of the fire service and where we will go on the critical issue of fire safety. I will raise a number of issues that I have questions about, and to which I hope the minister will be able to respond in his summing up.

The first is about common fire standards across Scotland, or the risk to which the public may be exposed as a result of our not having such standards. I understand the reasoning behind the removal of the national incident response standards and why it seems logical to have standards that fit local areas. I am not suggesting for one minute that the centre of Paisley is the same as the north-west Highlands, and I accept the argument about local flexibility, as long as local flexibility is not to the detriment of local people. However, I ask the minister to lay out how the new framework will deal with the potential loss

of nationally comparable information, which allowed the public to be reassured that high standards were being maintained in their area. I also request that he pay close attention to other common standards that used to apply, such as those that covered operating procedures and risk assessments, so that he is certain that there is no diminution of the service that is provided to the public.

Another area that I have concerns about is inspection of the fire and rescue services, which Robert Brown mentioned. I seek assurances from the minister that regular inspections will be carried out and that rather than being a general audit, they will be conducted by experts and specialists. It is essential that there is robust scrutiny of critical emergency services.

As the number of live fires to which an individual firefighter is exposed goes down, for example, as a result of the success of fire safety work and improvements in fire-retardant materials in homes, the need for live fire training goes up. There can be no argument about that. In years gone by, firefighters could expect to gain enormous experience through on-the-job training, as they would be exposed to a large number and a large variety of fires. However, that is no longer the case, which is why we must ensure that today's firefighters are properly equipped, through first-class training and increased live fire training, to deal with any incident with which they are faced.

I turn to fire safety and the incidence of fires, fire injuries and fire fatalities in Scotland. Over the years, Scotland has had a rather unenviable reputation for fires and fire deaths. There is no doubt that a number of factors have contributed to that reputation: for example, the flammability of materials in homes, cooking styles, levels of alcohol abuse—unfortunately—and the high incidence of smoking in homes. I am glad that the number of fires caused by cooking is down and that the new fire-retardant materials that have been introduced in recent years have had a positive impact. Smoking rates are also lower and smoke detectors are now installed in many homes. However, despite lower smoking rates, smoking materials remain at the top of the list of causes of fires that result in deaths and injuries.

**Robert Brown:** Has Stewart Maxwell been struck, as I have been, by the fact that the majority of fatal casualties occur in fires in dwellings in which smoke detectors are not present or not operational? Should that be a national priority for the strategic direction of the Scottish Government?

**Stewart Maxwell:** Robert Brown makes a salient point. There has been huge success in bringing smoke detectors to the public's attention. Many people install them and change their batteries as they should, but many others do not.

As a result of the regulations for new buildings, smoke detectors are now hard-wired into properties. I am afraid that overcoming the problem will probably take many years, but there is no doubt but that we must focus on it, given the clear statistics on the problems that are caused by smoke detectors that lie unused, or smoke detectors whose batteries have not been replaced.

Over the past few years in Scotland, about 40 per cent of fire deaths have been caused by smoking materials. Members should think about that for a moment: four in every 10 fire deaths are attributable to smoking and smoking materials. It does not need to be that way. In June 2004, New York state made reduced ignition propensity cigarettes the only cigarettes that were allowed to be sold in that state. Its approach was followed by Canada in October 2005, and by Vermont and California in 2006. North Carolina will join them in January 2010 and Finland will become, in April 2010, the first European country to adopt the measure. In New York state, 167 deaths were caused by smoking materials in the four years before RIP cigarettes were introduced; in the four years since their introduction, 113 deaths were caused by smoking materials. That is a decrease in fire deaths of 54, or 32.34 per cent. In other words, fire deaths in New York state fell by a third following the introduction of RIP cigarettes. Between 1999 and 2006, smoking materials were the leading cause of fire deaths in Vermont—they were responsible for 19 per cent of them. In the two years after the introduction of RIP cigarettes, no fire deaths were attributable to smoking materials in Vermont.

I began to campaign for the introduction in Scotland of reduced ignition propensity cigarettes in the previous session of Parliament. I lodged a motion on the matter in that session, and there was a members' business debate on it. There is currently a motion on the matter in my name before Parliament, which I ask members to sign. As I said, the issue was considered in a members' business debate in the previous session of Parliament but, unfortunately, the relevant legislative power is reserved to Westminster, so the Scottish Parliament cannot act to stop the unnecessary deaths. However, we can send a strong signal and demand that Westminster act. The campaign has the backing of all eight of Scotland's fire brigades and of the Fire Brigades Union. I ask the minister and Parliament to lend their weight to my campaign for RIP cigarettes to become, as soon as possible, the only cigarettes that are available in Scotland.

Stopping smoking is the best fire safety strategy. However, I conclude by quoting Chief Fire Officer David Dalziel of Grampian Fire and Rescue Service. In a letter to me on the issue, he said:

"Scotland has an unenviable record for fire deaths and casualties and measures such as you propose will make a significant and lasting contribution to reducing that toll".

09:59

**Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** I express my sincere condolences to the family of Ewan Williamson for their grievous loss. I also state my admiration for the bravery of my fellow trade unionists in the fire service.

Some members will recall that, when we passed the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 on 23 February 2005, there was general agreement that the then current legislation required to be updated to mirror the breadth of the role of the modern fire service's multifarious functions and to deliver a clear framework of responsibility for fire safety. No political party that is still represented in the Parliament dissented from that, which was right. Indeed, the previous Executive should be given credit for its recognition that the extant legislation of 1947 did not and could not possibly take proper account of the evolution of the fire service over more than half a century.

Section 40 of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 placed a duty on ministers to produce a fire and rescue framework for Scotland. It is four years since the first fire framework document was produced; now seems to be an opportune time to revise it where necessary in the light of experience of its operation. I congratulate the Government on bringing forward a draft framework for consultation.

Given that few subjects are more serious than the safety of our constituents and the firefighters who are entrusted with that task, I welcome the opportunity to speak about a number of matters that seem to me to need revision. We need to ensure that the fire and rescue framework, which is key to the delivery of public safety, is regularly updated in order to maintain its effectiveness.

I will focus on governance and structures. In its comprehensive briefing, the FBU contends that governance and structures are the central issue in improving the existing framework. I tend to agree. The main purpose of the former statutory body, the Scottish Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, was to establish common standards that would ensure that all fire services in Scotland would take a consistent approach. That was a sensible and necessary prerequisite for the maintenance of public safety. However, as a result of the 2005 act, that statutory body was abolished and replaced by an informal structure. The result was a loss of common standards and of the consistent approach that is essential to delivery of a coherent and resilient fire and rescue service.

No one is arguing that there should not be flexibility that will allow each fire and rescue service to meet special challenges in its area—Grangemouth springs to mind in that regard. However, as the FBU has said, that necessary flexibility needs

"to be within a set of national parameters that ensures the essential consistency throughout the country."

The problem is that a gap has, with the abolition of the previous statutory body, become evident in the structure. That gap needs to be filled.

The ministerial advisory unit has become the central body, but the experience of those at the front line is that there is an inherent conflict, the genesis of which lies in the terms of the concordat that was agreed between the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. The commitment by ministers not to micromanage public services does not sit well with the 2005 act's requirement that the minister produce a framework document that gives direction to fire and rescue authorities. In the union's view, that has led to

"a fragmentation of service delivery across the 8 FRAs which compromises national resilience".

I hope that all colleagues agree that that is a worrying and wholly unacceptable development. The Government must take action to meet firefighters' profound concerns about that aspect of how the 2005 framework has evolved.

The FBU is correct to argue that, although it is helpful, chapter 1 of the draft framework, which details the roles and responsibilities of partners and stakeholders, needs to be set

"within the context of a recognised, workable and agreed central structure."

We cannot allow the situation to continue in which eight fire and rescue authorities take eight different approaches. That can cause, and has caused, severe and unnecessary difficulties in respect of cross-border assistance and co-ordination at major incidents. Potentially, it could lead to an unacceptable inconsistency of approach in the development of integrated risk management planning.

**Fergus Ewing:** It might be useful to make it clear that the Government has an entirely open mind in respect of governance issues. We appreciate and have discussed with the FBU its perspective. We are happy to consider how that can be further developed while we work in partnership with stakeholders in local government.

**Bill Butler:** I am grateful to the minister for his assertion that the Government has an open mind on governance issues. That chimes with his opening speech, in which he said that the Government does not want

“a postcode lottery in fire cover”.

We can all agree with that, and I welcome it.

We cannot have a situation that leads to a lack of coherence in the approach and delivery of other matters, such as training strategy, procurement policy and appointments and promotion criteria. The lack of a uniform approach in certain areas potentially compromises public safety and the safety of the workforce, and so cannot be allowed to continue. Therefore, I welcome the minister's promise.

I also ask the minister to accept the FBU's argument—which seems incontrovertible—that

“the requirements of an Act of Parliament take precedence over the terms of a Concordat.”

That is a truism. I hope that the minister also sees the common sense in the FBU's suggested solution to this serious problem, which is that the ministerial advisory group should, because it seems to be the most suitable vehicle, be the body that must meet the requirements of the act in terms of national resilience. That would allow ministers to give direction, set common standards and determine national strategies, while taking proper account of the views of all the fire service stakeholders who are represented on it. If that solution is accepted by ministers, it will improve delivery of public safety. What could be more important?

When Parliament passed the 2005 act, no one envisaged the unintended consequences to which I and other members have referred. Members who speak after me will refer to further unintended results of that legislation. The draft framework presents the Government and Parliament with an ideal opportunity to listen to the concerns that are being voiced by those who work in the front line, and to acknowledge deficiencies and rectify them. The minister has promised that he will listen to the worries that are expressed by members today, and that he will revise the framework accordingly.

10:08

**Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP):** Like other members, I associate myself with the minister's tribute to Ewan Williamson. Many firefighters in my constituency knew and worked with Ewan. I also take the liberty of drawing to members' attention the motion that has been lodged by my colleague, Shirley-Anne Somerville, which supports the call for Ewan Williamson to be posthumously awarded the Queen's gallantry medal. I urge members to consider giving their support to the motion.

The FBU briefing contains the salutary statistic that in the 27 years from 1979 to 2006, only two firefighters lost their lives in the line of duty yet, in

the relatively short period between 2007 and 2009, the figure was four firefighters. As other members have done, I thank the FBU for the briefings that it has distributed, which—as is its style—are both informative and straight to the point, rarely missing a target. I have been impressed not only by the FBU's steadfast focus on representing the interests of its members, but by its commitment to making our communities safer. It disappoints me, therefore, that some of our fire and rescue authorities are not as inclusive as they could be in their decision-making processes. They could do far more to listen to and consult the FBU, which would be in the interests of all stakeholders, not the least of which are our communities.

I listened with great interest to the minister's comments when he advised us that the Government intends to review the integrated risk management planning process. I am told that the IRMP process is meant to enable fire and rescue authorities to identify risks in their areas and put in place the resources to address those risks. That sounds grand in theory, but the reality in my constituency has been very different, where the IRMP process has been used to identify the euphemistically entitled “efficiency savings”—more commonly known as “cuts”. There has been a downgrading of services at the Craighill station in Livingston, despite the fact that the new town has a growing population and a growing number of residential homes, businesses and nursing homes, as well as a hospital at the heart of the town and a nearby motorway. The IRMP process was used to justify the cut, but I fear that the reality was that a political decision was made. The minister is well aware of my views on joint fire and rescue boards, which disadvantage smaller areas such as West Lothian in relation to their larger neighbours.

There has also been inconsistency in how the IRMP process has been developed, and the differing approaches to the process have contributed to divergences in response standards, although I note that national incident response standards were abolished in 2005, as members have previously stated. Like other members, I have considerable sympathy for the idea of common or national incident response times, given the concerns that exist about postcode-determined fire services. Given that the Scottish Ambulance Service can work to national response times of 13 and eight minutes, it seems odd that response times for fires in identical buildings differ in Scotland's cities because of local determinations of resource application.

My last grumble—in the current debate, at least—relates to training. I note the minister's comments about unnecessary duplication in training and information technology. This is where I will sound like a broken record, but I make no apology for that. The minister is well aware of my

objections to the proposal by the Lothian and Borders fire and rescue board to build a new multimillion-pound training centre at Newbridge while it cuts front-line services in my constituency. I believe that that would be a fickle use of public money, given the proximity of Lothian and the Borders to the national training centre in Gullane.

I will end on a positive note. The facts that the minister has announced his intentions regarding the pensions commutation problem and that he has previously ended speculation in relation to control rooms are to be celebrated. I also record my appreciation for the firefighters in my constituency—in particular, the retained firefighters in Broxburn, who had to deal with the severe flooding that occurred in the community last year.

10:13

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

I, too, associate myself with members' comments about Ewan Williamson.

I will be fairly brief and will concentrate on a subject that has been mentioned only in passing by Angela Constance. It is an aspect of the work of the fire and rescue services that has proved to be extraordinarily important in my area, and in relation to which the minister's announcement in his opening speech is timely. I will talk about the impact of flooding, given the events of last weekend.

Throughout Scotland, but particularly in Moray, many families and individuals have yet again been left traumatised—I use the word advisedly—by the effects of events last weekend. To be flooded out of one's home is a truly traumatic experience. I can testify to the fact that certain individuals—whom the minister knows, as they live in his constituency—say that whenever heavy rain falls in their community, their personal anxiety levels rise, they have a degree of trepidation about what that might bring and they fear what might happen to them and their property. It is not only flooding that is damaging—the fear of flooding is damaging, too.

In such circumstances, the public need early warning of what might be about to happen to them. Thankfully, the processes for that are improving. However, the public also need to be prepared to minimise the impact of flooding if it affects their properties and their families. Also, they need on occasion to be assisted to leave their property or to be rescued from their property.

As we all know—not least because the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment said so yesterday—that that problem is going to increase because of changes in our climate and in the pattern and intensity of rainfall. It is inevitable

that there will be more flooding events in Scotland in coming years, which means that it is likely that more communities will be affected by flooding.

Partly because of the force of nature and partly because of the unpredictability of flooding events, it is not always possible to protect every property in Scotland from flooding, which means that there will always have to be a rescue element to our flooding preparations, and that more work will always be required to help people to prepare for floods.

Last year, when the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee was considering the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill, we heard effective evidence about the lack of coherence that is sometimes evident in the responses of emergency services, and we were told of the need for greater clarity around roles and when various services should act. Amendments that were lodged as a result of that evidence led to cross-party discussions with the minister about how to handle the matter, which resulted in Paddy Tomkins being asked to conduct a review.

I am a bit disappointed that the framework document acknowledges that review only on page 19, which is quite late in the document, and that there is no earlier rehearsal of the role of the fire and rescue service in water rescue, although it is a current and key activity. I regret to say that the review appears to be somewhat of an afterthought in the document, and that there is no rehearsal of the service's potential role in the future, or of the fact that the context in which we are operating might require that that role be enhanced.

I am pleased to say that, as it always does, the fire and rescue service in Moray played a vital role over the weekend in helping communities in Elgin, Fochabers and other areas. It was highly professional, provided reassurance to the communities within which it was operating and provided support to people who were being helped to leave their properties or were being rescued from those properties. There are always lessons to be learned from such incidents. In Moray, we have a fire and rescue service that has had a lot of practice in dealing with such incidents. Not every service has had so much, however.

I believe that the fire and rescue services throughout Scotland are well placed to play a key and enhanced role in water rescue. There are various parts to that. First, there is an education role, which is linked to preparing people for incidents. Through its fire prevention work, the fire service has great experience in helping people to adjust and adapt their personal circumstances.

Secondly, the service has a role to play in responding to incidents by rescuing and assisting people. If that is to be carried out properly, it will

need funding, the provision of proper equipment to all the services and—as many members have said today, and as the Fire Brigades Union said in its briefing—training in how to deal with those incidents. As Stewart Maxwell said, the services that do not have the level of experience that the service in Moray has will require greater training to enable them to operate properly when such circumstances arise.

I hope that, when the minister sums up, he will tell us what progress is being made on the Tomkins report. I also hope that he will assure us that, when he considers revising the framework following this debate and further consultation, he will think about how he can accommodate within it more explicit recognition of the existing role of the fire and rescue service in water rescue, and an acknowledgment that the Tomkins report might make recommendations about what the fire and rescue service might have to do in the future.

Presiding Officer, I have run out of things to say on this subject, so I will now sit down.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan):** That is a good time to stop, certainly.

10:19

**Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD):** It is a pity that we could not have had this debate yesterday, when I understand that an unusually high number of emergency service personnel from throughout the United Kingdom tied the knot, especially in Gretna Green. I refer of course to yesterday's date—9/9/9. I am sure that members will join me in wishing those newlyweds all the best for the future. However, today is 10/9/9, and we have to get serious about a serious subject.

As my colleague Robert Brown outlined, the Liberal Democrats largely welcome the Government's motion. However, as Bill Butler said, it is the Government's concordat that has caused some of the concerns around micromanagement that have been expressed by the FBU and the Liberal Democrats. Those concerns have resulted in an endless debate between the Government and the FBU over who can do what. That is why our amendment seeks to recognise the excellent work of our retained firefighters and challenges the Government to deliver, with the fire and rescue advisory unit and the ministerial advisory group, an improved Scottish fire and rescue service.

Another concern that has been highlighted to me on a number of occasions involves the question of who is responsible for fresh water rescue. The Government has instigated an inquiry into Scotland's water rescue capability, and a report on that is due at the end of the year. As a matter of some urgency, the Government needs to

designate an agency to take responsibility for fresh water rescue. Unless the confusion in that area is removed immediately, there might be more tragedies such as the one that occurred in Loch Awe in April.

The minister's motion is long on rhetoric and short on substance. The SNP Government says that it aims to work in partnership with COSLA and local government. However, if its track record is anything to go by, it will pull the wool over its partners' eyes, give them more burdens and restrict the funding that they need if they are to deliver. Who needs partners like that?

**Fergus Ewing:** Is the member aware that I have an excellent relationship with Mr Raeburn from his party?

**Jim Tolson:** I was not aware of that detail. However, when it comes to working with others, the minister might recall that, when the Liberal Democrats raised the issue of reserve firefighters, his colleague Rob Gibson said that our intervention was unhelpful scaremongering. Of course, this morning, the minister very much backed our position. I hope he feels that there should be some consistency in his group on that matter.

It takes a Liberal Democrat amendment to add some substance to the debate. It took the Liberal Democrats to make the Government realise that the effects of the European working time directive on our retained firefighters would have a devastating impact on our rural and island communities. Fortunately, the Government eventually saw sense, but it took a while.

The flexibility that the Government showed then needs be shown again. The draft fire and rescue framework needs to offer clear guidance to Scottish fire and rescue services if we are to avoid a repeat of the situation that we got into as a result of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, which led to a loss of common standards and consistency in relation to training, governance and so on. According to the FBU, the result has been a wide divergence in service delivery across the country. I strongly urge the minister to ensure that the ministerial advisory group, which he chairs, is diligent in setting a consistent and workable framework that will provide robust guidelines with some degree of local flexibility.

It is fair to say that there has been some progress with the Scottish fire and rescue service under this and previous Scottish Governments. One example of such progress is the proposed introduction of firelink—a highly resilient communications system that will replace a fragmented legacy radio system with one wide-area radio system. That new system will allow not only better communication within and across fire



and rescue services in Scotland but quick communication with other emergency services.

The firelink system will also include a priority call function to help give protection to our firefighters when, as has unfortunately become all too prevalent, they come under attack from mindless thugs—often the same mindless thugs who deliberately call out the fire services to false alarms, seeking to corner firefighters and attack them while they are on duty. Fortunately, such incidents are on the decline but they are nowhere near eradicated. Across Scotland, every fire and rescue service has seen a reduction in the number of false alarms. The drop in Fife is nearly 75 per cent, which is significant and much better than the Scottish average. Still, 158 false alarms in Fife in 2006 was 158 too many.

I am sure that there are a number of reasons for the decline, but the direction of good firemasters and a huge effort by serving firefighters to educate young people has ensured that Fife has blazed a trail—if the minister will forgive the pun. Many young people are realising the deadly consequences of sending a fire engine to their street for a false alarm—they realise that their own family could be affected.

The Government's motion does not go nearly far enough. It does not provide the assurances that either the FBU or the Liberal Democrats require. I hope that the Government realises that, by accepting our amendment today, it will give more substance to the framework, and that if the minister puts all his efforts into the ministerial advisory group, we will have a Scottish fire service that is truly fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

10:25

**Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to debate the Government's draft fire and rescue framework. Like other members, I pay tribute to Scotland's 8,310 firefighters and control staff, particularly those who serve the area that I represent in the Strathclyde and central regions. It is impossible to overstate the importance of their work and the passion and devotion that they show, day in and day out, in providing a rescue and response service that keeps people safe in often very difficult circumstances.

I join all my colleagues in paying tribute to firefighter Ewan Williamson, who was tragically killed in the line of duty earlier this year. We owe it to those who have given their lives or sustained injury in the course of duty to ensure that fire services throughout Scotland are equipped and resourced for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Tomorrow marks the eighth anniversary of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington DC,

which killed nearly 3,000 people including 343 firefighters and paramedics. Watching footage of that day that shows firefighters making their way through the crowds of people escaping the turmoil and chaos behind them, I noted that there has never been a more vivid demonstration of the saying that firefighters run into buildings that other people are running out of.

As John Lamont said, Scotland's fire and rescue services played an important role following the terrorist attack on Glasgow airport in 2007. I pay tribute to the work carried out on that day and since to keep Scotland's civilians safe from real and threatened attacks. The need for resilience against such threats is rightly identified in the draft fire and rescue framework that is before us today, and I am sure we all agree that it must be taken seriously.

I thank the FBU for the briefing papers that it provided, which are marked by its usual candour, as Angela Constance noted—although her description was more polite than the west of Scotland terminology that I might have used but for fear of using unparliamentary language.

The overriding aim of the draft fire and rescue framework rightly remains the elimination of preventable fire-related deaths, injuries and damage. Sadly, there is still work to be done in that regard. The motion mentions Scotland's poor record of fire fatalities, and it is certainly true that we have the highest number of fatal casualties per million of population, and the highest rate of non-fatal casualties per million of population, in the UK. I am glad that those statistics show a downward trend, but it is clear that there is still work to be done.

I am pleased, as I am sure other members are, that there has been a 12 per cent funding increase during the past three years for Scotland's fire services, and total revenue funding for Scotland's eight services of £331 million in the 2009-10 financial year. The Government continues to review and update the training that is available to firefighters to reflect changes in equipment and operating practices. Although the content of such training is of course the most important aspect, I nevertheless welcome plans for an extra week to be added to the current 12-week programme.

Another important aspiration of the draft framework is ensuring our preparedness to deal with floods and other environmental emergencies. As the minister said, the importance of that work has been illustrated all too starkly in recent days, with the flooding in Moray and the A83 landslide. It is important to stress that the role of dealing with emergencies that nature throws at us is one that fire services have undertaken for some considerable time, although it was not formalised until the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005.

I remember well the inquiry into flood prevention from my time on the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, and the widespread belief that multi-agency guidance on responding to and co-ordinating flooding incidents needs to be improved. That point is accepted in the draft framework document, and the need to prioritise that work has become even clearer in light of recent events.

The 2005 act requires the Government to keep the strategic framework within which our fire services operate under review, and I welcome the fact that the Government is doing so to take account of the changes that have taken place in Scotland since the first framework document was published in 2005. I am also glad that, notwithstanding Jim Tolson's cynicism, the Government is undertaking the review in what the motion describes as

"a spirit of partnership with COSLA and all key stakeholders".

I am sure that members across the chamber expect nothing less.

Getting the partnership approach right is hugely important, and I welcome the Government's consultation on the framework document a wide range of organisations and bodies that represent those who are involved in our fire and rescue services.

The Government's concordat with local authorities has had an impact on the way in which decisions are made and co-ordinated among Scotland's eight fire and rescue services. I broadly support the concordat and the emphasis that it places on giving local government the autonomy and flexibility to make decisions that are based on local need, but I recognise that the FBU has concerns. I accept that each fire and rescue service should be able to deliver services flexibly, but that flexibility needs to exist within a set of national parameters to ensure that there is essential consistency throughout the country, particularly in resilience preparation. In that regard, I welcome the minister's indication that the integrated risk management planning guidance that was established under the 2005 act will be re-examined.

I know that the FBU feels that the remit and powers of the ministerial advisory group could be strengthened, and I am interested to hear the Government's response to that. I accept that, under the terms of the concordat, the Government does not want to micromanage decisions that are rightly made at local level—indeed, that would be inappropriate. However, I hope that it will be possible to address concerns about consistency in standards and procedures between services,

especially in the area of national resilience and preparedness.

I commend the Scottish Government for its willingness to engage regularly with the FBU. My contact with FBU representatives indicates that there is an on-going and open dialogue, which is to be welcomed. Some of the concerns that the union and members in the chamber have expressed today—with which I have great sympathy—could perhaps be addressed more easily if local fire boards were to replicate that openness and ease of communication in their relationship with the FBU and, indeed, all unions.

I fear that I am probably taking up too much time, so I conclude by welcoming the minister's announcement today of further funding for firefighters' pensions and the Scottish Government's commitment to maintaining the existing control room structure. I welcome the opportunity that today's debate has presented, and recognise the Scottish Government's on-going commitment to ensuring that our fire and rescue services have the support and resources that they need to carry out what we all acknowledge can be a dangerous but vitally important role.

10:33

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** It would be hard to criticise the Scottish Government's motion or the minister's sincere speech. However, I am sure the minister agrees that there are issues that need to be explored during the debate.

Any debate on the fire and rescue service is welcome, because it gives us the chance to recognise and appreciate—as members have done today—the job that our firefighters do on society's behalf. Those men and women risk their lives daily to save the lives of others, and we are all indebted to them for the exceptional service that they provide in our communities. This year in Scotland, we tragically lost a brave firefighter, Ewan Williamson; as other members have done, I express my condolences to his family and his comrades.

Angela Constance pointed out that in the past two years, there have been four fatalities in the line of duty, whereas there were two in the previous 25 years. One death is one too many, but that increase is deeply worrying and indicates that something must be wrong. Ken Ross of the FBU says that deaths in the line of duty touch everyone who works in the fire service, and we should remember the debt that we owe firefighters when we seek to reorganise the service in any way.

Like other members, I have seen what firefighters can face in the local area when they are trying to carry out their jobs. They are often

attacked in our communities. There was a major incident a few years ago in Carnbroe in my constituency, and more recently there was an incident in Strathclyde in which bottles and objects were thrown at firefighters from an upper storey of a tower block.

Given firefighters' contribution to the safety and security of our communities, it was sad to see them having to strike over pay and conditions in 2002.

The FBU has wide-ranging political interests including union learning initiatives and its support for the Cuba solidarity campaign and, topically, the people's charter. If we look at fire brigades' websites, we see the diversity of what they do, for example planning for a swine flu pandemic, providing fire reach training for young people and planning for major incidents such as the Glasgow airport attack. However, their priority has to be intervention and fighting fires. To do that, the service needs more, not fewer, front-line operational firefighters.

The Parliament has taken action in the past to try to address some of the issues that face fire and rescue services. As others have said, the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 was intended to improve the service and was put in place with the best motives. Indeed, the review of the framework is required by that very act. Unfortunately, it seems that in some areas new arrangements have left front-line firefighters overstretched and underresourced, and the review needs to address that.

In recent years, the number of fire deaths and injuries to firefighters and members of the public has increased, training and competency levels have decreased, front-line jobs have been lost, fire stations have been downgraded or closed, and response times have increased. Those are all worrying trends. Non-uniformed posts in fire and rescue authorities are necessary, but there seems to have been a vast increase in the number of such posts with no corresponding increase in front-line uniformed posts. Indeed, about 220 front-line posts have gone.

Before 2005, if an FRA altered its number of front-line posts, that had a commensurate effect on its allocated budget, which went either up or down. Since then, it has been possible to decrease the number of uniformed posts with no effect on the budget. In that way, unfortunately, savings can be made. Given that, in the long run, it is not a saving in terms of safety to have fewer front-line posts, will the minister consider re-establishing the budget link, obviously in the spirit of partnership with COSLA? I hope he will answer that at the end of the debate.

One reason that is given for cutting front-line personnel is the effectiveness of community fire

safety initiatives, but even if they are successful in prevention, that does not justify a decrease in intervention levels for the fires that continue to occur. Does the minister have any plans to review or assess the effectiveness of community fire safety initiatives?

As others have said, the FBU believes that many problems in the service could be addressed through governance. Like Bill Butler, I am pleased to note that the minister says that he has an open mind on the matter. The FBU strongly believes that local flexibility must be set within national parameters that ensure that there is Scotland-wide consistency. The minister must seriously consider creating a central Scotland-level structure to oversee the eight FRAs. Perhaps the ministerial advisory group could have that role, but a forum below that level is also needed. There should be a body that can establish common standards with which FRAs are required to comply, and FRAs should be measured against those standards in a robust inspection regime. It is difficult to see how national resilience can be secured without harmonisation of policies, procedures, strategies and equipment. I reiterate that joint procurement by the FRAs would lead to significant savings and best value and would allow consistency in relation to appliances and equipment throughout Scotland.

That brings me to the somewhat contentious issue of the concordat. I do not think that a commitment not to micromanage has to extend to providing revenue funding on a non-ring-fenced basis. That does not necessarily follow. Of course FRAs should manage the day-to-day running of the services that they provide in a local context and with local flexibility, but they did that before the concordat. Scottish ministers have legal obligations, which they cannot offload, on matters such as national resilience. I believe that ring fencing of capital and revenue funding for the fire and rescue service is required in order to ensure appropriate funding levels. I was a wee bit concerned by the minister's comment that there will be competition in local authorities with the likes of education, housing and so on. That is worrying.

I conclude by quoting Strathclyde Fire and Rescue's motto, which is:

"Making our communities safe places to live, work and visit."

The revised framework must be measured against whether it will do that. Does the framework represent a better service in our communities? Will it save lives or will it result in underfunding? Our fire and rescue services are far too important to get caught up in the politics of the concordat. The people on the front line know what they need in order to provide a service that not only delivers for our people but ensures their, and their comrades', safety. The Scottish Government would be wise to

pay heed to the front-line firefighters' views as expressed via the FBU. I am pleased that the minister said that he will indeed do that.

10:40

**Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP):** Like colleagues, I pay tribute to the work and dedication of the fire service. The untimely death of Ewan Williamson reminds us that some of the jobs that are done in our society are hazardous and occasionally fatal. We should never forget that.

I also pay tribute to the recent work of fire and rescue services during the floods. We do not need to have been up north or anywhere near Fochabers to have discovered that floods can arrive. The sight of floods in the middle of Aberdeen came as a surprise to many, not least the owners of the cars that suddenly disappeared beneath the floods.

I, too, have visited my local fire brigade. I was interested to see what it does, and it was a fascinating visit. However, I did not sample a local hat. I was not offered one because, I suspect, it was felt that the brigade might not have one that was big enough. I note on reflection that the fire station is only a mile from my home. I think that that is a good place to have a home.

As has perhaps become my wont in the Parliament, I will discuss some of the issues at the periphery of the main topic of discussion, which has been amply covered by others. I start by looking at what I might describe as end-of-valley arrangements. I have addressed before the ability of ambulances to reach people who live at the end of the roads up the valleys that go from Aberdeen into Aberdeenshire, but there is a link to the issue of fire and rescue services. It seems to me and others that, if we are to have satisfactory arrangements for such things, integration is needed. We need to think carefully about how we integrate emergency services of one sort or another away from major conurbations in order to reach people who live at the end of valleys where there is no access from the other side. In such situations, we have to do what we can to get to people as quickly as possible. Standard response times become meaningless when the start point and end point are 15 or 20 minutes apart.

We must also continue to make efforts to reduce the number of fires. Quite simply, a person will not get hurt in a fire that does not start. I notice that the trends are in the right direction, which suggests that the right things have been done in the past.

I am glad that Stewart Maxwell commented on fire-resistant cigarettes, as I was going to mention them. If we had a mechanism for reducing deaths

on the road by a factor of a third, we would grasp it without having much of a discussion about it. I suspect that the introduction of seat belts in cars had a rather greater effect than that, and it did not require much discussion once somebody had worked out the statistics. I am not sure what the statistics are on RIP cigarettes—I am not sure that we have heard them yet—but it is entirely clear that we are going in the right direction. If it is clear that RIP cigarettes will make a substantial difference, we should emphasise that. I appreciate that the matter is reserved, but—

**Stewart Maxwell:** I appreciate that we are in the early days and that there are not many statistics on the impact. We should not jump to conclusions too early, but it is certainly becoming clear from the places where RIP cigarettes have been introduced that there is an impact. In addition to the involvement of Canada and a substantial number of US states, I believe that Australia has introduced RIP cigarettes and that Finland will do so. In all the areas where they have been introduced, the impact has been the same—there has been a downward trend. I do not think that we will have to wait much longer to be sure.

**Nigel Don:** That is my very point: we should not have to wait very long. After all, good ideas do not necessarily need to come with too many statistics attached. Although the issue is reserved and decisions in that regard have to be taken elsewhere, it is important that we place some emphasis on it. As always, time will rush away from us.

There are many things that we can do to help the situation. Members have mentioned smoke detectors, but there is no use having one if it does not have any batteries—and it is no use at all if it is sitting in the cupboard, even if it has batteries.

We must ensure that the right things are being done in the right places. Yet again, we have to think about cigarette lighters and, indeed, electrical equipment, which I believe is still the most hazardous element in our old building stock. My point is not so much that such hazards exist and must be dealt with, but that we should not expect the fire brigade to deal with all of them. For one thing, our children should be educated in such matters in our schools; for another, we are all educated through our media, but I have to say that do not recall any recent advertisements highlighting the importance of and sense in having smoke detectors and not leaving lit cigarettes lying around. I certainly remember such ads in the past and, in that respect, we should explore other such routes in other media.

In all of this, we need to strike a balance. For example, I am very grateful to the minister for having discussions on the effect of new regulations on bed and breakfasts. As originally

drafted, the regulations seemed unduly onerous, would have been ridiculously expensive and would not really have helped the situation. However, it seems that, as a result of those discussions, the regulations might be relaxed, which is a sensible move. That shows that one can swing too far and that, in all such matters, one must strike a balance.

On the issue of fatalities, I should at this point put on my ex-factory engineer hat and suggest that the biggest hazards in our country are industrial ones. Outside of a plane crash or terrorist incident, the most likely cause of an event incurring a large number of fatalities will be the build-up of explosive materials, almost inevitably as the result of an industrial problem. I realise that that issue, too, is reserved, but we simply need to keep our eye on the ball and ensure that industry does everything possible to prevent the egress of flammable and dangerous materials.

10:47

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab):** I am pleased to take part in this debate. Like other members, I pay tribute to Ewan Williamson, who gave his life serving his community.

The motion and amendments simply state our expectations of our firefighters and fire service. I had not imagined that any member might want to criticise or oppose such sentiments, but I had forgotten about our colleague Jim Tolson. In a democracy, though, he is right to say what he feels.

As it is nearly five years since Parliament considered and passed the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, and given that we are now moving towards the second fire and rescue framework, it is right that we assess progress, highlight the areas that need to be refined or improved, and acknowledge areas where we are not making the intended progress or improvements in delivering our fire and rescue service.

Although I am pleased to take part in the debate, it is always difficult to speak at the end of any debate, as other members have already covered most of the areas and highlighted many of the concerns.

I place on record my admiration for the men and women of the fire and rescue service, whose job most of us would find too dangerous and demanding. Whether full-time or part of the retained service, those firefighters are always ready to put their lives on the line to serve and protect our communities. I also pay tribute to the men and women who serve either full-time in Cumbernauld fire station or in the retained service in Kilsyth. They do a grand job engaging with the

community and helping to educate young people in schools and people in their homes about the dangers of fire and the small interventions that they can make to protect them and their families. Like those in Angela Constance's constituency, the firefighters in my community have to respond to very dangerous situations on the A80. They do a very important job and I thank them for their work.

The FBU raised a number of concerns about the consultation paper. I believe that, as far as the service in Scotland is concerned, it is fundamental that employers and the minister listen to firefighters' first-hand knowledge and experience before the final document is agreed to.

As other members have discussed various issues in some detail, including governance, standard response times, equality and fairness, and ring fencing, I will in the short time that is available reinforce the importance of training, which has also been mentioned. The point applies to any service, but the fact is that if we value the employees of the fire and rescue service—which we do—we must equip them with the best possible skills.

I am told that the Scottish Fire Services College at Gullane in East Lothian delivers excellent training courses to new entrants to the service, and that recruits return to their various fire and rescue authorities enthusiastic, fit, ready and well prepared to do the job that is asked of them. However, according to firefighters, the absence of a national training strategy means that, from that point on, training on identical subjects is delivered differently across the service depending on local determination. That is unacceptable, and the delay in introducing a national training standard must be addressed immediately. I have not been persuaded by the minister's comments on that issue this morning. I realise that training has to be carried out at station level and that the service has to respond to local communities' needs, but we also need to respond at national level.

In my opinion and in the opinion of the trade unions, training, health and safety and the general development of the workforce in our fire and rescue service are of paramount importance. Given that we expect those workers to respond to any emergency, whatever it is, and given that they do respond, we should in return provide them with training to a national standard. Firefighters work as a team in dangerous situations, relying on each other not only for their own safety but for the safety of the people they seek to assist. As a result, it is not unreasonable to expect training across Scotland to be consistent.

I acknowledge that eight different authorities serve eight different communities but, regardless of where boundaries lie, their business is to

respond to emergency situations. Indeed, fire and rescue crews certainly have to cross boundaries to respond to large-scale emergencies. My constituency is on the boundary between Strathclyde Fire and Rescue and Central Scotland Fire and Rescue Service, both of which have on numerous occasions carried out cross-boundary work. Firefighters should expect the person who is working at their side to be trained to the same level because, as I have said, they depend on each other in dangerous situations.

In conclusion, the service must have continuous training to a national standard. I know that the minister has already engaged with the FBU, which in this respect has raised an important issue. We must listen to the firefighters, who after all are on the front line, and develop a system that allows them to serve our communities and in which they can have confidence.

10:54

**Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP):**

I add my condolences to those of my colleagues from throughout the Parliament to Ewan Williamson's family, friends and colleagues. I pay tribute to all our fire services and take this opportunity to remember the fallen and the injured.

As Cathie Craigie said, speaking so late in an informative and good debate poses its own challenges. I am reminded of a story about Professor Neil MacCormick, who was a great friend of mine, when he was speaking at a hustings and was eighth on the list. He came on and won everybody's heart by saying, "Being eighth in the debate is like being a husband of Elizabeth Taylor—you know exactly what to do on the wedding night, but the trick is to make it interesting." So here goes.

The Labour amendment refers to "health and safety standards". I am sure that Mr Martin did not mean to imply in any way that firefighters in Scotland are anything other than rigorous in enforcing those standards. I am sure that no one thinks that people who put their lives on the line in the course of their employment would be lax about health and safety.

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** It is important to provide clarification that the point is not about firefighters enforcing the standards; it is about the services around them, and ensuring consistent health and safety standards throughout Scotland.

**Christina McKelvie:** I absolutely understood that that was the tone of the amendment. The member will hear what I think about health and safety. We can be certain that Scotland's firefighters will be careful to ensure that their health and safety protection is as complete as it

should be. The firefighters have the most to gain from the consistent and rigorous enforcement of health and safety standards in fire and rescue services, and they are best placed to know what needs to be done in their working environment, hence the on-going work with the FBU on health and safety issues.

I applaud the minister for engaging properly with the FBU and ensuring that it had a seat at the table when the framework was developed. Such invaluable input must have helped the framework to move in the most appropriate direction. I congratulate the minister on that wise decision. I do not encourage him on much, so I hope that he enjoys it while he can. Although I am encouraged by the inclusion of the FBU in the framework's construction, I note that the union has voiced concerns, and I ask the minister to take note of them. I do not expect an answer today, but I hope that he will take proper note of the concerns and factor them into his thinking in the next few weeks and months.

The union has argued that the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 has been found wanting in its operation. The framework states:

"While FRAs should continue to place greater emphasis on preventing fires from happening, the need to respond swiftly and professionally to those incidents that do occur is not diminished."

I echo Elaine Smith's concerns about front-line jobs. The FBU points out that every fire and rescue authority in Scotland has reduced front-line firefighter numbers. As Elaine Smith said, the union estimates that there are now 220 fewer front-line firefighters than there were in 2005. I am sure that the minister will want to ensure that the number of firefighters who can respond to live incidents, whether or not they are emergency calls, is maintained. I acknowledge that fire and rescue authorities are autonomous to a great degree and are therefore not subject to the direction of the Government. However, I encourage the minister to do what he can to ensure that, at the very least, numbers are maintained and to aim to get the number of front-line firefighters back up at the earliest possible opportunity. It should be noted that Central Scotland Fire and Rescue Service is taking steps to reverse the trend, which I welcome.

There was a long-term trend of reducing the number of fire deaths, but since the 2005 act came into force that has tended to reverse. In 2007, fire deaths increased to the same level as in 1959, and the number has increased further since. None of us wants that to continue. Stewart Maxwell described the causes of fires and talked about smoking. The increase is a worrying development, and even more so when we consider that the number of fires has continued to

decline. That is a salient point—the number of fires has declined, but the number of deaths has increased. The immediate temptation is to conclude that fires are now more dangerous, with fewer fires causing a greater number of deaths and injuries. That might be the case, but I ask the minister to have the evidence examined, so that we know for sure the cause of the increase in fatalities, which will allow us to take the necessary steps to address the problem.

The integrated risk management that is mentioned in the framework will go some way to addressing the problem, particularly in relation to firefighters' safety. However, I would be grateful for an indication from the minister that he will consider fire deaths as a stand-alone issue. The 2005 act added several fairly onerous responsibilities to firefighters' duties, but the number of front-line staff has decreased. I know that the minister will be concerned about those issues and that he is probably already considering them, but I would be grateful for an indication that that is the case, to ease the FBU's concerns.

I will restate Angela Constance's point about the contention that fire authorities have used the process of integrated fire risk management as a tool to argue for efficiency savings in the fire and rescue service, which has led to cuts in the number of front-line firefighters. I hope that we can be sure that fire safety is not being compromised by such decisions. It will not be easy for the minister to ensure that, but I know that his main concern is with getting it right rather than with having an easy time. I hope that he will take on board those concerns and consider ways of addressing them.

I fully support the minister in carrying out the task that is before him, and I congratulate him on bringing the framework so far. I encourage him to continue driving forward the agenda and to keep making Scotland's fire and rescue service the very best that it can be.

11:00

**Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):**

The debate has been constructive and many useful points have been raised that I hope the minister will address in his summing-up speech. We have had significant contributions, such as that from Paul Martin, who raised valid points about fairness and the need to tackle the currently fragmented approach to discipline and grievance procedures in the employing services. Robert Brown stated that we need greater clarity on the division of responsibility. He and Stewart Maxwell mentioned the inspection requirements under the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005. I would particularly appreciate the minister's response on that. Stewart Maxwell spoke well about his campaign to

ensure that only RIP cigarettes are sold in Scotland. I will certainly pay more heed to his campaigning from now on. Peter Peacock, who was, as ever, succinct and to the point, asked for more detail on water rescue and on the training and resources that will be needed for the implementation of the Tomkins report. Cathie Craigie spoke about the need for continuous training to a national standard. She and Angela Constance talked about the need to maintain front-line services. I hope that the minister will pick up on those points.

The minister opened the debate by paying tribute to Ewan Williamson from Edinburgh, who died in the line of duty. We all associate ourselves with the minister's sentiments, which have been echoed by all speakers.

The Liberal Democrats recognise the vital work of fire and rescue services throughout Scotland, including the contribution of the firefighters in the retained duty system, who provide a flexible and cost-effective community service, particularly in rural, remote and island parts of Scotland. We support local flexibility in service delivery, but we note the concerns of the FBU, which is calling for clear and enforceable standards and clear responsibilities. We therefore believe that the fire and rescue advisory unit and the ministerial advisory group must work effectively with fire and rescue authorities to deliver compliance within agreed and consistent objectives under the national framework.

Our amendment highlights the role of retained firefighters, which many members have mentioned. My region of North East Scotland is covered by Tayside Fire and Rescue and Grampian Fire and Rescue Service. Grampian has 33 retained fire stations and only three full-time ones. Tayside has 24 stations, of which three are volunteer and four are whole time, with the other 17 being retained. They provide fire and rescue services to a region that has busy industrial harbours, major oil and gas terminals, and the busiest heliport in the country. We also have two major hospital campuses, including the biggest single-site hospital in Europe.

Retained firefighters provide fire cover for at least 90 per cent of the landmass of Scotland, which is no mean feat. I must also mention volunteer firefighters, who work at remote stations. Tayside has three stations that are operated by volunteers, at Kinloch Rannoch, Glenshee and Kirkmichael. Those volunteers show an exceptional level of commitment, for which I thank them.

As the minister said, the framework recognises the changing role of the fire and rescue service. We now have a modern service that is about much more than firefighting: it is a comprehensive fire

and rescue service, which, as the minister rightly said, puts prevention on a par with intervention. The service attends car crashes, flooding incidents and landslips, and carries out a lot of prevention work in the form of home-safety visits and school work.

As the Liberal Democrat transport spokesperson, I am increasingly aware that, certainly in my area, firefighters' time is taken up with responding to road traffic incidents. I therefore welcome the framework's focus on reducing death and injury caused by road traffic accidents. It is telling that, as we debate the issue, the Chief Fire Officers Association is hosting a major conference in Glasgow to explore the unique role of the fire and rescue service in reducing the appalling effects of road traffic collisions.

The minister spoke about co-operation and partnership. I will highlight an example from my region. Road safety Grampian is a pioneering partnership with Grampian Police in which three members of fire service staff are based permanently at Nelson Street police office in Aberdeen. Those staff members are part of Grampian fire and rescue service's risk reduction unit that is managed by community safety and is under the overall control of central support services. The unit has crew managers, police officers and support staff working together in the same base. The ultimate target of the partnership is to contribute to the key strategic objective on which we just touched—reducing the number of deaths and serious injuries caused by road traffic collisions.

We heard this morning that the fire and rescue service has to deal with a sometimes hostile public, with at least 200 attacks a year, which is an appalling number. Paul Martin and Elaine Smith rightly highlighted the dangers of attacks and, indeed, the need for legal protection.

I will touch on something that is highlighted in the framework but which no one has mentioned this morning. Changing societal norms mean that duty systems that were developed over the past century do not necessarily meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century families and communities. If we are to cope with the projected increase in retirements and also have a diverse and representative fire and rescue service, the service will need to monitor carefully recruitment and retention, and develop initiatives to recruit the next generation of firefighters.

We will support the motion and Labour's amendment. In closing, I pay tribute to the sterling work that our fire and rescue service provides—a service that my colleague Robert Brown defined rightly as one "of compassionate competence". I urge the Government to ensure that the national framework provides only strategic guidance,

encourages appropriate enforceable national standards and at all times ensures that we respect local autonomy.

11:06

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I am glad to be able to wind up in today's important debate. I echo others in the Parliament when I say that we must never take for granted the efforts of the very brave men and women who turn up to fight fire and flood to save lives and property.

Anyone who has been through a fire will know the lasting effects of the grime, the soot, the pervading smell of smoke and the shock at that amazingly destructive force of nature that can not only kill in minutes but up-end the entire infrastructure of people's lives. That is why the men and women of the fire brigades who fight fire and flood must be given the utmost respect, and their practical experience must be listened to in the consultation. It is they who know first hand the facets of the service that need improvement.

Peter Peacock mentioned the effects of flooding in Elgin and Fochabers in my region. I know full well how bad those effects are. I hope that members will forgive me for focusing a good part of my remarks on our inland water rescue services in the light of the tragic drowning of four fishermen in Loch Awe in my native Argyll, which Jim Tolson also mentioned. I have been closely involved with the wishes of the community to do anything possible to save people from drowning in Scottish lochs and rivers.

For some years now I have been concerned about the effectiveness of inshore water rescue and who exactly is responsible for that service on lochs such as Loch Awe and Loch Maree, where another two people recently were tragically drowned. Following the drowning tragedy in March, I asked the Scottish Government questions relating to Loch Awe. A subsequent answer revealed that 12 people have drowned in the loch since 1996. That caused local concern and prompted the Scottish Government to launch a review of Scotland's water rescue capability. I am grateful to the minister for doing that.

Page 18 of the draft fire and rescue consultation document states that

"co-ordinating flooding incidents needs to be improved"

and that a review into Scotland's water rescue capability, led by Paddy Tomkins QPM, the former chief inspector of constabulary in Scotland, is taking place. His group will report its recommendations by December 2009. He attended a meeting of stakeholders in Oban—which I also attended—such as the police, the fire and rescue services, the mountain rescue



services, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, councillors and community councillors who thrashed out what could best be done to save lives in different areas.

The fire brigade plays an enormous role at the moment. If a person reports an incident, such as someone being in trouble in the water, they are put in touch with the police, but in general the police do not have the rescue training that is given to the fire service and they often do not have the resources to deal immediately with such incidents. They pass the incident to the fire service, which in many instances, for example the incident on Loch Awe, makes it the first responder. In the case of Loch Awe, the police chief informed me that she could not telephone local people to ask for their help and their boats, and in that case the fire brigade had no boat.

Although I fully understand that not every loch can be equipped with a rescue boat, it is vital that a boat is in reach of the rescue services in what I would call black-spot water-death areas that should be identified by the local rescue services as soon as possible. I am sure that the Health and Safety Executive in Scotland would wish to do everything possible to save life rather than put hurdles in front of would-be rescuers, as that might have the opposite effect. It is vital to find an appropriate balance between saving people in trouble and protecting the lives of those who go to their aid. That will be something for Mr Tomkins's review to work out. Having spoken to him, I have every confidence that whatever the recommendations are in December, they will improve our rescue services in Scotland.

Many people living in rural areas would like to help as observers. Local safety clubs should be given basic resources, such as binoculars, to observe areas of water, and they should be encouraged to have a network that can be called on by the police in an emergency. Fire and water have one thing in common—both kill quickly and are no respecters of time. Ultimate speed is one of the main essences of rescue.

**Elaine Smith:** Does the member agree that given the thousands of areas of water throughout Scotland, he describes a complicated issue? If the fire and rescue services are to take on additional work in that regard, it is to be hoped that the review's recommendations attract much more additional funding.

**Jamie McGregor:** That would certainly need to be looked into. I thank the member for her point.

Educating the public about what to do in emergencies is a vital part of prevention. I was mightily impressed by the video that the fire service showed me of a small fire becoming a raging inferno in less than three minutes. I was

also impressed by the excellent demonstration by the RNLI on the wearing and maintenance of life jackets by people using boats. I was horrified by some of the examples of life jackets and buoyancy aids without crotch straps and with corroded and utterly useless gas canisters. It is obviously vital that life-saving equipment is in first-class condition and that attention is paid to the recommendations of the RNLI with regard to life jackets. I mentioned that to Mr Tomkins, who said that he will take an interest in the subject.

Before concluding, I raise a worrying issue. Last weekend, an article in *Scotland on Sunday* pointed out the financial difficulties that private caterers and accommodation providers might face in relation to the enforcement of new fire regulations. Will the minister make certain not only that new regulations are fit for purpose but that they are enforced in a way that allows those providers to accommodate the extra burden of expense without going bust?

I welcome today's debate and the consultation, and I look forward to progress being made as we see the most effective possible co-ordination within our fire and rescue framework.

11:13

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** It has been a good, constructive and informed debate. The sunshine of the morning has brought at least some consensus even to the justice teams in the chamber, so let us cherish the moment. In that spirit, I am happy to say that we will support the Government motion and Robert Brown's amendment. We should look for consensus where it is possible because we are determining the future organisation and provision of a service in which, day in and day out, firefighters risk their lives to protect those of others.

Today, we look forward to the future framework for fire and rescue services in Scotland, but many of us look back to earlier in the summer when we attended Ewan Williamson's memorial service. It was right that the minister paid tribute to him today and I associate myself with all his remarks. Indeed, there should be official recognition of Ewan Williamson's bravery and sacrifice. The memorial service was a deeply moving occasion that reminded us of the bravery of our firefighters and the debt that we as a nation owe them. It was very moving indeed to see firefighters from throughout Scotland and other parts of the UK come together to mark Ewan Williamson's sacrifice.

There is much in the framework with which we agree and we broadly support the key priorities for fire and rescue services outlined in the introduction. However, after events such as the

death of Ewan Williamson—in the context of an increasing number of deaths in the line of duty, which Elaine Smith mentioned—it is right and necessary that the debate focuses on health and safety, to which a number of speakers referred. That matter was, quite rightly, brought to our attention by the Fire Brigades Union, whose members join us in the gallery today.

The framework refers to an action plan, which is to emerge from the study on fire deaths and injury. That must happen. Once the investigation into the death of Ewan Williamson has been completed and its findings are produced, it will be vital to respond appropriately and to take any necessary action. Of course, it would be inappropriate to preempt the investigation, but an appropriate response will be required.

In our amendment to the motion, we have said that health and safety should be prioritised in the framework, because we have heard concerns from the FBU about ensuring a rigorous and consistent approach to health and safety throughout Scotland. That was the driver behind our amendment.

In all things to do with the fire and rescue service, a careful balance has to be struck between providing local flexibility and ensuring consistency in services throughout Scotland. Members returned to that issue again and again in the debate.

Where appropriate, equipment and other resources should be shared between forces. I know that forces are already looking at collaborative approaches to delivering services in their area. Unnecessary replication of resources is a cause of frustration to which members have referred. The minister talked about the need to avoid unnecessary duplication in the service and to maximise efficiency in challenging financial times.

We also believe that more progress can be made towards achieving best value. Initiatives and resources such as firelink are an important innovation for the service as a whole. The need to develop a joint approach to shared services is highlighted in the framework. I believe that significant progress on that can be made. The issue of taking a joint approach is at the heart of Robert Brown's amendment, which chimes with the points that we have made on health and safety.

John Lamont rightly referred to "In the Line of Duty". I was happy to lodge a motion on that report and I was pleased that it received cross-party support.

The sheer scope of the contribution that our firefighters make to our communities must be fully recognised. Paul Martin talked about that in the

context of his experience in Springburn. Peter Peacock referred to the service's recent crucial work in tackling flooding. The service's role in water rescue can be important, too, so it should be part of the framework. Jamie McGrigor was quite right to highlight that issue and to draw it to the attention of the Parliament. Progress in that area needs to be made following the report from Paddy Tomkins.

I welcome the points that Alison McInnes and others made about the important role that retained firefighters play in remote, island and rural areas, which is recognised in the framework.

I also welcome the framework's emphasis on the continued role for fire and rescue services in improving the lives of people in our communities through their contribution to community safety education and awareness strategies and to youth engagement and restorative justice schemes. That not only addresses the important issue of fire prevention more broadly but tackles antisocial behaviour. We believe that that role is important and we welcome the fact that it is emphasised in the framework.

Paul Martin talked about the need to be vigilant against the tiny minority who, unbelievably, target and attack our firefighters. We need to make full use of the legislative provisions that the Parliament passed to take action on that issue.

The work and contribution of firefighters must be central to the framework—indeed, it must be central to the service itself. That is why we have placed such an emphasis on health and safety in the debate. It is right that the framework refers to learning and development for firefighters and that there is a focus on training and the role of the Scottish Fire Services College. Cathie Craigie made important points about national standards in training, which need to be addressed.

Of course, there is also the issue of workforce planning. I think that the minister said that, where budgets are tight, there are significant opportunities to share resources and infrastructure. However, the fact is that the number of firefighters has been falling. Priority has to be given to ensuring that there are enough firefighters to do the job safely. As Elaine Smith said, recruitment and retention of firefighters must always be at the heart of planning for the future of the service.

The minister also touched briefly on the wider debates about the structure of the service and what shape it should take in the future. I tend to agree that that is not a debate for today, but I am sure that we will return to it. I do not think that anyone here believes that the framework will be the last word on that crucial matter.

If the minister takes on board the concerns that have been aired in a constructive way, progress can be made through the framework. I note that the minister said that he had an open mind on governance, but we can deal only with the structures as they are. I would welcome further information from the minister on what he means when he says that he has an open mind. Does that mean that there is likely to be further change in governance sooner rather than later?

We have to ensure that there is excellence in the service throughout Scotland and that there can be an expectation of the same high standard of service for communities wherever they are in Scotland. There is a need for ministers to ensure closer collaboration between the ministerial advisory group and the other relevant authorities, including the local joint boards, to ensure that there is a clear strategy.

The framework talks about the famous goal of a joined-up approach, which must be taken even in post-concordat Scotland. We cannot have fragmentation, to which Bill Butler referred.

Stewart Maxwell made pertinent points about nationally comparable standards and data. Angela Constance referred to consistency in response times. I hope that the minister will answer the questions on those issues in summing up.

We all want to see much more progress being made to address Scotland's unenviable record on fire fatalities compared with other parts of the UK. We all hope that that can be achieved through the framework, which must be a step forward in the journey towards a structure and service that give our firefighters the support that they require to do their jobs and to achieve the goal that we all share of having fewer fire fatalities in Scotland.

11:23

**Fergus Ewing:** Before I address the debate, it is with regret that I advise members that I have become aware during the debate that, yesterday evening, a 27-year-old woman died after a fire broke out at a block of flats in Dumfries. The emergency services evacuated residents from the block of six flats but, sadly, one young female lost her life. That is a reminder of the importance of the topics that we have been debating today and the role that our firefighters carry out in putting their lives at risk so that they may save others.

The debate has been excellent. I start off with a collective thank you to all members who have made positive and considered contributions. We will learn from the debate. This has been a good and timely opportunity to have a wide-ranging discussion about our fire service.

I am immensely pleased about the tone of the debate, the positive nature of the contributions from members of all parties and the fact that many members have taken the opportunity to devote their contributions to specific topics, developing their arguments in a considered way. That will be invaluable for us as we proceed.

I will address some of the remarks that my colleague Paul Martin made. My overall response is that the framework document is a process, not a conclusion. We are willing to discuss, reconsider and revise it as necessary. It is an excellent start, if I may say so, and has been agreed with all the stakeholders involved. In almost every case, I have a good working relationship with those stakeholders. Across the parties, it is virtually free of any party-political considerations, which is absolutely right.

Many members have made much comment on the briefing material that the FBU provided, the advice and assistance that the union has given and the time that it has spent describing to members of all parties its views on the important matters in the framework. I have met the FBU regularly and will continue to do so. I pay tribute to the way in which it and the Retained Firefighters Union represent their members with determination, vigilance, persistence and a prose style that is, if I may say so, utterly devoid of ambiguity.

I will address in turn some of the main issues that were raised. First, I will consider training. In the light of recent events, nothing is more important than ensuring that the training regime is adequate and fit for purpose. The framework recognises that point at page 7 and paragraph 7.1.2.

The upskilling of our whole-time and retained firefighters is most essential. The Scottish Government is entirely committed to continually developing their skills and is investing more than £6 million annually in core and specialist training. A training needs analysis has been commissioned to confirm actual need against planned and existing capacity and, thereafter, to determine a strategy for investment and collaboration on the development of facilities locally and at the fire college in Gullane.

Many members mentioned those issues. I think that Cathie Craigie mentioned the national college at Gullane. As an early decision, I was pleased to dismiss a proposal to merge it with Tulliallan, which all members would have dismissed had they been in my shoes. It was a particularly silly proposal that seemed to show a blatant ignorance of the different training needs and disciplines of our fire and police services and, indeed, the different traditions that Tulliallan and Gullane have. In Gullane, we have an excellent national

training facility that provides a solid grounding for those who enter the fire service.

There are many elements to training. At a meeting last month, the FBU raised real fire training with me. We take that very seriously. Carbonaceous burn units are one way of providing a realistic simulation of fires and they are used by a number of services. Fife Fire and Rescue Service has recently purchased a new unit. I know that because I was there when it was launched and I saw just how fierce the heat is. When the firefighters emerged from the unit, they all did so shaking their hands because, even with full protection, the heat—which is several hundred degrees centigrade—is so ferociously intense that it provides a real fire experience, which is important.

The Scottish Fire Services College in Gullane has recently reached agreement with BAA to use its facility at Edinburgh airport. The frequency of attendance at live fire exercises varies throughout Scotland. One service achieves a target of exercises twice a year for every firefighter while, at the other end, an ambition to experience live fire training once every three years is not achieved. I mentioned that because, as I said, there are areas in which we face challenges. That matter is without doubt—I am being candid about this—one of those. That is why, following my discussions with the FBU last month, I have signalled that I intend to pursue the matter when I meet chief fire officers fairly shortly. I hope that I will have the support of all members in so doing.

**Cathie Craigie:** When the minister meets the chief fire officers, will he also raise the importance of a nationally agreed strategy for training so that, when firefighters have to work with colleagues from other fire and rescue services, they can at least be sure that they are trained to the same level and standard? I am sure that the FBU has raised that matter with him.

**Fergus Ewing:** That is certainly one of the issues that we will discuss. I think that Cathie Craigie acknowledged in her speech that training needs differ across Scotland. One of the places that I had the pleasure of visiting was North Ronaldsay. It takes about a day to get from there to Inverness. If the training is not in Inverness and the firefighters have to go to Gullane, that might take another day. It can take several days, particularly in the Highlands and Islands but also in Dumfries and Galloway or parts of Strathclyde, to undertake training. There are huge pressures on the local fire boards to fund training, particularly in rural areas, and there are different circumstances in those areas. However, as various members said, there must be sufficient and adequate training in the various functions that our firefighters carry out on our behalf.

**Cathie Craigie:** Will the minister give way?

**Fergus Ewing:** If I may, I would like to move on, because I want to address many other members' points.

Of particular importance is the core function of tackling real fires.

I say to Angela Constance that Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service's proposal to build a training centre at Newbridge is ultimately a matter for the service; it has the decision-making power. The Scottish Government has provided significant financial support for the creation of a new Strathclyde Fire and Rescue training facility outside Glasgow. The facility's strategic location will ensure that it is accessible and available for use by other services as well as Strathclyde Fire and Rescue. We have made it clear to LBFRS that, given that that is the case and given the location of Gullane within the LBFRS area, we do not see how the Scottish Government could justify providing central funding to support the Newbridge proposal.

Various members, notably Peter Peacock and Jamie McGrigor, mentioned water rescue. The challenges in carrying out water rescue in flooding and in moving water are immense. There are few things more dangerous than someone deciding to enter a river where the water is moving swiftly, as it often does. Sadly, over the summer months, there were a number of fatalities in our rivers—those who decided, understandably but foolishly, to jump into a river to try to rescue a pet and lost their lives. That is an extremely serious issue.

Because of that and because of representations from chiefs such as David Wynne, the FBU and other stakeholders, we decided not only that we needed to have a review but that it had to be headed up by someone who had the most distinguished record and great experience. I was pleased to hear Jamie McGrigor recount some of the work that Paddy Tomkins has already done. I am due to meet Paddy shortly and expect his report to be submitted to me in or around November. It will be a key piece of work and, if the Parliament wishes to debate it after it has been published and perhaps after we have had an opportunity to consider it, it will be entirely appropriate that we do so, given the speeches that a number of members have made today.

A number of members also focused on governance. Bill Butler and Elaine Smith devoted substantial parts of their speeches to that issue. The fundamental basis for the way in which we work with our stakeholders is partnership. As a former solicitor—who, it should be said, was for most of the period in partnership with members of my family—I know that partnership can be a febrile, fissile and volatile business format, in

which partners can disagree. There has to be a mechanism by which views can be discussed and thrashed out, and a decision reached.

I am confident that the current arrangements are working reasonably well. All stakeholders are represented on the ministerial advisory group, which I chair. A point that I do not think has been made in the debate is that one of the benefits of the framework document is that, for the first time, it sets out with absolute clarity the respective roles and responsibilities of me, local government, the unions, the chiefs and all the stakeholders; as well as, on page 9, the governance that is provided by the MAG. Although it is not a statutory body, the MAG has the potential to develop further. I indicated to Paul Martin that I have an open mind on the issue. I have also indicated to the chiefs, to COSLA, to the Scottish fire conveners forum and to the trade unions that if there is a suggestion for how we can further improve the MAG, I am perfectly willing to consider it.

How MAG performs its business has changed since I took the helm. It will now meet the expectation that there will be three meetings a year. The format of sub-committees has been slightly simplified. We have an entirely open mind about how to meet people. However, it is wrong to put too much emphasis on governance. A structure in itself is not a solution. The problems that we have are problems that we face irrespective of what structure we have. That said, I very much look forward to hearing from members, and perhaps party spokespeople, about how we can take our work forward. I am always happy to meet party spokespeople to discuss any issue regarding the fire service.

**Elaine Smith:** Will the minister consider re-establishing the link between fire service budgets and the number of uniformed posts, as I asked earlier?

**Fergus Ewing:** I would need to consider that carefully. Plainly, we are under considerable financial pressures. In large part, our local government partners are responsible for delivering those services, and we work with them constantly to ensure that, as far as possible, all decisions involve a joint partnership approach. However, I do not dismiss the point, which we would need to consider extremely carefully.

A number of members, including Christina McKelvie, Jamie Hepburn and Stewart Maxwell, raised the important issue of inspection. I can inform members that the Scottish fire and rescue advisory unit has carried out an extensive review of operational service delivery in 2008-09. The results are to be shared with chief officers, and a report is to be provided to me imminently. The unit will revisit all services in the final quarter of this year to review process. Further, the Fire

(Scotland) Act 2005 gives me statutory powers to direct the head of the SFRAU to inquire into matters detailed in the act, should I require to do so.

Various specific issues were raised in the debate. Stewart Maxwell made a cogent, coherent argument for reduced ignition propensity cigarettes. I suspect that that is an issue to which we will return—and rightly so. I very much hope that we can work positively with the UK, and perhaps the European Union, to make progress on that issue. The figures that Mr Maxwell quoted in relation to the reduction in the number of deaths in New York and Vermont speak for themselves. Although it is an idea whose time has perhaps come, there will need to be careful discussions before the Scottish Government can come to a view. I look forward to meeting Mr Maxwell fairly soon to pursue those matters.

As I have mentioned, earlier in the year I had the pleasure of visiting our eight fire services and seeing for myself the excellent work that they do. I met firefighters and discussed their work with them. There is a pictorial record of those visits, including a number of photographs of me meeting firefighters and clad in a firefighter's uniform. *Hello!* magazine it is not. With those words, I commend all members and their contributions to the debate.

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### General Questions

11:40

#### Commonwealth Games (Anti-racism Education)

**1. Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive how it will support anti-racism education during the 2014 Commonwealth games. (S3O-7781)

**The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison):** The Scottish Government is clear that there is no place for any form of discrimination in Scottish society. We are already working with our education partners to support a number of initiatives aimed at stamping out racism. The learning programmes to be delivered in the months leading up to the Commonwealth games will give us a further opportunity to do so.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** The minister will be aware that the Scottish Government has squirreled away something in the order of £2.9 million from the immigration impact fund. Is the Government in a position to assure me that organisations such as Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland, Show Racism the Red Card and the Ethnic Minorities Law Centre will have access to some of that funding to take forward the education programme to which she has referred?

**Shona Robison:** I will write to Hugh O'Donnell specifically about the £2.9 million from the immigration impact fund.

We have undertaken a number of initiatives. There is the important on-going work of the one Scotland message. A number of things have happened recently, such as the rock against racism gigs, which the member may have attended—I am sure that the gigs have been very good. It is important to get the message across in different ways. The Commonwealth games provides us with a unique opportunity to do more on the issue of racism because of the links that can be made by communities and schools with the various Commonwealth countries that are taking part. A lot of work is happening, and there are many opportunities to do more.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** One of the key educational opportunities of the 2014 Commonwealth games is that those who have never volunteered before will be given the opportunity to do so and, as a result, to improve their skills base and confidence. Does the minister

agree that our new army of volunteers should be drawn from throughout Scottish society and that it should represent the diverse and rich cultural and racial mix within our nation? Does she agree on the benefits that that will have for anti-racism strategies to boot?

**Shona Robison:** I very much agree. The volunteering opportunities of the Commonwealth games are enormous—15,000 volunteers are required. Those opportunities will give people in our more deprived communities the chance to develop their education and skills. As I mentioned previously, the games will also allow communities to make links that will develop up to 2014—and beyond, I hope—and to improve their understanding of the cultures of other countries. Schoolchildren in particular will be able to take advantage of that.

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Does the minister agree that as well as focusing on anti-racism education, the best approach is positive encouragement for ethnic minorities to participate in the organising of the games?

**Shona Robison:** It is important that people from all backgrounds and cultures are involved in the organisation of the Commonwealth games. We want to draw from all communities—not just in Glasgow but beyond—for the volunteering opportunities that I mentioned. The international spirit of the games gives us an opportunity to break down some of the barriers that, sadly, still exist in Scotland.

#### Mental Health Service Provision (Third Sector)

**2. Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether the impact of single outcome agreements on direct service provision for mental health services by the third sector has been fully evaluated. (S3O-7756)

**The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison):** No specific evaluations have been commissioned on the impact of single outcome agreements on the third sector or on services provided by the third sector. The Scottish Government has commissioned research on how the third sector is responding to the new opportunities and challenges arising from its new relationship with the public sector; that research was commissioned with the engagement of the third sector and public sector partners.

**Tom McCabe:** Will the Minister for Public Health and Sport consider undertaking a detailed evaluation of the issue, given that the third sector not only benefits from but relies on such information? Rather than rely on the research to which she referred, will she ensure that a more comprehensive evaluation of the impact of single

outcome agreements on the third sector is done? An organisation such as the Scottish Association for Mental Health is already expressing concerns about a £2.7 million retrenchment for other organisations, and it is not alone. The people who depend on the services will feel the impact of such moves. The issue is serious, so will the minister consider whether third sector organisations are suffering because of single outcome agreements, perhaps unintentionally?

**Shona Robison:** I will say a little more about the research. It will consider not only changes that have resulted from the concordat but planned policy changes, such as the simplification of the scrutiny landscape and reducing the number of public bodies. The research will give us a lot of information about the positive impact on the third sector and could pick up any challenges, too. The research will track 20 voluntary organisations for five years.

On funding, there is no doubt that, given some of the financial challenges that are coming the Scottish Government's way, which are partly—or in the main—due to the £500 million of cuts emanating from Westminster, Tom McCabe and others cannot escape the fact that the budget reduction will have an impact across the whole of society. He must recognise that, and perhaps he should make representations elsewhere to prevent it from happening in the first place.

### Student Maintenance Loans

**3. Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it remains satisfied that maintenance loans available to full-time higher education students in Scotland under the non-means-tested support system remain at the level of £890 a year while all students in England studying away from home can access more than £3,000 of non-means-tested maintenance loans. (S3O-7784)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop):** Unlike in England, students in Scotland do not have to pay tuition fees. As a result, English students have to pay an additional £3,000 each year, and leave with greater debt than Scottish students, despite generally studying for a year less. Student loan debt figures demonstrate that: in 2009, the average student debt figure for Scotland was £5,487, compared with £10,287 in England.

Our consultation on the paper "Supporting a Smarter Scotland" closed on 30 April 2009. The paper outlined a number of options on how student support could be improved by utilising the £30 million that has been made available through the spending review for higher education student support in 2010-11. It also provided an opportunity for all interested parties to set out priorities. We

are analysing and costing the various options that have been proposed and will make an announcement shortly.

**Mike Rumbles:** The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning knows that my question is focused on what help students receive as they go through their studies. I have an interest to declare, in that I have first-hand knowledge of the issue because I have a son at university doing a course that is available only in England. He receives more than the amount recommended in the parental contribution, but can access only £900 a year as a student loan. His English counterparts have over £3,000. He also pays £9,000 in university tuition fees. Like many other Scottish students studying in England, he is reliant on taking out commercial loans. Such students are doubly hit because they pay tuition fees and are not allowed to access student loans of any worth. Will the cabinet secretary take action to increase the level of student loans that are available to that segment of Scottish students?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The question was specifically about Scottish students studying in England, and there are specific reasons why we must ensure that such students are treated at the same level as English students studying in England. That is because of the proportion of European Union applications; if we were to treat those students preferentially, we would have to offer the same preferential treatment to Polish, French or German students studying at an English university.

As I said, we are looking at improving student support from 2010-11 onwards. I have had constructive discussions with a number of members across different parties. I hope to come forward with a proposal to support students that will command members' approval and support.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Does the cabinet secretary agree that NUS Scotland's report "Overstretched and Overdrawn - A survey of student hardship, Summer 2009" shows clearly that tackling student hardship and the increasing reliance on commercial debt must be the Government's priority in responding to the supporting a smarter Scotland consultation?

**Fiona Hyslop:** We tackled the issue of student debt by ensuring that we reduced the amount of loan debt that was caused by the graduate endowment fee. The improvement of graduates' income by £2,300 is to be welcomed. However, I recognise that there are issues during a recession for student support as students go through university. Indeed, as the member knows, we are tackling that issue. She also knows that one of the key areas of concern is the position of independent students, who are often older and often have child care responsibilities and costs, which must also be addressed.

### Prisoner Releases

**4. Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive how many prisoners have been released from custodial sentences after serving a quarter of their sentences, as a result of powers exercised by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice. (S3O-7690)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** The provisions introduced by the Management of Offenders etc (Scotland) Act 2005 have enabled certain offenders to be assessed as suitable to be released under the home detention curfew scheme. Those offenders are released on licence and are under curfew, supported by electronic monitoring, to assist them to reintegrate into their communities. Between 2006, when the scheme was introduced, and 4 September 2009, 6,248 offenders sentenced to less than four years were granted home detention curfew. Eight hundred and forty-one of them—13 per cent—moved to home detention curfew after serving a quarter of their sentence in custody.

**Bill Aitken:** Can the cabinet secretary enlarge on the number of those released in those circumstances who have breached the terms of their licence and on the number who have offended during the unexpired period of their sentence?

**Kenny MacAskill:** The statistics show clearly that over 75 per cent of prisoners successfully completed home detention curfew. Between July 2006 and 30 August 2009, 5,993 low-risk offenders were released on licence under HDC, of whom 23 per cent—1,386—have been returned to custody, with fewer than 1 per cent being reconvicted of a further offence.

### The Lighthouse

**5. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it will take to safeguard the future of the Lighthouse in Glasgow. (S3O-7761)

**The Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution (Michael Russell):** The future of the Lighthouse Trust as a company is now in the hands of the administrators, PricewaterhouseCoopers. The administrators' proposals will be developed through a process of discussion and agreement with various creditors and interests, including the Scottish Government. The Government is very keen to see a national centre of architecture continue in some form, and we are exploring ways to achieve that with the administrators.

**Pauline McNeill:** The minister said on 28 August in *The Herald*:

"I don't think nothing is there to replace it ... I think it will be missed".

Given that the minister does not appear to be using his influence to save the Lighthouse for the future, can he give a bit more detail on how the national centre for architecture and design will continue? Will it still exist? If so, in what form will it exist and where will it be located?

**Michael Russell:** I think that I have been entirely clear. While the process of administration continues, it is not only right but proper that those who are creditors and those who have an interest in the organisation undertake discussions with the administrators. At the end of that, all parties will be much clearer about what is possible.

The member should recall that the failure of the Lighthouse was, regrettably, to do with not one but two substantial deficits that had been run up. It would have been completely wrong—Glasgow City Council accepted this, along with the Scottish Government—to have intervened at that stage. However, the Scottish Government has contributed almost £1 million to work that has been undertaken at the Lighthouse, and that work should continue. I am hopeful that we will be able to move forward the work that the Lighthouse has done and ensure that there is a national centre for architecture. However, it will not be made any easier if those who are involved in the process snipe at the administrators in their discussions instead of joining them in positive discussion.

**Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** We know that the Lighthouse is owned by Glasgow City Council. Taking into consideration the grants that have been received by the Lighthouse from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Scottish Arts Council, and the caveats that are attached to that funding, designating it for public purposes, will the Lighthouse remain in public hands in the future?

**Michael Russell:** I have given as much indication as I can, given the nature of the process. There is a strong commitment to a centre for architecture, to the work that the Lighthouse has done and to the issues with which the Lighthouse deals. I hope that we will be able to salvage something significant out of the wreckage. However, the decision to go into administration was taken by the board. The Lighthouse had recurrent problems, which had developed for reasons that have been well publicised. To get the best out of the situation, we should have a constructive dialogue with the administrators and allow that to take its course.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** In the spirit of taking the matter forward in a constructive way—that is the certainly the way in



which I want to approach the situation—what steps will the minister take to ensure that the work of the Lighthouse to promote architecture and design in Scotland can be continued?

**Michael Russell:** I welcome that contribution. There are positive steps that we can take. For example, the annual funding of almost £1 million is project focused, and we have no intention of withdrawing from projects if we can get them delivered, essentially for the same resources, by people who are capable of delivering them. An opportunity clearly exists for the Lighthouse to be involved in that.

I should stress that, while the administrators are working, the priority must be for them to conclude that task, in discussion with creditors and with those who wish to support their work. That is what we are trying to achieve. There is no intention of withdrawing from the principles of the work that is being undertaken. We recognise the importance of having a national centre for architecture.

#### Water Framework Directive

**6. John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency over the implementation of the European Union water framework directive. (S3O-7694)

**The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham):** The Scottish Government is in continuous discussion with SEPA on the implementation of the EU water framework directive and will shortly be invited to approve the first river basin management plans, which are due for publication in December 2009.

**John Scott:** As the minister knows, proposals that are being considered by Scottish Power could lead to up to 40 per cent of the water flow in the River Doon being diverted to the River Dee in Kirkcudbrightshire. Given the ecological damage that such a reduction in flow would cause, and the risk of increased bathing water pollution in the Ayr bay, will she undertake to monitor the situation closely to ensure that the River Doon will not be plundered in the way that is presently being threatened?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** I am well aware of the controversy that has emerged in respect of the River Doon. SEPA and Scottish Power have been in discussions for about two years about possible changes to the Galloway hydro scheme. One of the possible changes—the most extreme one—has generated an enormous amount of controversy, and I am aware of the widespread opposition. However, no formal proposals have yet been submitted by Scottish Power. They are expected to be submitted in December 2009, at which time SEPA will begin the formal consultation

process. All parties will have the opportunity to make representations to SEPA and, ultimately, to the Scottish ministers. Because of that, I must be a little careful what I say about the matter here.

#### Firearms

**7. Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it is making with regard to devolving powers over firearms to the Scottish Parliament. (S3O-7707)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** The Home Office continues to reject our calls to devolve responsibility for firearms legislation to the Scottish Parliament. The Calman commission recommended that legislation for air weapons be devolved, and we acted quickly to lay orders in Parliament before the summer recess—but there is still no sign of progress from the Home Office. Indeed, I invited the Home Secretary to visit Edinburgh this summer to discuss this and other issues, but the offer was not taken up.

**Angela Constance:** In my constituency air-guns cause havoc and harm. The cabinet secretary may be interested to know that F division of Lothian and Borders police reports that there were 40 incidents in West Lothian over the past year. In the light of his answer, how does he intend to persuade the Home Secretary to reconsider his position, and what would he do if he was successful in securing the devolution of air-gun regulations to Scotland?

**Kenny MacAskill:** I have made it quite clear that we are ready to act immediately. There is something quite bizarre in the fact that, although I can make a decision regarding the release of Mr al-Megrahi, this Parliament cannot make a decision to tackle the safety of our communities by tackling the air weapons that are in them.

**The Presiding Officer:** Before we move to the next item of business, members will want to join me in welcoming to the gallery Charlie Parker MLA, the Speaker of the Nova Scotia Legislature, and his delegation. [*Applause.*]

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** I have received an unusually large number of significant constituency question requests from back benchers. I ask all members, in particular front benchers, to keep questions and answers as brief as they can do, so that I can accommodate as many of those requests as possible.

### Engagements

**1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-1855)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** Later today I have engagements to carry forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

**Iain Gray:** Nine hundred Diageo workers—and their families—in Kilmarnock and Glasgow are coming to terms with Diageo's decision to pay them off. Our thoughts are with them. The campaign against the closure involved all parties: trade unions, councils and the communities that are affected. I acknowledge that Mr Swinney harnessed that, to try to create a plan that would change the company's mind. I deeply regret that he was unable to do so.

This morning I read widespread criticism of the First Minister for megaphone diplomacy, for grandstanding and for choosing a television appearance over a meeting with Diageo's chief executive. Was the First Minister part of the problem and not the solution?

**The First Minister:** I start by welcoming Iain Gray's agreement, because I was surprised by his comments yesterday, from which I took a criticism of Mr Swinney. I am glad that Iain Gray seems to have thought better of that.

The argument about megaphone diplomacy concerns my attendance and speech at the anti-closure rally in Kilmarnock in July. I am proud of my attendance at that rally. I am proud of the workers, the council, the unions and all parties who attended the rally. I am proud that Annabel Goldie attended the rally. I know that Iain Gray was not there, but his party was well represented. I thought that it was a formidable and inspiring demonstration by people who were anxious to defend their right to work and their communities in Scotland. Not only will I never apologise for standing shoulder to shoulder with a workforce in its time of extremity but I am proud of a country and a community that care enough about their company and their product to rally in defence of jobs in Scotland.

**Iain Gray:** I agree that the campaign was not lost at the rally. It was lost in the negotiations. The choice to go to a TV studio rather than to a meeting with Paul Walsh must surely have compromised those negotiations.

However, let us look forward. What does the First Minister plan to do now to ensure that those men and women have the opportunity to use their skills and experience in new jobs? What will he do to ensure that Diageo contributes to mitigating the damage that it is doing to communities that have served it for 200 years?

**The First Minister:** I attended many meetings with Diageo senior management, including with Mr Walsh, and there were many discussions.

The proposals that were put to Diageo were cogent and serious and were supported by all parties in the task force. They tried to reconcile Diageo's financial objectives of reducing costs and maximising profits with the social objectives of protecting communities at Port Dundas and Kilmarnock. To date the task force has not been successful. I regret that as much as Iain Gray does, but I commend everyone in the task force who made efforts to try to change Diageo's mind.

As part of the proposals that we put to Diageo, there was an offer from the council and Scottish Enterprise and from the Scottish Government on the necessary help that would be given to the areas if Diageo had to transfer its factories from Port Dundas and Kilmarnock. That will certainly be part of the Scottish Government's thinking on the matter. The unions are in negotiation today with Diageo: the 90-day consultation period has not come to an end. I assure Iain Gray that neither this Government and its agencies—nor, I think, either Glasgow City Council or East Ayrshire Council—will be found wanting in mobilising to help the communities and workforces in Kilmarnock and Port Dundas.

**Iain Gray:** I sincerely hope that the Scottish Government will not be found wanting in trying to mitigate the effect of this disastrous decision, but we must ask whether that will be the First Minister's priority. This week, a leaked minute showed Scotland's most senior civil servants totally geared to

"meeting the First Minister's aspirations".

Are those aspirations to defend and create jobs? No. They are creating "conflict and confrontation" with the United Kingdom Government; "expanding" the national conversation to 14 work streams, each headed up by a director; and making

"maximum use of speeches, announcements, summer tours, comms messages and stakeholder engagements"

to promote the national conversation. That is not serving Scotland; it is using Scotland.

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Ask a question.

**Iain Gray:** Here is a simple question. Will the First Minister stop that nonsense now and concentrate on saving jobs and getting our economy growing again?

**The First Minister:** Is it not interesting how quickly and easily Iain Gray's questions move from the serious subject of Diageo to politicking? I thought that his first two questions meant that we were going to get a serious inquisition of the measures that need to be taken.

I will answer first the question that Iain Gray should have asked about Diageo's contribution. I believe it to be fundamental—[*Interruption.*] The issue is important for communities in Port Dundas and Kilmarnock; perhaps Labour members might choose to remember that. Diageo as a company has been focused on what it can save in terms of costs and what it can maximise in terms of profits. I believe that until lately there has been little or no focus on the social consequences of its economic decision making. Part of the remedial action that must be taken by the task force, Government and the public agencies is to focus the company's mind on the fact that it cannot just walk away from communities and that there is a social cost, which is estimated in Kilmarnock alone to be £14 million a year, although the personal impact is much greater for many families. The Parliament should unite in insisting that companies remember their social obligations as well as pursuing the bottom line in profits. That is a reasonable position.

This Government's primary objective is to increase sustainable growth in Scotland. We believe that constitutional change and economic and financial powers are imperative to be able to do that. Iain Gray is happy to remain a Westminster lapdog on the apron strings of a financial settlement. This Parliament and this Government will have to tackle not only the decision making of private companies but the impact of a public sector recession in Scotland, provoked by the spending policies of the Westminster Government. That is why the desire and necessity for constitutional change embraces not only the Scottish National Party and its Government but is the consensus of a large number of people across Scotland.

**Iain Gray:** My question is exactly about how important jobs and the economy are right now, and not only at Diageo in Kilmarnock. A hundred jobs have gone at Alexander Dennis in Falkirk; 350 have gone at Carillion in Tannochside; 300 have gone at T-Mobile in Larbert; 300 have gone at JVC in East Kilbride; 700 have gone at Hewlett-Packard in Erskine; and, of course, 500 jobs are at risk at Bausch and Lomb in Livingston. That has all happened since April, since the civil servants

have been spending their time talking about the national conversation.

**The Presiding Officer:** Briefly, please.

**Iain Gray:** All those workers require all our attention and they need their Government's full attention, too. They do not need—on taxpayers' time and money—a campaign for separation that no one wants.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question, please.

**Iain Gray:** Will the First Minister make his rigged referendum bill redundant now, close down his national conversation and get on with his real job? Then we can all unite behind that effort.

**The Presiding Officer:** I repeat my call for brevity.

**The First Minister:** I am inspired by that call for unity after the most jumbled question I have ever heard in this Parliament.

Let us talk about the job losses in Scotland. Iain Gray must accept that some responsibility for the recession that we are going through lies with the United Kingdom Government. I could go through the interventions that the Scottish Government has made in Rosyth, in Cumbernauld, in Campbeltown and, most recently, in Glasgow to sustain and enhance employment in Scotland. Those interventions have been very significant indeed, but they have been made against the background of the greatest recession in living memory. At some point, Iain Gray might accept some responsibility for what his political party has done to the state of the UK economy.

As far as the civil service is concerned, is Iain Gray actually suggesting that we should have a civil service in Scotland that does not pay attention to the Government's policies? Is he actually suggesting that the civil service should be trying to impede or obstruct or not follow the Government's policies? The essence of a democracy is that once a Government is elected, the civil service attempts to implement and give advice on the policies of that Government. If Iain Gray ever gets into government, that will be the situation.

Finally, I noticed the interview in *The Scotsman* on Monday, which had the headline, "Scots still don't know who I am, admits Gray". Has he ever wondered whether the problem might be that Scots know who he is, not that they do not know who he is?

## **Prime Minister (Meetings)**

**2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S3F-1851)

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

**Annabel Goldie:** The First Minister should be aware that every 90 seconds, a pupil is excluded from Scotland's schools and that, according to the Government's own figures, 85 per cent of excluded pupils are sent home with nothing to do. That is a disgrace and an inexcusable waste of resource.

On 17 March 2005, when the SNP was in opposition and was demanding everything left, right and centre, Fiona Hyslop, the current Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, said:

"If we regard indiscipline as a serious issue, it is important that regular statistics be produced so that there can be accountability. The production of statistics every three years is not good enough."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 2005; c 15444.]

Hear, hear! The Conservatives agree and so do 84 per cent of Scots, who in a recent poll said that they wanted the figures to be published every year. Will the First Minister support his education secretary and publish those figures annually, or—to quote Ms Hyslop again—

"What does the First Minister have to hide?"—[*Official Report*, 20 January 2005; c 13733.]

**The First Minister:** I agree with Annabel Goldie that disruption in school is an extremely serious issue and that the number of exclusions in Scotland is far too high. However, she must know that the number of exclusions is published annually. The most recent figures show that it fell by 11 per cent in 2007-08. She will also be interested to know that the wider survey on discipline in schools will be published shortly. It is therefore not the case that we do not have a handle on what is happening as regards the important issue of dealing with disruptive pupils in Scotland.

I was very interested in a Conservative party proposal that I saw ventilated in the papers earlier this week. It may well be that more initiatives are required, but Annabel Goldie should accept that a range of initiatives are under way to deal with that serious problem in Scottish education, and although the number of exclusions is far too high, she should acknowledge that 11 per cent fall in 2007-08.

**Annabel Goldie:** What the First Minister has failed to make clear is that the Government does not publish statistics on incidents in classrooms, and that is what is worrying teachers, parents and well-conducted pupils throughout our schools. We need to take persistently disruptive pupils out of mainstream education and place them in second-chance centres. That is what the Scottish Conservatives would do. The Scottish National

Party Government says that such facilities already exist. Will the First Minister therefore publish figures to show whether those facilities are working, or is that something else that he wants to hide?

The First Minister has recently been found wanting on the international and domestic stages. It is sad that his hapless education team has clearly been found wanting as well. There is no mention of discipline in the SNP's programme for government. Why not?

**The First Minister:** I thought that Annabel Goldie was doing rather well on a serious subject until she wandered over her general criticisms of the Government. I take it from her condemnation of the Government's behaviour that she will not vote SNP at the next election.

Let us get back to the serious issue under consideration. I will see whether I can help Annabel Goldie with the statistics. There are 193 local authority special schools in Scotland, 19 of which are specifically for pupils with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Some 206 services are networked by the Scottish Government's pupil inclusion network to provide support for pupils who are excluded or are at risk of exclusion from schools. In addition, in the colleges there is a £30 million package of partnership activity that offers flexible learning packages to keep pupils positively engaged.

A range of initiatives is under way in Scottish education. It would be too easy to say that the 11 per cent reduction in exclusions in 2007-08 is to do with that range of initiatives, but in pursuing another initiative, as she did earlier this week, Annabel Goldie should not forget or diminish in any way the body of work that is going on to tackle such a serious problem in Scottish education.

### 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-1859)

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

**Tavish Scott:** There was a warning this morning that the United Kingdom may face a double-dip recession. That means that Scotland faces further serious job losses. Unemployment in Scotland is already rising faster than it is in the rest of the country. Diageo is a catastrophic hit on the people of Kilmarnock and Port Dundas, and the Government will have to pick up the pieces. What are the First Minister's tactics for dealing with future job losses? Does he think that the vital part of the Government's approach is to be consistent

for local people, their communities and employees who face the loss of their livelihood?

**The First Minister:** The Government is pursuing a range of initiatives.

I thank Tavish Scott for the constructive comments on the Diageo task force that he made yesterday. He recognised that it was a cross-party, cross-agency workforce in which everybody worked as hard as they possibly could to try to find an alternative to the Diageo proposals.

I defend Government intervention for the public purpose. Tavish Scott recognises, as I do, the difficulties that arise from the recession: rising unemployment and job losses. I believe that there will be more disappointments to come, but in recent times there have been a number of substantial successes in Scotland, perhaps against expectations. The Rosyth ferry is back working against many people's expectations, and 800 jobs were saved in Cumbernauld against many people's expectations. The Campbeltown tower facility for offshore and onshore wind has every prospect of increasing employment. Tavish Scott will have noticed the recent £5 million investment—I describe it as an investment and regional selective assistance—to ensure 800 new financial sector jobs in the city of Glasgow in Tesco Personal Finance. All those initiatives are supported by the public purpose. I will defend absolutely Government intervention to increase jobs and employment in Scotland.

**Tavish Scott:** I would, too, and I agree with those points, but does the First Minister recognise the importance of explaining the quantum leap in the offer to Diageo compared to what has been offered in other parts of Scotland? As he said, for Diageo he led a protest march, there has been a Government task force and a significant financial offer was made. Banking jobs have gone in Edinburgh, Fife and further afield. What have the Government's tactics and approach been to them? In Hawick, Lochcarron of Scotland, Pringle and Hawick Knitwear have shed jobs—1,000 jobs have been shed across the Borders in the past year. A ministerial visit was made, but there was no task force or Government money. In the First Minister's area, what was his approach to the grievous loss of the Inverurie paper mill? Companies, workers and their communities need to know what to expect from the Government. Is the First Minister offering every company Government money to keep jobs here? How will he be fair to all workers in different parts of the country who face the sack in this difficult recession?

**The First Minister:** Let us identify the offer to Diageo. In addition to the BDO Stoy Hayward report that was commissioned by Scottish Enterprise to close the financial gap that it identified in its proposal—a gap of £6 million a

year, which Diageo accepted as an estimate—there were three things on offer. The first was a change in working practices, which was agreed by the Scottish Manufacturing Advisory Service and supported by the trade unions. The second was an offer, led by East Ayrshire Council, regarding the remedial costs of the Hill Street site in Kilmarnock—particularly the proposal of perhaps putting the new Kilmarnock college on that site and helping with the remedial costs. The third was the identification by Scottish Enterprise of a suitable serviced greenfield site on the outskirts of Kilmarnock. Those are the sort of initiatives that are being offered to a range of companies that face closure.

I have already listed for Tavish Scott a range of examples of public interventions that have been substantially successful in saving jobs throughout Scotland. We must, however, acknowledge that although we make the effort in every significant case in the country, sometimes—many times, perhaps—despite the efforts of the Government and others, an initiative will not be successful. I would rather be in a Government and leading a country that made the effort to save jobs and employment than leading one that said, "There's nothing we can do" and fatalistically accepted the consequences. In every redundancy situation, the Government will do its level best to protect growth, jobs and livelihoods across the nation.

**The Presiding Officer:** I am disappointed that, despite my gentle plea for brevity, First Minister's question time has so far taken 22 minutes—longer than ever before. I am, therefore, going to instigate discussions with all relevant parties to see how I can best protect the ability of back benchers to have an input to the questions. I am now unable to invite any supplementary questions from some important back benchers.

### Scottish Government Budget

**4. Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what reduction is expected in the Scottish Government's budget as a result of the United Kingdom Government's budget plans. (S3F-1866)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** The UK budget included a reduction of £496 million in our spending plans for 2010-11. Based on the analysis of that budget, every credible forecaster is now predicting substantial reductions in available public spending over the medium term. In Scotland, a report by the centre for public policy for regions, which was published last month, suggested that, very soon, public spending in Scotland will be substantially below—over the medium term, in real terms, up to 11 per cent below—what we have expected over the past few years. We will shortly publish, in our draft Scottish budget for 2010-11,

proposals that, despite the chancellor's cuts, seek to protect the programmes that matter most to and are the priorities of the people of Scotland.

**Joe FitzPatrick:** Does the First Minister agree that it is deeply disingenuous of Labour MSPs continuously to demand extra spending in a range of areas while the Labour chancellor in London is making it clear that he will cut budgets further? Peter Mandelson has admitted that UK Governments will be cutting budgets for the next 10 years. Has the Scottish Government been given any indication of future budget cuts for Scotland? Will the First Minister join me in urging all parties to accept that budget cuts are coming from Westminster and to support the Scottish Government in its work to protect services?

**The First Minister:** Understandably, perhaps, with an election in the offing, both the Westminster Government and the Conservative Opposition have been coy about their spending plans over the medium term. That is why the best advice that we have is provided by key forecasters such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies and, in Scotland, the centre for public policy for regions. I said a few seconds ago that the CPPR has forecast a reduction in public spending of 11 per cent. That is the top of the range that it has forecast; its median forecast is that the Scottish budget figure could be 8.5 per cent lower—that is, £2.5 billion lower in real terms—than it was in 2009-10 by the year 2013-14. That is an extraordinarily serious position.

I see some looks of disquiet among Labour members. Let us remember that that forecast was produced by a former Labour Party economist, John McLaren. Whether John McLaren is right or other forecasters are right, what the Westminster Government and the Opposition in the Scottish Parliament are doing is being virtually silent on the medium-term implications of budget cuts in Scotland. This Government and this Parliament should not be silent; they should broadcast that message to the Scottish people so that informed choices can be made on the future constitutional direction of this country.

**Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** It would be nice if we could focus on the facts and not on the fictional forecasts. As an economist, the First Minister should know that most long-term forecasts prove to be incredibly ill placed.

Let us do what we should do in this chamber and look at the budgets that we have before us. Does the First Minister agree with his director general of finance and corporate services that the Scottish budget for 2010-11 is increasing in real terms by 1.3 per cent? Those are her words, not mine. Does the First Minister agree that the Scottish economy benefited from the more than £50 billion of United Kingdom Government

intervention to save our banks and address economic issues in Scotland? Most important, does the First Minister agree with his civil servants' worrying plans for a 5 per cent cut in the budget of every Government department? That is what is being planned here and now by the First Minister.

**The First Minister:** The last time that I looked at the equity investment by the UK Government in the financial sector, I thought that it was recording a profit on the original investment. Perhaps Andy Kerr has different information.

Just a few months ago, Andy Kerr was trying to deny that there was a £500 million reduction in the Scottish budget over the previous figures. I see that he is indicating that he is still denying it. In that case, I am sure that, when Mr Swinney shortly announces the full budget implications for 2010-11, even Andy Kerr will have to face the reality of a Labour budget cut of £500 million. Perhaps he will use the legendary iron discipline that he holds over his back benchers to remind them of that fact every time one of them gets up and asks for more public spending on every issue under the sun. Remember the £500 million cut coming from Westminster.

#### **Floods (Government Assistance)**

**5. Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what plans the Scottish Government has put in place to assist local authorities dealing with flooding incidents such as those experienced last week. (S3F-1854)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** Last Friday, many communities, mainly in Grampian and Tayside, woke up to some of the worst flooding in the area for many years—in some cases, for 80 years to a century. The disruption that was caused by such flooding—both in north-east Scotland and more recently in Argyll—is, of course, considerable and our immediate focus is on those most affected.

Council and emergency services personnel in the affected areas have been working flat out to protect communities, and I know that the chamber will join me acknowledging their efforts.

On Monday, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment visited the affected areas in Moray and, on 4 September, the Minister for Environment held a conference of agencies involved in the strategic co-ordinating group. River levels peaked in north-east Scotland on Friday afternoon and dropped further over the weekend.

Yesterday, the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change visited the site of the landslide at the Rest and Be Thankful on the A83. Extraordinary efforts have been made to shift thousands of tonnes of debris from the A83, and I

am delighted to say that, following a site assessment, the safety of the road has been assured and it has been cleared for reopening at 3 pm today.

**Sarah Boyack:** I welcome the excellent efforts that have been made by our rescue services to deal with the immediate aftermath of the dreadful flooding problems that we had last week.

Residents in those areas worry about the need for effective long-term flood defences. Will the First Minister agree to re-examine the issue of investment in flood schemes? When I warned that schemes would be hit when the national contribution of 80 per cent for schemes was removed, SNP ministers accused me of scaremongering. However, Edinburgh is now £22 million short, and Moray Council, whose residents were badly hit last week, is now £27 million short.

This Parliament fixed the process of flood scheme approvals, and it is now 10 years since Edinburgh experienced devastating flooding. The council has the tender bids in, but it will have to go back to the drawing board. The process will cost more, it will take longer and it will give people years more worry. Will the First Minister act to fix the funding shortfall to enable the desperately needed schemes in those areas, and in others, to go ahead?

**The First Minister:** As Sarah Boyack knows, the funding for flooding was put into the record local government settlement, rising as a percentage of total expenditure in Scotland. She moved quickly over the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 that was passed earlier this year. That act is, of course, designed to help prevent the delays that have beset many of the remedial flooding schemes across Scotland, including those in Moray. I would have thought that that act illustrates action by the Parliament and certainly by the Government.

It is unwise to banter about politics on this issue. I have seen a number of quotations from Moray Council, and I will take one—it is not from a Scottish National Party councillor, but from a Conservative councillor, Allan Wright, who said:

“People are quite justified in thinking, you know, why can’t the council just say, we’re going to do this and get ahead and do it. Well, I am afraid that the Scottish Executive as it was then three years ago, did not allow that.”

He was talking about the council’s inability, because of the legislative situation, to proceed quickly with that particular measure. That is exactly why we introduced—and the Parliament passed—the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009, which will help the situation in the future.

**The Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, but for the first time in my role as Presiding Officer we are unable to get to question 6. That concludes questions to the First Minister.

12:31

*Meeting suspended until 14:15.*

14:15

*On resuming—*

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Finance and Sustainable Growth

##### Tourism (North-east Scotland)

**1. Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to support tourism in the north-east. (S3O-7708)

**The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather):** As with all areas of Scotland, the north-east is marketed by VisitScotland based on its considerable strengths and its ability to deliver what visitors are looking for on their visit. VisitScotland uses a range of channels, including websites, direct mail and public relations activity, to reach potential visitors across Scotland, the United Kingdom and international markets. The driving purpose is to capitalise on the north-east's many strengths, which include modern, thriving cities, a dramatic coastline, the famous malt whisky and castle trails, and fantastic opportunities for skiing and mountain biking.

**Nigel Don:** As the minister will be aware, recent figures show that Scottish hotels have enjoyed a 5 per cent increase in occupancy over the summer, although Aberdeen suffered a 5 per cent decrease. Surprisingly, that largely correlates with the oil price—the Aberdeen hospitality industry relies heavily on the offshore sector. Events such as Offshore Europe, which is currently taking place in Aberdeen, can provide much-needed boosts, with about 40,000 visitors this week. What steps will the Scottish Government take to work with the business and tourism sectors in Aberdeen to compete successfully at this challenging time?

**Jim Mather:** We will do so very much by direct engagement. We ran an event in the summer at the Treetops hotel, which brought together a wide spectrum of interests in Aberdeen. I had what I thought was a very positive session, with lots of outcomes, and I am more than willing to share that with the member. Just yesterday, with Offshore Europe under way, we convened the oil and gas advisory board—essentially, the board establishes the huge, bullish future that oil and gas have. The delegates at the event this week, the movement in the oil price and the energy that the Government is putting into the sector augur well for the future of Aberdeen, its tourism and its wider economy.

##### **Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):**

The minister will know that the Secretary of State for Scotland, too, was in Aberdeen yesterday. He said that he would throw his weight behind the city's bid to be UK city of culture in 2013. Will the Scottish Government match that commitment and also support Aberdeen's bid?

**Jim Mather:** I can guarantee that I will talk very positively to my colleague Mr Russell on the matter, and I will maintain my connection with the north-east. Yesterday, as I have told the member offline, we held the first oil and gas advisory board, and it will continue its work at a considerable pace to ensure that we get the necessary momentum to deliver yet more funds, which will make Aberdeen yet more of a cultural centre.

##### **Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):**

This is on a different north-east matter. The minister will be aware of the recent mothballing by the National Trust for Scotland of Leith hall in Aberdeenshire. What plans does the Scottish Government have to support the promotion and marketing of historic properties such as Leith hall in an effort to attract more tourists to the area?

**Jim Mather:** The member raises an important point. Engagement and discussion with the National Trust are continuing, to ensure that the trust and its properties play a fulsome part. She will be interested to know that I am hosting a visit from a Mr and Mrs McCoss this evening—they have been forthcoming in putting some money into Arduaine garden in my constituency. The more we widen the spectrum, the better. The interesting thing about the rejuvenation of Arduaine garden has been the active interest that local tourism businesses have taken. As I say, it is about widening the spectrum, with people keen to be involved and to develop assets in a more fulsome way that brings proper benefit to the local community.

#### Forth Replacement Crossing

**2. Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to ensure a fair deal for members of the public seeking compensation payments for the impacts of the proposed Forth replacement crossing. (S3O-7786)

##### **The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson):**

Provisions will be included in a forthcoming bill, which will set out proposals for compensation that arises from the construction and operation of the Forth replacement crossing. They will follow the provisions that have already been approved in legislation for other public works.

**Margaret Smith:** The minister will accept that it is a complex matter and that it is causing concern



among constituents, particularly those who have received letters this week so that properties can be added to the book of reference.

I bring to the minister's attention the following issues: delays in the land manager getting back to residents; compensation information going only to certain residents; concern about the level of professional fees, which are covered by an out-of-date scale; home-loss payments that are less than equivalent payments in England; people's inability to secure lawyers who have relevant experience, because such lawyers are already in conflict-of-interest situations; concern that general advice is not covered; and professionals' unwillingness to act for people until the bill is introduced.

Will the minister meet me and other local representatives to discuss those matters and other concerns that have been raised by affected residents? Will he guarantee that all affected local residents, and not just the people who have registered with Transport Scotland, will be sent a copy of Transport Scotland's guidance on compensation?

**Stewart Stevenson:** The member raised a wide range of issues. It might be helpful if I say that I am able and happy to make myself available to meet her and representatives from her constituency—that can be arranged in the usual way, through my private office.

It is worth saying that the Forth replacement crossing is a complex project and that Transport Scotland and managers who are involved in the project have made substantial efforts. I think that newsletters have been sent right round many local communities. If there are ways in which we can improve our interaction with the community, I am very happy to assist the member and her constituents.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** I press the minister for more detail. Can he quantify the number of residents who it is anticipated will be directly affected by the Forth replacement crossing scheme and will potentially have grounds for seeking compensation from the Government as a consequence of the scheme's impact? How much has been set aside in financial contingency for home-loss payments? How much would need to be set aside if home-loss payments were to be paid at the level at which they are paid south of the border?

**Stewart Stevenson:** The member will recall that we have discussed home-loss payments in the Parliament. We do not have plans to revise the numbers. To raise payments to the levels that apply in England would require us to take substantial moneys out of the social housing budget—that is one reason why we will not do so.

Until the introduction of the Forth replacement crossing bill, we will continue to refine the design, so at this stage it would be inappropriate to speak of a specific number of residents. As we go forward with the design we are seeking to minimise the number of people who will be affected and, as I said to Mrs Smith, we will seek to communicate with a wide range of people, the majority of whom will not be directly affected.

**Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con):** The minister's answer to Margaret Smith was helpful in general terms. On a specific issue, the compensation document has thus far been sent only to people who are on the Transport Scotland database. Given the document's complexity, will the minister give a commitment that it should go directly to every potentially affected household?

**Stewart Stevenson:** I will consider the suggestion, although in saying that I exercise caution, because the document is complex, as Mr Brown correctly said, and to send it to every resident of South Queensferry, for example, not only would be unnecessary in the context of administration but, more fundamentally, might alarm many people for whom the document will not have much relevance. However, I will discuss the subject further with my officials.

### Fife Council Budget 2010-11

**3. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with Fife Council about its budget for 2010-11. (S3O-7742)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** Discussions relating to local government budgets for 2010-11 are being conducted through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

**Helen Eadie:** Will the cabinet secretary give policy guidance to Fife Council, and to local authorities throughout Scotland through COSLA, that it is unacceptable for local authorities to impose on disabled people increases of more than £300 per month for care charges, such as has happened to my constituent from the Pringle family in Dalgety Bay and hundreds of other people in Fife, and that it is unacceptable to close old people's residential homes such as Hanover court in Cowdenbeath?

**John Swinney:** Obviously, decisions on how budgets are allocated at local level are by statute properly the responsibility of each local authority. Local authorities are required by statute to bear in mind a range of factors in setting their budgets, so I am sure that Fife Council will do that in all circumstances. Clearly, the Government's priority, which we share with our local authority partners through COSLA, is to ensure that we protect front-

line services and do all that we can to support economic recovery in Scotland. Those will be the themes of the budget settlement for 2010-11.

**Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary agree that it really is distasteful that Mrs Eadie continues to raise the problems of individual constituents in the chamber? Is he aware that Saga, which is an organisation for elderly people, recently voted Fife Council as the best council in the whole of the United Kingdom for the services to old people? Does he agree that Mrs Eadie's efforts would be much better employed if she were to have a word with her fellow MP for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath—Mr Gordon Brown, with whom she shares a constituency—to do something about the £500 million cuts that are coming our way? Would not that be a far more effective way of protecting her constituents and mine from cuts in services?

**John Swinney:** I advise Tricia Marwick that, despite obvious requirements, I am not yet reading *Saga Magazine*. However, I observe with interest the accolade that has been awarded to Fife Council.

On what points Mrs Eadie chooses to raise, it is of course entirely a matter for each member to decide which issues they raise in the chamber.

On Tricia Marwick's final point about the financial settlement, it is clear that the Government will have at its disposal £500 million less than was budgeted for under the spending review. That will place a great deal of pressure on public services provision in Scotland.

**Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD):** I do not quite recognise the scenario that Mrs Eadie presented. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the joint administration on Fife Council has been at great pains to ensure that those who may face additional charges for their care can access funding from the public purse to help to make up for the increase?

**John Swinney:** Yes, I accept the point that Mr Tolson makes. I know that Fife Council's approach to charging for care services is not dissimilar to that of other authorities of all political persuasions—if I may put the point so diplomatically—throughout the country. Clearly, the council needs to take into account the effect of its decisions. Obviously, if the council's older people's care services are receiving the accolades to which Tricia Marwick referred, the approach that the Fife Council administration has taken is to be positively welcomed.

#### Renewables Industry (Meetings)

**4. Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive when ministers last

met representatives of the renewables industry and what issues were discussed. (S3O-7754)

**The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather):** Ministers and officials meet representatives of Scotland's renewables industry on an on-going and frequent basis to discuss issues relating to the development of what is a vibrant sector. For example, last week I met representatives of both the Buccleuch group and Northern Energy Developments Ltd to discuss the development of bioenergy projects across Scotland. At the strategic level, our engagement includes the forum for renewable energy development in Scotland—FREDS—which I co-chair and which has met three times so far this year. The renewables sector is also well represented on the Scottish energy advisory board, which the First Minister chairs.

**Paul Martin:** Like me, the minister no doubt looks forward to the boost in the microrenewables industry that will result from the council tax discount incentive that all parties voted for in the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that the renewables industry is well placed to make the most of that job creation opportunity? Is he confident that training is available to maximise the resulting employment opportunities?

**Jim Mather:** The member highlights an important aspect. The answer is that, yes, we are in a very positive position due to the work of FREDS and because of what we have done to consolidate the position: the passing of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill; the consultation on low-carbon vehicles; the Government's 10 specific energy pledges, which will help to support the point that the member asked about; the consultation on the energy efficiency action plan, which has huge implications for the economy; the renewable heat action plan; the carbon capture and storage study; and the renewables action plan. All of those converge on the Government's key priority of increased sustainable growth.

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Will the minister say what the Government is doing to encourage very small-scale hydroelectric schemes, which, given the barbecue summer that we have just had, must now be a much more attractive option for many very small landowners?

**Jim Mather:** A stream of work specifically on hydro is being done within FREDS. In addition, we are looking to ensure that we back up the work that was carried out last year by Nick Forrest, who identified some 657MW of potential run-of-the-river hydro schemes, which would have minimal environmental implications.

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Question 5 has been withdrawn.

## Diageo

**6. Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers the proposals by Diageo for its operations in Kilmarnock and Glasgow to be consistent with the principles of sustainable economic growth. (S3O-7777)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** This Government has set as its central purpose increasing sustainable economic growth and providing opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish. We have set targets for achieving those ambitions. Diageo's decision will have a significant impact on communities around Kilmarnock and Port Dundas, and its rejection of the task force's alternative plan to support the retention of jobs in those communities is deeply disappointing.

**Ross Finnie:** The World Commission on Environment and Development's report, "Our Common Future", published in 1987, which is better known as the Brundtland report, gave us the most commonly accepted definition of sustainable development. It described it as

"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Yesterday, David Gosnell, a managing director at Diageo, said that the Scottish Government's initiative failed to grasp "basic economics". Does the cabinet secretary think that Mr Gosnell understands that basic economics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must embrace the principles of sustainable development?

**John Swinney:** I agree with Mr Finnie. As he knows—I think that I said so at the time—I very much welcomed the sentiments that Mr Finnie expressed in the debate on the issue that my colleague Willie Coffey initiated. He gave expression to the thinking that I think should have gone into the decision-making process at Diageo.

When it comes to basic economics, which I am sure that Mr Finnie would concede on an all-party basis I have some ability to navigate from time to time, we face two basic issues. First, several hundred families in the Kilmarnock area have had their livelihoods turned upside down and there is no certainty about how that damage will be repaired. As a direct consequence of Diageo's decision, the public purse will probably end up carrying a cost of about £14 million a year.

The second issue of basic economics that we face is that the final analysis of the alternative business plan that the task force put forward is that the funding gap was in the order of £3 million to £4 million, which, when put against Diageo's profits of £2,000 million, does not seem to me to be a bridge that could not have been crossed

through co-operation between the company and the Government.

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** In Diageo's "Corporate Citizenship Report 2008", Paul Walsh says:

"The most powerful way for a business to do good is to do good business."

Given that Diageo appears to interpret good business as anything that is in the interests of its shareholders, regardless of its social impact, does the cabinet secretary agree that that interpretation of doing good is far from sustainable and makes a mockery of the concept of corporate citizenship?

**John Swinney:** Linda Fabiani raises an important point. Given that we are wrestling with a range of extremely difficult pieces of economic news as a consequence of the global economic recession, when major organisations take decisions such as the one that Diageo has taken—which I read as about the long-term search for profitability rather than the impact of the recession—they must take meaningful account of their social responsibility. It is important that companies reflect that sentiment not only in their brochures and publications but in their actions into the bargain.

**John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** There is no doubt that there has been a change in the Scottish Government's approach following the Diageo announcement in the summer. Prior to that announcement, it did not take such an active approach when there were to be redundancies in other places. I welcome that more active approach, which John Swinney has spearheaded.

Will John Swinney say that a similar approach will be taken in the future, particularly to Bausch and Lomb but also towards other job losses that there might be? Will he commit specific Scottish Government resources to ensure that companies are approached in the future in the same effective and consistent way?

**John Swinney:** I am afraid that I do not agree with Mr Park that the Government's approach has changed. Perhaps there has been more publicity about and scrutiny of its approach, but Mr Park should consider a range of other announcements, including on the Vestas plant in Campbeltown, which is in Mr Mather's constituency, and on the Goldfish plant in Cumbernauld—the Government secured not only the saving of that plant but an increase in employment. The Government is actively involved wherever there are job losses or the prospect of them.

I would be the first to admit that we will not be able to change outcomes in all circumstances, because companies take decisions for a variety of reasons. I have been completely open with

members about that. However, that is no excuse for not trying to change companies' approaches and plans in order to avoid our having to wrestle with serious social and economic implications, which there are particularly for the town of Kilmarnock.

### Edinburgh Trams

**7. Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth has had with the City of Edinburgh Council in the last 12 months on the subject of the Edinburgh trams project. (S3O-7721)

**The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson):** The cabinet secretary and I have had no discussions with the City of Edinburgh Council on the trams project over the past 12 months.

**Ian McKee:** The tram chiefs have admitted that the project will fail to be completed on time and on budget, as the Scottish National Party Administration predicted. Does the minister agree that not a penny more of Government funding should be given to finance the project?

**Stewart Stevenson:** Members will recall that, early in the Government's life, the Conservative party, the Liberal Democrat party and the Labour Party voted to continue the trams project; we would have liberated the £500 million for other important transport projects throughout Scotland. I have made it clear on many occasions in the past that that is the limit of the Government's support. That was forced on us. We have £500 million available for the project. We have no more, and there will be no more.

**Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** I did not intend to ask a question about the trams project, but I am absolutely gobsmacked by what the minister has just said. Some £500 million of taxpayers' money—for which he is responsible—is tied up in the project. Given the difficulties that the project has had over the past year, and irrespective of the differences of opinion about whether it should have gone ahead, I am gobsmacked that he has not had any discussions on the matter with the council. Would it not have been useful to do so?

**Stewart Stevenson:** The project is entirely a matter for the City of Edinburgh Council. My officials carefully monitor the payments that we make to it, which are related to the progress that is made. They will continue to do that with the professionalism with which I always see them conduct themselves. It is important that members understand that the project is a City of Edinburgh Council project and that it is for the council to complete it.

### Whisky Industry

**8. Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how important it considers the whisky industry is to the economy of Scotland. (S3O-7720)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** The food and drink sector is one of the Scottish Government's key economic sectors. Scotch whisky is one of the United Kingdom's leading export industries and is vital to both the Scottish and wider UK economies. The whisky industry generated exports worth £3 billion in 2008, and the Scottish spirits sector employs 8,700 people.

**Anne McLaughlin:** In the light of the major job losses and cutbacks that have been announced in recent months—as a Glasgow MSP, the Diageo workers at Port Dundas are obviously at the forefront of my mind—is the cabinet secretary confident that the companies that manage the whisky industry have done all that they can to maintain the volume production of Scotch whisky against the production of vodka, gin and other spirits, in which many of those companies also have an interest? The production of those other spirits can more easily be shifted to lower-cost economies.

**John Swinney:** The decisions that companies make about volumes of production are properly a matter for the companies involved. Nevertheless, we want to ensure that wise decisions are being taken about the approach to volumes in order to ensure that the whisky industry in Scotland is able to maintain the strong contribution that it makes to our economy and in recognition of the significant value that is created by the quality that is enshrined in many of the industry's products.

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary share my anger at Diageo's rushed decision to reject the proposal that was developed by the cross-party task force? Does he agree that that shows that Diageo has no soul and no regard for its loyal workforce or its heritage? Will he impress on Diageo that, if it walks out on Kilmarnock, it must make a substantial contribution to the regeneration effort to repair the damage that it will have done to a town that has served it so well?

**John Swinney:** I said publicly yesterday many times that I was deeply disappointed by Diageo's decision to reject the alternative business plan that had been put forward by the task force. I would have liked that plan to be adopted, but the company decided against that. I agree with Mr Coffey, who has put tremendous effort into trying to protect the employment of his constituents, that if Diageo proceeds with the plans that it has announced, the company must make a substantial

contribution to the regeneration of Kilmarnock and assist in the recovery of an economy that will be badly damaged as a consequence of its decision. That will be a central part of what the Government discusses with Diageo in the weeks and months to come.

### **Environmentally Friendly Buses**

**9. Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to promote the use of more environmentally friendly buses. (S3O-7718)

**The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson):** The Scottish Government is keen to incentivise the use of environmentally friendly buses and we are currently considering changes to our bus policy to achieve that.

**Michael Matheson:** The minister will be aware that Scotland's biggest bus manufacturer, Alexander Dennis, is based in my constituency and employs some 1,000 workers. He will also know from my representations to him that Alexander Dennis is a world leader in hybrid bus technology. I welcome the consideration that the Government is giving to a scheme to promote the use of environmentally friendly buses, but can he tell us when he expects such a programme to be implemented? He will agree that such a programme will assist in ensuring that the Government's ambitious carbon reduction targets are met and that valuable employment is secured in my constituency.

**Stewart Stevenson:** The member may be interested to know that, within the past two hours, I have discussed that very subject with the Confederation of Passenger Transport. It forms part of our rebalancing of the bus service operators grant scheme to ensure that it has a more environmental focus. I absolutely respect the member's comments in relation to Alexander Dennis, in which he expressed a view that is widely held across the industry and in society. We are making best progress and hope to have something more material to say on the matter in the not-too-distant future.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question 10 was lodged by Ken Macintosh but he is not in the chamber.

### **Tennent's Brewery**

**11. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive to what extent it considers the Tennent's brewery at Ladywell in Dennistoun contributes to the drinks industry. (S3O-7709)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** The Wellpark brewery produces Tennent's, a nationally recognised brand, as well as a number of other

lines. Tennent's lager is Scotland's leading lager brand by volume. The Wellpark brewery makes a significant contribution to the drinks industry in Scotland.

**Bob Doris:** Tomorrow, along with Anne McLaughlin MSP, I will meet the new owners of Tennent's. At that meeting, I will show a willingness to work with the C&C Group to market both Glasgow and Scotland as core parts of the Tennent's brand in much the same way that C&C used the strength of brand Ireland to market Magners cider successfully. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, in a week in which we have witnessed job losses from Port Dundas, the potential action of the new owners of Tennent's in taking Tennent's lager to the next level by developing the Tennent's brand in such a way could be of huge benefit not only to the company, but to its workforce and to the economies of both Glasgow and Scotland?

**John Swinney:** I spoke with John Dunsmore, the chief executive of the C&C group, on 27 August, which was the day on which the acquisition of Tennent's was announced. I indicated to him that the Government welcomes the investment that has been made in Scotland, and we have opened a constructive dialogue with C&C, which we will certainly continue in the period ahead. We want the company to exercise its full potential in the Scottish market.

### **Voluntary Sector Funding**

**12. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had regarding funding for the voluntary sector. (S3O-7747)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** We have established an effective and on-going dialogue with the third sector over the past two years. That dialogue has supported the emergence of a clear role for the Scottish Government as an investor in the third sector—pump priming the sector's capacity to be an effective partner—and as a funder of the basic infrastructure on which the sector depends.

Decisions on local delivery funding rest with local funders, who have a clear understanding of local need and priority. That clarity—and especially the availability of investment funds—has been warmly welcomed by the sector.

**Rhoda Grant:** The cabinet secretary will be aware of the growing concern in areas such as the Highlands and Islands regarding cuts in funding to the voluntary sector. Although closer working is always welcome, it should not be used to slash by up to 70 per cent funding for councils for voluntary service in areas such as the Highlands and

Islands. Will the minister take this opportunity to reassure CVSs in the Highlands and Islands that they will not face such a funding cut?

**John Swinney:** There is an inherent contradiction in the question that Rhoda Grant asked. On the one hand, she acknowledges the need for closer working, but on the other hand, she attacks the mechanism by which closer working is being encouraged.

In a number of areas in the country, the closer working that the Government is trying to encourage has been taking place extremely effectively. A wide and effective partnership approach has brought that about. I am sure that there can be constructive discussions in the Highlands to take forward that agenda.

The Government has demonstrated over the past two years its absolute commitment to ensuring that we have a thriving third sector in Scotland. We have shown that commitment through the expansion of major funds to support social enterprises through the Scottish investment fund, and we have given funding certainty to CVSs, voluntary centres and other elements of the voluntary sector in Scotland. I think that that provides welcome stability for the sector. It is important that we ensure that the sector is able to meet the challenges and work effectively with public sector partners to maximise its role in public service provision. That is the focus of the Government's agenda.

**Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** What can be done about continuation funding for services such as those provided by TYKES and the Crossroads care scheme in east Sutherland when an agreed package—whether from the lottery or elsewhere—comes to a time-limited end? Both those organisations receive non-Government funding, but that funding will run out at some point. What audit does the Scottish Government do to pick up such organisations in a constructive way when that cut-off date comes?

**John Swinney:** Mr Stone raises a challenge for the third sector that is important, although not new. Many organisations have time-limited funding streams and, in a number of regrettable cases, when that funding comes to an end, the project comes to an end as well.

The approach that the Government is taking, which involves enabling the sector to be more sustainable after a period of pump priming, is designed to ensure that many of those projects can continue, perhaps in a social enterprise model. That is the thinking behind the establishment of various arrangements that are designed to expand the size of the social economy in Scotland. I think that there is a significant role

for ventures such as those raised by Mr Stone to contribute to that process.

### **Economic Development (North Ayrshire)**

**13. Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to assist economic development in North Ayrshire. (S3O-7765)

**The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather):** The Scottish Government remains focused on delivering our core purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth across Scotland, including in North Ayrshire.

Through the Government economic strategy and our economic recovery plan, we are using all the levers at our disposal to lead Scotland out of the downturn and position our economy to take maximum advantage of the recovery. That includes the acceleration of £293 million in capital expenditure into 2009-10, on top of £54 million in 2008-09. Overall, our economic recovery plan is supporting 15,000 jobs across Scotland.

In addition, we have engaged directly in Ayrshire on a number of occasions.

**Irene Oldfather:** I thank the minister for his answer, but given the developments at Diageo during the past 24 hours and the fact that my constituency of Cunninghame South already has one of the highest unemployment levels in Scotland, what action will the Government now take to create further employment opportunities in North Ayrshire? Will the Scottish Executive consider kick-starting economic development with some much-needed transport infrastructure projects? Will the minister consider the possibility of relocating civil service jobs? Will he consider restoring the previous Scottish Executive's route development fund to send a clear message to the people whom I represent that the Scottish Executive supports and has confidence in the local area? That support, as the minister will know, is crucial to business.

**Jim Mather:** I can promise the member that we will build on the cohesion that has been created through the Diageo campaign and during the summer, when we had people from South Ayrshire, North Ayrshire and East Ayrshire in the room together. We will work openly with her on the issues—I welcome the fact that she has made herself available for regular updates with Scottish Enterprise west region. In the spirit of openness and cohesion, we look forward to doing everything that we possibly can to remedy the situation and get Ayrshire back on a stronger, firmer footing.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I am aware that some of the minister's officials are in Dalry in my constituency today to discuss training requirements with DSM Nutritional

Products (UK), which is one of the largest private employers in North Ayrshire and which I visited with Mr Swinney.

One of the most important economic development projects in North Ayrshire is, of course, the Dalry bypass, which is in the strategic transport projects review. Does the minister intend to move that project forward? Does he agree that investing in the bypass would have been much easier if Ms Oldfather and her colleagues had not voted to squander half a billion pounds on the Edinburgh trams project; if the Prime Minister had not reneged on the promise that he made at the Dunfermline West by-election to fund a new Forth bridge; or if this Parliament had been given the borrowing powers to enable investment in more large-scale infrastructure projects over a longer period of time?

**Jim Mather:** The member makes a number of valid and interesting points, and has wisely done so within earshot of the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change; I am sure that he heard—and will reflect on—all of it.

#### **Local Government (Funding Pressures)**

**14. Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what representations have been made to it by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities regarding COSLA's anticipation of significant funding pressures over the next 10 years. (S3O-7763)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** COSLA is fully aware of the forecast from independent experts that suggests that, as a result of the high levels of debt that the United Kingdom Government now has to service and the impact of the current recession, we can expect year-on-year real-terms reductions of between 2 and 4 per cent in the Scottish budget, right through the next spending review period and possibly beyond. Reductions of that size for that period would be unprecedented.

Under the concordat, we have regular discussions with COSLA on the financial position that faces local government, and those will cover the substantial challenges that now face Scotland as a result.

**Mary Mulligan:** In response to the call for evidence for its local government finance inquiry, the Local Government and Communities Committee has received written evidence that the council tax freeze is not sustainable. That view was supported by Unison and Unite representatives at the committee's meeting yesterday. Has COSLA represented that view to the cabinet secretary, and does he agree that the council tax freeze is not sustainable?

**John Swinney:** I think the council tax freeze is sustainable. It has been welcomed around the country, because many householders were getting fed up of the sky-high increases in the council tax that were started by the Conservatives in the 1990s and fuelled by the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats through the start of this century.

People have appreciated our caution; they also appreciate the agreement between national and local government to freeze the council tax and would welcome the continuation of that approach. It is, of course, a further example of the effective co-operation that goes on between national and local government in Scotland, which is in stark contrast to the arrangements under the previous Administration.

**The Presiding Officer:** I am afraid I must conclude questions on finance and sustainable growth; I will allow a few seconds for members to change places for the next item of business.

## “Strategic Budget Scrutiny”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-4526, in the name of Andrew Welsh, on behalf of the Finance Committee, on the committee’s inquiry into strategic budget scrutiny.

14:55

**Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP):** I commend the Finance Committee’s report “Strategic Budget Scrutiny” to the Parliament. Because 2009-10 is not a formal spending review year, we would normally expect this year’s budget to remain broadly similar to the 2007 spending review plans. The Finance Committee decided to undertake strategic scrutiny of future budgets because a number of factors make the draft budget for 2010-11 substantially different from the original plans and are likely also to influence future years.

Because those changes put considerable pressure on the Scottish Government’s budget for 2010-11, the committee considered the impact of the recession on public sector budgets in Scotland in the immediate future and in later years: that is, the expected pressures and demands on the Scottish Government’s 2010-11 budget, and the likely implications for the Scottish Government’s budget in the longer term. The committee sought to inform and assist the scrutiny that we, the subject committees and Parliament will undertake in the autumn. Our report findings cover fundamental issues and key decisions that we will need to make in the years to come.

No one should be in any doubt about the position. Evidence that we received shows that the current year is likely to be the peak year for public spending for some years to come. I acknowledge that there are political differences about the way in which capital acceleration should be presented when figures from different years are compared, but although there is an increase in the total departmental expenditure limit between this year and next year, we all agree that the sum that will be available to the Scottish Government in 2010-11 will be lower than was envisaged in the 2007 spending review.

The budget process for 2010-11 takes the Scottish Government and Parliament into new and potentially very challenging territory. We are now in a different environment for spending and must face up to budget constraints that have never been witnessed in the lifetime of the Parliament. For the Scottish Government and individual public bodies, that raises short-term issues of budgetary planning for 2010-11, but this is just the first of some challenging budget years. Although it is

difficult to make predictions because no formal spending allocations are yet available for the years beyond 2010-11, the trend is none the less clear.

This year’s United Kingdom budget estimates a current budget deficit of £137 billion next year and a net borrowing requirement at the historically high levels of £175 billion this year and £173 billion next year. Those borrowing levels radically affect assumptions about public spending as the UK Treasury tries to balance support for recovery from recession with a return to fiscal balance in the longer term. The debt position will have a significant effect on public spending because future management of public finances will also have to make good the shortfall in tax revenues that the recession has brought about. Indeed, many economists predict that UK public spending will continue to be under severe pressure in the medium to long term, perhaps even as far ahead as the late 2020s or early 2030s.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer’s 2009 budget speech, in which he outlined public spending projections to 2013-14, estimated average real-terms growth in current public spending of 0.7 per cent between 2011-12 and 2013-14. However, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth’s analysis of the 2009 budget suggested that when that current spending growth is combined with capital spending reductions, it means a real-terms reduction of 0.1 per cent in total public spending over the same period. We simply do not yet know how Scotland will fare in that overall picture. This summer has brought increased spending on unemployment benefits and significantly reduced tax revenues, which means that even those pessimistic United Kingdom spring budget predictions might prove to be optimistic.

There is no doubt that there are several difficult years ahead of us, so significant challenges and strategic choices must be addressed for the 2010-11 budget with explicit recognition, where possible, of their effect in future years. As we have seen both at national level and in individual public bodies—which are facing reduced income streams at the same time as demand on services is increasing—the effects of recession on public finances are very variable and their future course unpredictable. The longer those effects persist, the less sustainable it is for public bodies to absorb them through efficiency measures or the use of reserves. We suggest specifically that subject committees scrutinise whether robust analysis and contingency strategies are in place in their portfolios to address that issue.

Aside from the effects of recession, the fact is that when budgets are tight, fixed-cost commitments impact increasingly on room for manoeuvre. The Finance Committee considered



the overall effect of some fixed costs such as multi-year pay deals, pension costs and unitary charges for private finance initiative and public-private partnership projects. However, subject committees should also scrutinise the effects of various fixed-cost pressures on budgets in their individual portfolios. Certain policy commitments such as free personal care, concessionary travel and so on will have particular impacts on the room for flexibility in the rest of the budget. The current context demands a very clear understanding of the future cost trajectories for various commitments and policy streams and their effects on other budgetary choices.

The committee did not undertake an overall assessment of the total projected costs of different policy priorities. We recommend that subject committees seek robust detail on expected budgetary trends in areas of particular importance, that they specifically request longer-term projections, and that they examine the extent to which spending departments can demonstrate evidence of longer-term thinking.

The committee took evidence on how the Scottish Government and Scottish public bodies should react and found that there is a finely balanced debate over what further savings can be achieved through across-the-board efficiency targets and the implications of such an approach for service delivery. The committee has a continuing interest in delivery of the efficiency programme and suggests that subject committees examine carefully any assumptions that are made about potential across-the-board savings in their portfolios.

Witnesses highlighted some broad areas in which a more targeted approach to achieving savings might be pursued, and they made some limited suggestions on areas that might be targeted through further shared-services initiatives, changes to overhead costs and different approaches to reforming public service delivery. Subject committees should examine in more detail the options within their portfolios, the timescales and up-front costs of pursuing those options, their connection to the Government's priorities and their impact on service delivery.

The extent to which funds for particular purposes should be protected is a key issue, so we suggest that committees consider carefully any claims to protect certain spending lines, how those lines relate to Government targets, and the effects of protecting them on other portfolios. In other words, they should consider the proposal and its consequences.

The allocation of Barnett consequential funds for 2009-10 has already supported some priorities. In considering their budget portfolios, subject committees may wish to examine how the

additional consequential funds have been allocated and how the distribution fits into and supports longer-term strategic choices. If difficult decisions on prioritisation of funds are to be made on a rational basis, significant further development of the concept of outcome budgeting will be essential, along with improved evaluation of individual programmes and greater connection between policy priorities and budgetary choices.

Connections must be made between budget priorities, growing the economy and how the budget is deployed to combat the effects of recession. Subject committees might wish to seek evidence that the Scottish Government has considered how it can make speedy progress on further improving the information and performance management systems that are essential to support decision making.

Evidence to the committee suggested that there is a need for a more robust challenge function in Government to provide critical appraisal of all spending and to act as a Treasury equivalent. There are different views about whether that requires reorganisation of Government and ministerial responsibilities, but whatever approach is adopted, it is critical that the Scottish Government demonstrate how it has achieved that strong challenge function and that it provide assurances that public spending will be effective. Those process issues are central to managing public spending in order to achieve medium-term and longer-term sustainability.

I commend the Finance Committee for grappling ably with a formidable amount of information. We successfully examined the big picture while considering issues in enough detail to establish effective groundwork for scrutiny of the forthcoming draft budget for 2010-11. On behalf of the committee, I thank all the witnesses, the committee's adviser, Professor David Bell, the research staff in the Scottish Parliament information centre, and the committee clerks for all their hard work in producing the report and throughout the inquiry.

The reality of the debate affects every man, woman and child in Scotland, as well as every local authority and business and all the public services that we take for granted. The subject is complex and there is no quick fix or single solution—there is only a quest to create more from less in the funding and delivery of publicly funded services. The solutions must come from innovation, new ways of working and co-operation across organisational boundaries, as well as from a constant search for efficiency, effectiveness and maximum value for money, using honesty in appraisal and wisdom in investment for the sustainable benefit of the people whom we all serve.

The Finance Committee has produced a sound, balanced and positive report. I commend its recommendations to Parliament.

15:07

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** I welcome the opportunity to debate the Finance Committee's important report, which comes shortly before the publication of the draft budget for 2010-11. The report is titled "Strategic Budget Scrutiny"—we should take our lead from that title. The report provides a helpful commentary on the financial challenges that we face next year and in the years to follow, in common with Administrations in all parts of the United Kingdom.

The background to the discussion is the current UK fiscal position and the outlook for public finances. HM Treasury's figures show that public sector borrowing is approaching more than 12 per cent of gross domestic product, a level that has not been seen for 70 years and which is the highest in the G20 countries. By the time the economy has recovered, UK Government debt will be approaching 80 per cent of GDP, which will be double the level in 2007-08.

Those are shared challenges—they are shared between the Government, Parliament, the wider public sector and the people of Scotland. Shared challenges mean shared responsibility. The Government is responsible for providing leadership during a time of economic and financial constraint and for making effective proposals for dealing with the difficult choices that we face. We will do that when we publish the budget for 2010-11. There is no doubt that Scotland faces significant economic and financial challenges now and during the coming years. I therefore welcome the committee's report because it highlights key issues that should be a focus of Parliament's scrutiny of the draft budget in the coming months, and of our collective consideration of the challenges that are posed by the medium-term financial outlook.

The Finance Committee's report is absolutely right to identify that the Scottish Government and Parliament must prepare now to enter new and challenging territory. Following the unprecedented growth in public spending between 2000 and 2007, when the Scottish Government budget grew on average by more than 6 per cent a year in real terms, there has been a marked slow-down in UK public spending. The most recent UK spending review, which covered the three years to March 2011, identified growth in public spending of 2.1 per cent a year. Scotland was particularly hard hit, with public spending expected to grow by just 1.4 per cent a year on average over the period, which was the lowest financial settlement from the

Treasury since devolution. On top of that, as members know, we have to live with the consequences of the chancellor's decision, announced in April, to take a further £500 million from the Scottish budget in 2010-11, just as we are looking to recover from recession.

**Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** For the record, can I check whether the cabinet secretary's position now differs from his position on 25 June 2009, when he spoke in Parliament about end-year flexibility recovery of national health service capital moneys? He said then:

"On current form, the Government will have sufficient resources on deposit at the Treasury to make good that shortfall".—[*Official Report*, 25 June 2009; c 18948.]

Does that agreement still exist in relation to the £129 million in NHS capital moneys?

**John Swinney:** There is no change in that position. My point to Mr Kerr is that the budget will be £500 million less than we expected when it was set during the spending review. Mr Kerr quoted me correctly from the debate in June when I explained how our EYF balance can be deployed to compensate for the reduction in the Department of Health capital line. It is clear that we could use that money for alternative purposes if we were not using it to cope with a £500 million budget reduction from the chancellor.

We have made it clear for some time that we consider the chancellor's actions to be incorrect: they fly in the face of our situation at this point in the economic cycle. The chancellor even admitted in his speech on Tuesday that

"To cut spending now would kill off the recovery".

There is an inherent contradiction in the chancellor's position.

**Andy Kerr:** Will the minister give way?

**John Swinney:** I ask Mr Kerr to allow me to make a little more progress before he has another go at it.

In assessing the financial challenge that lies ahead, there is a noticeable change in the debate at United Kingdom level, which has moved away from a question of Labour investment versus Tory cuts, to a position in which both those parties now argue that public spending will be cut. That change in the debate highlights the sharp degree by which the public expenditure position in the United Kingdom has deteriorated. There will be clear implications of that inevitable scenario on public spending in Scotland. I will give way to Mr Kerr now.

**Andy Kerr:** Why has the cabinet secretary failed to address the measures that were taken to deal with the difficult situation that was faced by our banks and our economy in Scotland—more than

£50 billion of UK investment in the Scottish economy? Why, as we learned from a secret note that was leaked from officials, have the cabinet secretary's officials been planning a 5 per cent cut in the Scottish budget since April this year?

**John Swinney:** I say to Mr Kerr that of course I acknowledge the investment by the United Kingdom Government in the financial recovery packages, but he has to accept that the economic and financial circumstances in which we find ourselves happened on the watch of the self-same Government that took those measures. That is hardly an advert for fabulous financial stewardship.

On the contents of the 2010-11 budget, Mr Kerr will appreciate from having been a minister that that information will be properly shared with Parliament when I publish the 2010-11 budget.

Next year's financial position will put immediate pressure on the Scottish Government budget. Looking ahead, it is clear that the future public spending climate in Scotland is going to be tight for many years to come. As the committee puts it:

"The Scottish Parliament is now in a very different environment for spending."

The United Kingdom Government announced in the budget in April that total public spending will fall by an average 0.1 per cent a year in real terms between 2011-12 and 2013-14. Furthermore, spending on social benefits and debt interest are expected to grow significantly as a result of the recession, which means that budgets for our vital public services will be under even greater financial pressure.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates, based on the figures in the budget, that departmental public spending across the United Kingdom will have to fall by 2.3 per cent per annum in real terms to meet the Treasury's spending forecasts. Using those figures, the centre for public policy for regions, which is linked to the University of Glasgow, has estimated that by 2013-14 the Scottish budget will be between £2.1 billion and £3.8 billion lower in real terms than it is this year. In that context, we have to deal with major challenges in public expenditure and in relation to economic recovery.

The Government has set out for a considerable time its approach to economic recovery. Our most recent update of the economic recovery plan was published in June and focused on supporting jobs in our communities, strengthening education and skills and investing in innovation and the industries of the future. We will ensure that Parliament is updated on those areas in the period to come.

The new spending climate for Scotland requires government at national and local level to think

again about how best we can deliver the services that the public expect and deserve. This Government came to office with a commitment to focus our resources on the front line, which I am determined to continue to do. In the years ahead, that must mean that less is spent on delivery of services, so that we can maximise the money that we invest in the service itself.

For the national Government, our challenge is to remove even more of the overlap and to further streamline the network of public bodies and agencies. That will mean greater focus on the experience of the citizen, so that government removes the artificial barriers that exist on our side of the delivery equation but which are meaningless to those who are in receipt of services.

For local government, in my view the solution is not further reorganisation to cut the number of councils. Rather, the challenge is in considering where can services be shared, when they can be delivered together across boundaries and how they can be delivered in partnership with other public sector agencies. The focus of this Administration on collaborative and co-operative working among public organisations at local level is designed to deliver that agenda of public service reform in order to ensure that we configure services to meet the needs of the individual citizen. That will underpin the approach that we take to the significant pressures that exist on public expenditure in Scotland.

The Finance Committee has given us a productive and useful insight into many of the challenges that we face. Parliament will, of course, have to scrutinise many of the decisions that the Government takes in connection with the budget. However, a budget can clearly be agreed only with the consent of Parliament. I look forward to discussing with the other political parties and all members of Parliament how we can secure a budget bill that meets the economic and financial challenges that we face, but which also delivers the expectations that people have of the public services upon which we all depend.

15:17

**David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab):** I commend the report to Parliament and I thank our clerks, our adviser and all those who gave evidence to the Finance Committee. We certainly had some interesting evidence sessions.

The report states on page 1:

"significant challenges and difficult strategic choices will require to be addressed for the 2010-11 budget and for the future course of public spending in Scotland."

At paragraph 27 it states:

“the budget process for 2010-11, therefore, takes the Scottish Government and Parliament into new and potentially challenging territory”.

Quite.

However, it is not as if all that has come as a surprise. In the spending review of 2007, it was always envisaged that the years 2010-11 would have the lowest year-on-year increase—note the use of the word “increase”—of the three years that were covered by that spending period.

**John Swinney:** Mr Whitton should go away and have another look at his numbers, because he will find that the position is exactly the reverse of what he has just told Parliament. The increases in the budget were slow at the beginning of the spending review period and larger at the end.

**David Whitton:** I am sure that I will take some lessons from Mr Swinney on sums—after all, he was an auditor and I was not. If I am wrong, I will come back to him.

I am also grateful to *Scotland on Sunday* for revealing details of a meeting of mandarins—a group otherwise known as the Scottish Government’s senior team—that took place on 27 April. At that meeting, the permanent secretary told his colleagues that a squeeze in public expenditure had been anticipated and that planning for it had been taking place for a number of years. So—no surprises for Mr Swinney when he took office.

However, in fairness to Mr Swinney—he knows that I am always fair to him—he could not have anticipated the global economic crisis, the collapse of two of our biggest banks and the recovery measures that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has had to take.

The leaked report of the meeting makes interesting reading and has a direct bearing on the Finance Committee’s report. Under an item on tackling the budget challenge of 2010-11 and beyond, Stella Manzie, the Government’s director of finance, who gave evidence to the committee, is reported as stating:

“In tackling the budget challenge we need to be careful in our use of language.”

The following day—28 April—Mrs Manzie appeared before the Finance Committee and was so careful in her use of language that she had to be called back again later in order to clarify her position.

We spent too much time arguing the difference between a lower-than-expected increase and what constitutes a cut. I am sure that members will be pleased to hear that I am not going to go over that again today. I will not do that in order that I avoid

embarrassing a civil servant, but I simply highlight that, if we in Parliament, who serve the people, are to propose policies to steer us through difficult economic times, it does not help when evidence to the committee is presented straight from the Sir Humphrey phrasebook—although Mrs Manzie may have been doing her political master’s bidding.

In her first evidence session, Mrs Manzie also commented on the Government’s efficiency drive. She said that £1.7 billion had been saved in the three years to 2008 and that the Government’s target was 2 per cent year on year, reaching 6 per cent in 2010-11. She was confident that it would achieve that target, as it had exceeded the one that was previously set. I also asked her whether the Government would also reach 5 per cent if that was the target that was set and she rightly replied that

“It would be for ministers to decide whether that was an option.”—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 28 April 2009; c 1141.]

Have they decided? We are entitled to ask the question, as we now read from the same leaked report that the Scottish Government is planning a 5 per cent cut across all departments. Did Mr Swinney order that? If so, it amounts to almost £2 billion-worth of cuts, which is four times the amount about which the Scottish National Party constantly complains.

The minutes of the management meeting on 27 April show a clear direction of travel. According to Angiolina Foster, the director of strategy and ministerial support,

“The exercise to identify 5 per cent cuts across portfolios will only be part of the solution.”

The Finance Committee was made aware of none of this, despite its close questioning of Mrs Manzie and the minister himself. Little wonder, as the minutes also record Ms Foster as stating that the current model of spending in Scotland’s public sector is “not sustainable”. So much for the historic concordat with local government.

In another astonishing line, the director of strategy and ministerial support said that they are attempting to

“meet the criteria of preparing Scotland to be a sustainable independent country.”

I confess that I had to read that a number of times to satisfy myself that it had not been written by the First Minister, although the minutes record that the management team is working to his instructions, as he outlined at First Minister’s questions today.

You will probably disagree with me, Presiding Officer, but I am prepared to work with the cabinet secretary in helping Scotland to weather—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have no views when sitting in the chair, as you should know, Mr Whitton.

**David Whitton:** I apologise, Presiding Officer.

**John Swinney:** Resign.

**David Whitton:** That is a terrible thing to ask the Presiding Officer to do.

I am prepared to work with the cabinet secretary in helping him to weather the current economic storm, but one thing I will definitely not do is help to prepare Scotland to be independent. Down that road lies disaster.

Since the committee's report was published, we have had a reply from the cabinet secretary to its contents. He wrote to us on 30 July but, according to the leaked report, the management team was due to meet again in June with further suggestions on how to conceptualise Scotland's future. Perhaps, in his closing speech, Mr Swinney will tell us what bright ideas the team has come up with. Indeed, perhaps he could publish the minutes of the meeting and save *Scotland on Sunday* the trouble.

Will he also shed light on other newspaper leaks that he is considering a 0 per cent pay increase throughout the public sector instead of the 1 per cent that was previously announced? Will he confirm or deny that the Scottish Government now looks to introduce an across-the-board decrease of 5 per cent in all departmental budgets?

The cabinet secretary wants us all to assist him with his budget deliberations. We can do that only if we have an open and honest exchange of information. He should not be coy about his spending plans.

The Finance Committee's report was our contribution to the current debate, and I commend it to the Parliament.

15:24

**Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):** I, too, thank the witnesses who gave evidence to the wide-ranging inquiry.

The report is all the stronger for being consensual. Finance Committee reports are often debated in a relatively low-key manner and rarely reach the pages of the press. Since Parliament's return after the recess, we have debated many seemingly more controversial subjects, from the release of the Lockerbie bomber to the Government's proposed referendum. However, the subject that we debate today—Scotland's public finances and the longer-term trends that will shape them—is actually more important. It is the dominant issue not only of this week or this session but probably of the coming decade.

Our collective response to the challenge of the public finances will be the test of the maturity of the Parliament and of the parties within it. I was struck by a change in the First Minister's tone on the subject at First Minister's question time. I hope that that change in tone is permanent. The Scottish Government argument thus far has been that it is against any spending reductions. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth confirmed at the Finance Committee that the Government does not intend to deal with spending pressures by increasing taxes, which by default means that any spending pressures will have to go on to debt.

Given that the national debt is set to increase by perhaps as much as £200 billion—or 400 times the amount that exercises the First Minister so much—there must come a point when the level of debt becomes unsustainable. That is a judgment not only for Government but for investors. There comes a point when even funding debt interest becomes prohibitively expensive. As of next year, the Government expects to pay about £43 billion a year in debt interest. Before we pay back even a penny of debt, we will be spending a sum that is equivalent to about one and a half times the total Scottish Government budget.

We are fortunate that interest rates are relatively low at the moment, but we cannot be certain that they will remain that way. Surely the Scottish Government must know that it is not sustainable simply to add all the pressure on to extra debt. Our current debt level is not sustainable. Suggesting that a spending squeeze can be avoided is simply not credible. That does not mean that we cannot make the political points about why the squeeze is set to be so bad. However, just as the UK Labour Government must take responsibility for its handling of the public finances thus far, it is up to the Scottish Government to take responsibility for its decisions in government.

Whatever Government is in power, the amount that it has to spend on devolved services is impacted by spending not only on debt interest but—as members have said—on major reserved issues such as social security. If we compare the documents that the UK Government issued on the budget this year with those that it issued last year, we see an increase in social security and tax credit costs of about £12.5 billion. In Scotland, we are talking about an increase of more than £1 billion in social security payments. Even as devolved spending in Scotland is being reduced, we are seeing increases in some areas of reserved spending.

A range of options will have to be considered in seeking to reduce devolved spending. We could simply make an across-the-board percentage reduction that takes us down to whatever level of

funding is available; we could stop or scale back specific spending programmes; we could develop fundamentally new ways of delivering services; or we could seek a higher level of efficiency savings. The answer will probably be a combination of all of those.

**David Whitton:** For the sake of clarity, will Mr Brownlee tell us whether the Conservatives are in favour of a 5 per cent decrease across the board?

**Derek Brownlee:** The Government may have no choice; it depends on the state of the public finances. I am about to address the substantial point of how to tackle the cost.

What we cannot avoid is a reduction in the public sector pay bill. Various figures have been quoted on the scale of that pay bill, ranging from around 50 per cent to as high as two thirds of the revenue budget. Given the real-terms reductions in revenue spending, the current public sector pay bill is unsustainable. That is an uncomfortable reality, but we have to confront it. It is almost certain that a combination of not filling posts, pay freezes and redundancies will be necessary.

The choice for us as politicians is to decide where the impacts will be felt. We have to make the strategic decision on where in the public sector to apply reductions, whether in broad areas such as the health service or more discretely in individual health specialisms. In recognition of the pressure on public spending, my party has taken positions on Scottish Water, prescription charges and the graduate endowment, although we recognise that those decisions are not necessarily popular and that on their own they are insufficient to deal with the scale of the looming squeeze.

Political cycles do not always coincide with fiscal or economic cycles. We could probably muddle through this year without taking too many decisions, but we cannot afford that luxury in future. If we are to minimise the impact of spending reductions on front-line services in future, we will need to start acting now. Reform is not always quick. If we fail to start the process, we make it more likely that straightforward service cuts will result. Far from being the enemy of public services, reform safeguards them.

We should actively consider the long-term sustainability of all spending programmes, understand better the factors that drive costs in the public sector and engage in a structured debate with the public on our spending priorities in a time of austerity. Last year, we suggested that the Scottish Government should set up an independent budget review group, learning the operational lessons of the Howat review. A similar initiative, albeit in rather different circumstances, in the Republic of Ireland has reported and stimulated widespread and informed public

debate. Something similar in Scotland would be a welcome contribution to the debate.

15:30

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** If I may, Presiding Officer, I will apologise to colleagues in the chamber through you, because I must leave shortly after my speech to carry out girlguiding duties—odd as that may sound.

The Parliament's role is not only to scrutinise the Government's work but to hold it to account for the assertions that it makes. Indeed, assertions have, regrettably, been the Government's core response to the recession. At the beginning of last year's budget process, we indicated that the budget had to focus, more than it had at any time since devolution, on recession. We were right then, and the focus for next year's budget, which is approaching, and the budget for the following year will again have to be on the recession and, indeed, on how we can ensure recovery to make the economy stronger than it is in other parts of the UK. That surely is a shared priority across the Government. Indeed, when the cabinet secretary came to the Finance Committee in May, he said that the whole budget process was founded on the Government's overarching purpose of economic growth. We agree with that analysis, and we do not disagree with many of Derek Brownlee's points about the difficult situation that the devolved budget is now in.

The cabinet secretary said that we need to think again, and that that applies to local government and the Scottish Government. I agree, but there is no sign of the Government thinking again when it does not wish to engage properly with other parties in the Parliament on shaping a draft budget rather than simply responding to it with regard to some of the difficult choices that we may have to make.

Over the summer, we have seen little action from the Government on the economy. Just before this debate, the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism repeated that 15,000 jobs were being sustained with the £293 million of accelerated capital expenditure. Of course we welcome the sustaining of those jobs, and of course if reprofiled capital expenditure can be used to do that, we will support it, but the difficulty is that exactly the same assertion, using those figures, was made six months ago. We know from answers to parliamentary questions that no mechanism has been put in place to quantify how much of that capital expenditure has actually been spent or how many jobs have been delivered. If the cabinet secretary has that information, Parliament should be given it.

In advance of the budget, we need to know whether what the cabinet secretary said was the core response in last year's budget will be effective going forward. We simply do not know whether that is the case, which was one of the reasons why, in discussions with the Government in February, the Liberal Democrats, in response to a difficult budget process in the Parliament, argued for a different way of approaching the coming budget. We argued that there could be a cross-party mechanism. We believed that the Government—in good faith—responded to that positively, but there has been only one substantive meeting of the cross-party group, and the Government has not provided any information on the pressures that it will face for the coming year's budget, nor presented any updated information since May.

**Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jeremy Purvis:** I will do so in a moment.

We are prepared to work with the Government and, indeed, other parties in making the difficult choices that we face. Indeed, the civil service indicated in the April meeting to which David Whitton referred that work would be under way. The difficulty is that the civil service pointed to the process and simply said—Mr FitzPatrick may wish to respond to this—that the joint strategic review would be used to “test the water”. It is no good the Government coming to the Parliament saying that it is genuinely interested in achieving consensus on the difficult choices that our nation faces if it is simply using other parties in this place to test the water.

**Joe FitzPatrick:** Obviously, communication is always a two-way process. I am interested to hear what suggestions Mr Purvis put to the cabinet secretary on how we might tackle the £500 million cut to Scotland's budget.

**Jeremy Purvis:** If Mr FitzPatrick had been listening to me he would have heard that there has been only one meeting of the group. How on earth can other parties make suggestions when the Government does not even agree on the basis for access to civil servants?

I am making these points in a sincere way. *[Interruption.]* Other members might disagree. If, as the Finance Committee convener has said, we approach next year's budget in exactly the same way as we have approached every budget since devolution, we will not be any further forward. If we are to address the difficult choices that this country faces, we must scrutinise next year's budget in a different way. I hope that the cabinet secretary agrees with that.

**John Swinney:** Mr Purvis has given his view of the joint spending review process, which I agreed

to, support and am taking forward. He knows about the conclusion that I reached on the meetings that we held earlier this year, as I wrote to him about it—it was that meaningful discussion required a starting point, which is the publication of the Government's budget. I am, of course, duty bound to publish the budget. Thereafter, as Mr Purvis knows full well, I have promised him every opportunity to suggest alternatives, with support from the civil service to cost them. Perhaps, for the completion of his rather negative assessment of where we are, Mr Purvis could reflect on that.

**Jeremy Purvis:** If members or parties in the Parliament are to engage in discussions only after the Government has published its proposals, that will be no different from every other year since the Parliament was established. We thought that the Government was thinking in a different way. In its meeting in April, the civil service gave an interesting view—I am referring to Angiolina Foster's statement. I quote from the notes of the meeting:

“Some work was carried out a few years ago which modelled the spend of Scotland's public sector. It was identified then that the current pattern of spend was not sustainable – it will be worth reviewing that work now.”

She went on to mention that it was important to consider public value, saying:

“This is a moment of opportunity ... Part of our task is to close the gap between officials' thinking and analysis and ministers' thinking.”

Depressingly, the note of the meeting went on to say:

“Politically, 2010-11 will need to be handled in a particular way, but may be more scope for radical thinking in 2011-12”.

The Parliament will indeed face a critical budget next year, which is why we thought that the process should be different. It is regrettable that the cabinet secretary thinks that discussions between parties can take place only after the Government of the day publishes its proposals. That is a regrettable way to proceed. If the officials are right that next year's budget has to be

“handled in a particular way”,

such that the only scope for radical thinking will come after the next Scottish parliamentary elections, perhaps we should bring those elections on.

15:38

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I, too, thank everyone involved in what was an interesting and timeous inquiry. The evidence sessions were worth while and informative, as were the discussions among MSP colleagues in private session.

As the report makes clear, there are facts that cannot be disputed and which create the background against which everything else must be painted. It is a background of recession, with difficult times ahead and hard choices to be made. It is clear that the cash that is available to the Scottish Government for 2010-11 is lower than was ever originally envisaged. To quote the committee's report, that

"takes the Scottish Government and Parliament into new and potentially challenging territory."

That will not be a one-off for 2011, of course. Professor Bell's report, which forms a supplement to the committee's report, is valuable in that regard, and it informed much of the discussion that the committee had with those who gave evidence. In his introduction, Professor Bell writes:

"it is unlikely that there will be any real increase in the resources to support Scottish Government spending programmes over the next five years. Indeed, they may fall. This is a marked contrast to the period since 2001 during which the real resources available to the Scottish government grew at an unprecedented rate."

Professor Bell also takes

"as given what is widely accepted by most serious commentators on the British economy, namely, that it will be some time before any effective economic recovery takes place."

**Andy Kerr:** Will the member quote further from Professor Bell, on his agreement with Stella Manzie that the budget will grow in real terms in 2010-11 by 1.3 per cent?

**Linda Fabiani:** I intend to address that point later in my speech. Mr Kerr has been jumping up and down and seems impatient; he will just have to wait.

Professor Bell and witnesses to the committee flagged up the debt issue, which Derek Brownlee mentioned. Even when the corner is turned and we are told that we are no longer technically in recession, the unprecedented level of borrowing that is the result of the UK's management of the economy will have serious consequences for Scotland's public spending profile, well beyond the short term. As Professor Bell concludes:

"the more profound effects on public services will arise due to the 'overhang' of debt that has to be repaid by the UK government and the negative effect that will have on public spending throughout the UK ... over at least the next decade."

Under the current constitutional settlement, if interest rates rise the effect on UK finances will again mean that the Scottish budget is hammered. The Scottish Government will be constrained by the Barnett squeeze, by increasing payments for inherited PFI projects and by the ridiculous situation whereby, unlike Scottish local authorities, the Northern Ireland Executive and even English

parish councils, the Scottish Government is unable to borrow.

There has been talk recently about how we must all pull together. Of course we should do so. An important step that the Parliament could take would be to campaign unanimously for borrowing powers for Scotland, which would give us the flexibility prudently to allow Scotland's Parliament to be more responsive to Scotland's needs. Many people support that approach, from Unison and the Scottish Trades Union Congress to the Royal Society of Edinburgh and our churches. We should work together for borrowing powers.

On the subject of political consensus, I will seek consensus with Mr Kerr. We must get beyond the game of ping-pong in which members argue, "It's a cut", "No it's not", "Yes, it is." That is not constructive for anyone. Let us consider the facts. At the beginning of the three-year spending review, a settlement was agreed and publicly funded organisations were given an indication of their spending capacity for the period. Then, £500 million was wheeled away by the chancellor in his 2008 pre-budget report. The budget is now £500 million less than was previously advised. Public bodies will receive £500 million less than was expected. Some MSPs have worked in public services and some of them have probably been budget holders in public service organisations. If they had been promised funding and then had it withdrawn, they would have been in no doubt whatever that there had been a cut. That has to be faced.

The Finance Committee urged subject committees carefully to reflect on its report. Hard times are ahead, and the Parliament and Government must face them together. We should all rise to that challenge.

15:43

**James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):** Like other members of the Finance Committee, I start by thanking the adviser, committee clerks and fellow committee members from all parties, who contributed to our report.

There is no doubt that budgets are a challenge in the current economic circumstances. They are also an opportunity. In that regard, the committee's comprehensive report sets a scene that will inform discussion and help the process on which we will embark when the Government publishes its draft budget next week.

It is important to get the budget process right. The process must be effective. In that regard, the committee made an important point in paragraph 147 of its report about the Scotland performs website. When we are spending vast sums of money, it is important that we can ascertain



whether the objectives that we set are achieving the desired outcomes. From that point of view, it is fair to say that there have been some concerns about the Scotland Performs website. The site does not currently include all the information. If we really want to demonstrate that we have a greener, fairer or wealthier Scotland, we need a system that not only shows why the money is being spent but displays the outcomes of that spending. More work is needed on that.

For SNP politicians, no debate or discussion or speech about finance or the economy is complete without a reference to the £500 million. That is an attempt to get across to the public the perception that next year's budget will have £500 million less than this year's budget. In reality, next year's departmental expenditure limit will be £600 million greater than this year's DEL. As others have pointed out, Stella Manzie has confirmed that the budget will increase by 1.3 per cent in real terms. If we want a proper debate, we need to be open and transparent about the figures.

**Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP):** Let me complete the quotation of what Stella Manzie said. The committee's report confirms that she stated that

"applying the deflator gives a real terms reduction of 1%."

**James Kelly:** I will repeat what I said and take Mr Allan through the figures. This year's budget is £29,382 million. That will go up to £29,982 million in next year's budget. That is a £600 million real-terms increase. In addition, the Government has access to end-year flexibility money, which it has still not drawn down, to the value of at least £95 million. Therefore, the Government will in fact have a £700 million increase.

The SNP has wasted some money in the Government's budget. For example, £22.9 million has been spent on the Scottish Futures Trust, which to date has not delivered a single project. The national conversation has cost £700,000. That might keep the SNP bloggers happy, as they sit up all night logging on to the website, but it has done nothing to address the problems that Scotland faces. The infamous leaked memo has revealed that 14 Government teams are working on referendum bill issues. That must involve very high running costs—towards the £1 million mark, I suggest—but it is not addressing the issues in Scotland that need to be addressed.

In addition, the Government has made some poor policy choices. I realise that I am running out of time, so let me mention just one such policy—I see that the Presiding Officer is indicating that I have perhaps a bit more time—which is the pursuit of community service orders and the scrapping of jail sentences of less than six months. I know from my experience as a constituency member that the

policy is very unpopular in my constituency, where people want a strong message to be sent out to criminals. Not only is that arguably the wrong policy, it will cost £7.5 million this year alone and it will obviously cost money in future years.

Another issue is the fact that the Government is wedded to the Scottish Futures Trust and to a single funding mechanism, that is, the non-profit-distributing model. That has resulted in the pipeline of capital projects drying up. Compared with 2007, when £1.3 billion of projects was in the pipeline, the two subsequent years have seen a £2 billion decrease. We can see that in the 20,000 construction workers who lost their jobs last year. Those poor policy choices have cost money and jobs in the economy.

Members have already made points about the secret memo that appeared in *Sunday on Scotland*, but there are other serious concerns. When a committee of the Parliament discusses the strategy for the budget, it is a concern that what civil servants say when they appear before the committee is different from the discussion that is taking place behind closed doors. For example, the committee heard nothing about 5 per cent cuts across the board.

Another serious point that the memo raises relates to the discussion that has obviously been going on about the importance of the general election and the climate post the general election if there is a change in Administration—

**Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con):** Hear, hear.

**James Kelly:** Let us hope that that does not happen.

The SNP perceives that such a change would provide it with a better opportunity. It would be very serious if civil servants were acting as cheerleaders for a Tory victory at the general election.

To sum up, it is important that we get the process right and that we have transparency and value for money. If we get those right, perhaps we can produce a budget for Scotland that will create jobs and boost the economy.

15:51

**Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** As a member of two of the subject committees that expect the budgets for the areas for which they are responsible to be squeezed, I want to suggest ways of approaching the present budget round that will allow us to get the better value and innovation that the convener of the Finance Committee mentioned.

We can argue about the figures, but funding has been slashed and our responsibilities are

accruing—as a Parliament, we are acquiring more and more responsibilities. That is why we need to have much better management of the money that we have. If we are to reduce the pressures, we ought to consider ways in which the UK Government can help us. It will not help us with the block grant, which is what has been discussed so far, but it can help us in a number of other ways.

**Andy Kerr:** Will the member give way?

**Rob Gibson:** No, not at the moment—although I would welcome a response from Mr Kerr to the point that I am about to make about the fossil fuel levy, on which I would like his support. The fact that that fund, which currently stands at £164 million, remains unspent in the bank account of the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets has been the subject of continuous correspondence from the Scottish ministers to the Treasury, but the Treasury keeps saying that, as a department, it cannot release that money and that Scotland, as a department, cannot have that money as extra money. We can spend it if we like, but if we do it will cut our block grant.

Given that that is the case, we are looking to our friends in the Opposition, who have a hotline to ministers in London, to get access to that money so that it can be used for recovery purposes, by which I mean the development of renewable energy. That would be a job creator and would provide various ways of increasing the number of apprentices, which would be a good little start.

The Department of Energy and Climate Change could perform a number of roles for us. The Secretary of State for Scotland, Jim Murphy, is to visit the far north on 1 October, when he is set to address the regeneration partnership. On his visit, will he announce real financial incentives for renewables developers in the far north? Will such incentives be provided through the return of the fossil fuel levy to us?

There is a need to look again at the problems of providing access to the grid for the renewable energy that is to be developed. Ofgem has held up the process by charging Scots 10 times more than people in parts of the south-east of England. We know that Ofgem has tried to offload responsibility for creating a new grid access regime on to the Department of Energy and Climate Change. Will Mr Murphy tell us whether he has achieved that by convincing one of his colleagues down south to help us out? Jim Mather pointed out in a response to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee that DECC's approach will be vital for developing appropriate and equitable grid network development and transmission access reform in Scotland. We can get help from the Opposition on those two matters to improve things in Scotland.

That would command support from across the parties.

The third issue that I want to raise is the small funds from many places that are required to keep the economy going, particularly on the social side of things. Of course, the Big Lottery Fund has focused on the major events that will take place in London in 2012, but I suppose that it is possible that we could ask it to ring fence some funds for us to get back for particular purposes to help sustain our economy. I hope that the Opposition will support the Scottish Government to get some of that money focused on areas that require particular activities at the moment.

*The Press and Journal* tells us today that, according to the chancellor, the

“Worst may be over on recession”.

It says:

“Scottish housebuilder Miller Group said stuttering market conditions had stabilised, with an 8% rise in housing volumes for the six months to June 30 and a 45% surge in reservations in July and August compared with last year.”

In considering budgets, it is important to think about the future. Will we allow house builders to continue to build houses that create problems for climate change mitigation? Should we try to ensure that they build houses that will not cause problems for future budgets? Jeremy Purvis's comments about thinking innovatively and knock-on effects were interesting. It is important that we seek ways to improve the quality of such things. The UK Government has considered zero carbon emissions from all new houses by 2016. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 is also to the fore. It is up to us to ensure that we do not ladle problems on to ourselves year on year as a result of decisions that are taken now.

If we are to see any kind of recovery, it must include many more things than what the chancellor has told us about. We need the Labour Opposition's help to get a hotline to London. If it does not help, we will know which side it is on.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** Will whoever has their mobile phone or BlackBerry on please turn it off; it is disturbing the sound system.

15:57

**Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab):** The Finance Committee has produced an insightful report that will, if the various players in the Parliament pay attention to it, prove a useful guide as we try to navigate our way through what will undoubtedly be stormy waters ahead. It is also useful for maturing our processes. Ten years after the establishment of the Parliament, it can play an important part in honestly assessing what could be

improved in both parliamentary and Government terms.

Comprehensive scrutiny of the Scottish budget has never enjoyed the success that it has deserved over the 10 years of devolution. Indeed, one might justifiably be accused of having bare-faced cheek if one described the attempts at scrutiny so far as comprehensive. I speak from experience. I have been a member of the Finance Committee, a convener of that committee and the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform. Believe me when I say that we have barely scratched the surface of meaningful scrutiny. There are several reasons for that, not the least of which is the extremely generous nature of the fiscal settlements that we have enjoyed over the 10 years of devolution. Most informed commentators—and even some politicians—will tell us that those days are now over.

Two things need to change: Parliament's capacity to scrutinise the Government and the organisational arrangements within the Government. I will deal first with parliamentary capacity. It would be an understatement to describe the current arrangements as an uneven contest. So far, we have viewed budget scrutiny largely as a one-off event that takes place during a particular part of the year. In reality, it must be a constant, on-going process that is facilitated by a group of professionals who have unlimited access to Government information and who can monitor trends and examine Government claims over time—professionals who can supply politicians with information on the outcomes of current expenditure patterns, allowing the politicians to judge the worth of those and thereby allowing objective consideration of future proposals. In other words, we need a high-level parliamentary budget office with as much capacity for scrutinising the Government and its actions as the civil service has for covering them up.

Secondly, as the report says, we urgently need a robust system of challenge within the Government. We need a ministerial department—in my view, it should be the finance directorate—that has the capacity to challenge all aspects of Government expenditure and the senior civil servants who pander to the egos of their ministers in order to protect their own empires and, all too often, to disguise their own glaring inefficiencies. The touchy-feely arrangements that were established when devolution began are anathema to the proper role of politicians, particularly ministerial politicians. Our role is to probe and challenge, even if that gets in the way of making best friends with the civil servants who work for us.

There are genuinely difficult financial circumstances ahead of us, and there will be a requirement for the kind of decisions that will test

the mettle of every politician in this place. If we are to step up to that challenge and to put the quality and volume of vital public services before vested interests, particularly governmental vested interests at every level, we should pay attention to the report and begin to make changes now in the interests of the people whom we serve.

16:01

**Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP):** I echo other members' thanks to the members and staff of the Finance Committee who have produced such a comprehensive report. Any report invites multiple readings, but one point is pretty clear. The report contains evidence that was received about the overall size of Scotland's budget. The much-quoted Stella Manzie, the director general of finance and corporate services in the Scottish Government, stated that

"the net result of the 2008 Pre-Budget Report and the 2009 UK Budget is that the Scottish DEL total for 2010-11 is 'reduced below original plans by £496 million'."

Before we go any further, let us put the matter to rest. However it is spun or explained away, Scotland is getting £0.5 billion less than everyone—Opposition parties included—expected or was able to plan for. That has consequences for every area of Government plans. Were it not so, why would other parties be telling Scotland to tighten its belt?

Even for a party that is well used to holding two—sometimes three—contradictory positions simultaneously and devoutly, Labour surely stretches credulity in saying that the budget settlement from Westminster is anything other than a cut in what we all expected and planned for. The injunction from Labour for the Scottish Government to live within reduced means also sits ill with any assertion that Scotland is being given a handsome pay rise by Westminster. Then again, it is lacking in credibility for Westminster to tell us that we should tighten our belts while it tells other countries around the world that they cannot cut their way out of a recession. It seems that the belt-tightening advice applies uniquely to Scotland. There is a further inconsistency—very much in evidence today—whereby, perhaps increasingly comfortable on the Opposition benches, Labour members provide lists of planned spending projects that they believe that the Scottish Government should undertake while in no way attempting to relate them to the cuts that the Scottish budget faces.

Nobody denies the severity of the international situation or the difficult choices that all Governments face this year. However, in the words of the report, Scotland's block grant may have "peaked" as the result of political decisions that have been made elsewhere. As the cabinet

secretary has just indicated, we can expect a further dip of several billion pounds, in real terms, by 2013. Even before the cut was made, Scotland faced the smallest percentage budget increase in some time. Other members have pointed to that fact. However, when the Scottish Government asks local authorities to make efficiency savings, the councils concerned get to make them. The novel form of efficiency savings that Westminster has introduced in Scotland amounts to a direct cut from our annual budget.

Putting that debate aside, it is abundantly clear, as is recognised by at least some other parties in this chamber, that part of Scotland's unique predicament is its unique inability to borrow. Scotland, as other speakers have observed, is unable to spread the cost of major capital projects over a period of years because of the restrictions in the Scotland Act 1998.

Before the usual suspects complain about that statement, I ask them to say which bit of it is not true. As presently constituted, the Parliament has no borrowing powers. In February, in acknowledgment of the situation, the Liberal Democrats lodged a motion that stated:

"That the Parliament believes that the acquisition of borrowing powers would enhance the autonomy and accountability of the Scottish Parliament and improve the Scottish Government's ability to respond to changing economic circumstances".

At present, Northern Ireland has such a power, but Scotland does not. Clackmannanshire has such a power, but Scotland does not. English parish councils have such a power, but Scotland does not. In fact, it is difficult to find an example of a Parliament anywhere in the world that is constrained in this way—let alone the many other ways in which we are constrained.

Many bad arguments are offered against Scotland taking more control of our own financial affairs, whether that control means borrowing powers, genuine fiscal autonomy or independence. However, the most craven as well as the most logically inconsistent argument is that now is not the time. If this is not the time for Scotland to acquire such powers, when is? When the UK Government is further in debt? It is already the most indebted state in Europe. When we are on the other side of the recession? At that point, the argument will no doubt be offered that, at a time of economic strength, we should not rock a stable boat. For those who oppose such powers, the time has never been right, and never will be. For the rest of us, the time is now.

16:07

**Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** As members have been thanking the committee staff and secretariat, I would like to thank the SPICe

staff, who make it easy for a back bencher such as me to analyse and understand some of the issues that we are dealing with. Clearly, one of the major issues that we are dealing with is the fact that we—along with every part of the UK—are considering public spending budgets against the backdrop of a global economic and financial crisis on a scale that has never been seen before by any person living. Against that background, our rate of growth must reduce. The same is true of countries across Europe, not just the UK and Scotland.

No matter how much the SNP goes on about cuts to the budget, it is a fact that the Government's director general of finance and corporate services confirmed to the Finance Committee that the Scottish budget for 2010-11 is going up in real terms by 1.3 per cent. As we have heard from others, Professor David Bell, adviser to the Finance Committee, and SPICe have also confirmed that there will be a real-terms increase. There might be a lower rate of growth but, as the Scottish Government's most senior finance civil servant has agreed, there will be a real-terms increase in the 2010-11 budget. However, we recognise that it will be necessary for there to be slower growth in public spending in the coming years, which means that the Scottish Government must look for areas in which greater efficiency can be achieved. Cutting costs is the first priority, not cutting services.

I remind John Swinney of his inaugural speech as the leader of the SNP, which he gave on 10 October 2000. He said:

"We must never say anything we cannot deliver and we must prove where the money is coming from to pay for each and every one of our policy commitments.

We must set out our arguments in a persuasive way and our arguments must be based on substance and on evidence."

Mr Swinney also said:

"I don't want us to hide behind the simplicity of demanding that only by spending more money can we deliver better policy."

Disappointingly, the SNP is running away from the tough decisions that need to be made by Governments. We discover now that, instead of setting priorities and making choices, the SNP has drawn up a plan that will cut the budget of every Scottish Government department by 5 per cent. A better Government would have considered its priorities and shifted resources to where they are needed most, rather than take a scythe to every budget and put jobs and services at risk. The across-the-board £2 billion cut that is planned by the SNP's most senior civil servants shows no regard for front-line public services and says nothing about the Scottish Government's priorities. That is in contrast to the UK Government, which was prepared to make tough choices and set

priorities to get us out of the global recession, rescue the banks and protect public services.

If the Scottish Government will not listen to the reason of the Labour Party, it should take heed of its most senior civil servants and of the Finance Committee's report, which all warn that the SNP's spending plans are not sustainable. The SNP wants to give everything away for free, but that will come at the cost of front-line services and those who need them the most.

Any experienced politician knows that if you want to make populist rather than hard choices, the money will have to come from somewhere. The largest budget item is the council tax freeze at £420 million—you cannot freeze income when expenditure all around continues to rise. That is nothing but a recipe for disaster.

I read with interest some of the things that Margo MacDonald said in her piece in today's edition of *The Scotsman*. In particular, I was attracted to her ideas on public involvement and experimenting with American-style town hall meetings. What would such public meetings throw up as the priorities of the people? Would our people choose to have caring services or to freeze income to local authorities? Going face to face with the public requires real effort and commitment, and exposes political parties in a serious way.

Margo MacDonald says:

"We might yet see a contest between the Liberal Democrats, who came clean on cuts a while back, and the Conservatives over who can promise the deepest or widest cuts to public spending."

She is also right when she says that it is not enough for the Tories to admit that, when they are in government, they will cut public spending. She goes on to say that, here in Scotland, we have an even greater need to know where the savings in public spending will be found. That is a profound and essential requirement for voters.

Will the savings be found by following the example that Fife Council has set in closing the Cowdenbeath Hanover court residential home for old people because the SNP refused to subsidise it in the way that Labour did? Will disabled people in the rest of Scotland face huge increases of £300 or more per month for their care charges? Will the big choices be about hurting most of all those who are least able to speak out for themselves and callously exploiting that fact? That is what is happening in Fife, despite the fantasy and denial in which Jim Tolson and Tricia Marwick live. I do not expect any different from them, as they are political bedfellows in the coalition in Fife Council.

All the papers that relate to the Finance Committee's report tell us that we have to look for

efficiencies in how we spend public money, so I will give members another example of what happens in Fife that is replicated throughout Scotland. Local councils move the costs for delayed discharges on to the health service. There is a charge of £300 a day for a bed, which over a period of six weeks costs the public purse £12,600. How much money does that represent overall for a council? That could be a real efficiency saving.

I realise that my time is now up; I thank you for my opportunity to contribute to the debate.

16:14

**Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP):** I begin by echoing the comments of other members—particularly those on the Finance Committee—in thanking the Finance Committee clerks and the SPICe researchers for their work on the report on strategic budget scrutiny, which was, as always, carried out with diligence.

The Finance Committee compiled the report against a background of firsts for the Scottish Parliament. A budget had been voted down by the Opposition for the first time; we were in the midst of the first recession in a devolved Scotland; and for the first time, we were facing £500 million of proposed cuts to the Scottish budget. That made the process an interesting one. It became clear early in our evidence taking that we were entering a new and more challenging financial climate in which Governments would have to make some difficult choices about funding public bodies in future budgets.

In his paper "The UK Budget Position and Strategic Implications for Public Services in Scotland", Professor David Bell describes the situation that will face the public sector over the next decade as

"an unprecedented period of austerity".

I record my thanks to Professor Bell for his efforts to pull together some complex economic and financial analysis and distil it in a way that was useful to me and, I am sure, other members of the Finance Committee and back benchers.

During the inquiry, I began to appreciate the significance that those events and others would have on future Scottish budgets. With no long-term budget allocations available to us, much of our evidence was based on predictions. Given that position, and without the aid of a crystal ball, it is not surprising that some of those who gave evidence came to very different conclusions about the impact on public sector spending, but there was universal agreement that, at best, the future will be challenging.

The process of producing the report also highlighted the fact that the Scottish block grant is a blunt object with which to combat a recession. Economies that have a full range of fiscal powers at their disposal are struggling to cope. Scotland must face the challenges that lie ahead with the constraints that the current constitutional framework places on us. With that in mind, I was pleased to see in the Scottish Government's programme last week a referendum bill that will seek to give people the choice to have the same powers over their economy as any normal country. I look forward to the passage of that bill in the Parliament and the continuing work of the national conversation.

**David Whitton:** I am sure that Mr FitzPatrick appreciated the £50 billion from Westminster that helped to prop up Scotland's two biggest banks, thus saving many thousands of jobs.

**Joe FitzPatrick:** Of course, the £50 billion is not Government money but borrowed money and it pales into insignificance in relation to the input that Scottish banks made to the UK Exchequer during the past decade. It would be particularly useful to Scotland if the £8 million that Jim Murphy siphons off for the Scotland Office were added to the Scottish block grant. That money is creamed off in order that Jim Murphy can run a Labour Party, anti-SNP operation from the Scotland Office. That is a disgrace. The money should be pumped back into the Scottish budget so that John Swinney and Alex Salmond can use it to benefit the people of Scotland, rather than its being used to benefit the Labour Party.

As we have heard, there appears to be a note of disagreement over the forthcoming reduction in the Scottish block grant. However, outside the chamber, most members seem to accept that we have to address the coming cuts and their impact on Scotland's public sector. I take this opportunity to welcome the approach of the members of the Finance Committee, who have, on the whole, set party politics aside to ensure that we get the best possible outcome for the people of Scotland. I hope that that will continue. There is a difference of opinion about whether it will be a cut or a reduction, but let us be honest. Next year, we will receive £500 million less than we expected. I would call that a cut; if others want to call it a reduction, I do not think that that is worth arguing about. There are other, far more important matters to discuss.

**Gavin Brown:** The member suggested in his answer about the banks that, if the money was borrowed by Government, it could not be classed as Government money. Does he support greater borrowing powers for the Scottish Government?

**Joe FitzPatrick:** I certainly support the Scottish Government's having the same range of powers

as any other, normal Government. That would include the power to borrow and also the ability to save up in the good years and have access to that money later, like any normal country does, rather than having to go to London with a begging bowl to ask for some of our money back—money that is already ours. Rob Gibson mentioned some of Scotland's money that is locked away by the Westminster Government. I hope that the front bench of the Labour Party will take Mr Gibson's message and send it down to their colleagues in London. We should get that money unlocked so that it can be put to use here in Scotland when we need it most.

I am not suggesting that we will agree on everything, because we will not. The role of the Opposition is to challenge the Government and my Finance Committee colleagues from all three Opposition parties are good at doing that. However, it is good that they manage to have that political debate while remembering the importance of what we have to achieve. We have managed to achieve consensus when it might have appeared impossible, and I hope that we continue to do so because, after all, we are here for our constituents and it is in their interests that we try to reach a compromise.

The Parliament must address the reduction in the budget and think about how to handle future budgets. In that respect, Tom McCabe's comments were very helpful. I know that the cabinet secretary will continue to take a consensual approach to this year's negotiations and ensure that channels of communication are open to all parties. I hope that the other parties will take that opportunity and play their part in what has to be a two-way conversation. I understand that the cabinet secretary will put his cards on the table first but I hope that, when he does so, the Opposition parties will make their own suggestions about how we can minimise the impact of £500 million of cuts on front-line services and the people of Scotland.

16:20

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab):** This is certainly the most important debate that we have had for some time, because the Finance Committee's report is on the key issue that we will have to address not only in the coming parliamentary session but in the coming decade. When I read the report yesterday, I was certainly impressed by the way that it cut through conflicting analyses of the financial situation to arrive at a very balanced view. It also made the important recommendation that a challenge function should be established in the Scottish Government. Even when we were in government, I found it

unsatisfactory that a finance minister should have such a large portfolio.

The various conflicting analyses have been aired again this afternoon. Perhaps Labour and the SNP can come to an informal deal on this issue with the acceptance that there has been a significant reduction in the amount of money that was previously announced. We can continue to debate whether the reduction is £500 million or £380 million, but the fact is that the money is less. Equally, however, there will still be real-terms growth in next year's Scottish budget. It is nonsense to say that capital expenditure that has been brought forward somehow represents a cut. We must accept the reality of the situation, which is that, as the Scottish Government's director of finance said, there will be real-terms growth of 1.3 per cent. After that, we will, of course, have political arguments about the amount of money that we will receive, but the Parliament needs to concentrate on the more important question of how we make best use of it.

First, I want to consider the political context of this issue. The SNP keeps going on about what it calls cuts from the Westminster Government, but it absolutely supported the fiscal stimulus that that Government introduced. From today's reports and from figures that have been issued over the past week or two, we can see that that policy has been very successful. Given that the SNP accepted it, it has to accept its consequences, particularly the repayment of debt.

The Conservatives are in a different position, because they did not support the stimulus. However, if we had followed their advice, we would be in a far worse economic and financial situation. They also go on about overall levels of debt but, as I have said before in the chamber, debt as a percentage of GDP was less in every year between 1998 and 2008 than it was in 1997 when Labour came to power. Debt has increased only as a result of the fiscal stimulus and the effects of recession over the past few months.

**Derek Brownlee:** In that case, why is it that between 1997 and 2008, before there was any sign of a recession and before the banks got into trouble, national debt doubled?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I think that I already answered that question when I said that debt was less in every one of those Labour years than it was in 1997 when the Conservatives gave up government.

That political argument goes on. However, in this Parliament, we must focus on how to make best use of the money that we have. We know for definite only about next year's budget and that thereafter any increase will not be as large as 1.3 per cent. Things will get more difficult, but

some of that will depend on whether there is a Labour or Conservative Government at Westminster in 2010.

We clearly need an honest and clear view of the various options that confront the Parliament. We will probably have to think some thoughts that we have never had to think over the past 10 years; and we must take another look at the council tax freeze, certain universal benefits such as free prescription charges and many other aspects. I realise that, every time such an example is brought up, it produces great antibodies both in us and in the general population, but the fact is that we will have to look at options that have not been on the table before. That is the challenge to which we must rise in the next year.

Let us remember that, next year, there will still be a real-terms increase in the budget. If the SNP will remember that, I am prepared to accept that of course there is less money than was originally announced.

16:25

**Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD):** The debate has been useful. I congratulate Andrew Welsh and the Finance Committee on addressing what is an important subject. It is clear from the speeches that, although members have a wide variety of opinions, everyone has benefited from the Finance Committee's work. The report sets out a range of presentations from experts on the state of the economy and the impact on Scotland. It then moves to the specific issue of the impact on the budget that is about to come. The committee has highlighted difficulties and explained issues on which Parliament as a whole can have an influence.

Naturally and understandably, a range of views has been expressed on the state of the economy. I was interested in Derek Brownlee's point that, in tackling debt, we are talking about matters of timing. Like Mr Brownlee, I am interested in the First Minister's apparent initial suggestion that none of the debt could be attributed to Scotland and it therefore did not need to be repaid. I am grateful for the clarification of that and the slightly more realistic position, which Liberal Democrats welcome.

I move to the issue that we are getting closer to having to deal with, which is how the economic situation impacts on the budget. Malcolm Chisholm was open and honest about the fact that there will be cash differences, but he pointed out exactly what the chief finance officials said—that real-terms growth is still occurring. Malcolm Chisholm's exposition was clear, so I hope that we will not go on tediously trying to find differences in that statement.

On the approach to the budget, I return to my colleague Jeremy Purvis's point about our genuine hope and expectation during last year's budget process that we would try to take a different approach this year. Even last year, we all understood that we would have a difficult situation this year. I am sorry that we now have a disagreement on what we sought to do. Jeremy Purvis summed up well our point that there ought to be a process—it might be new and difficult—through which we might assist in shaping the budget, rather than simply responding to it. I reiterate our disappointment that, after an introductory meeting in that process and only one further meeting, a proposed meeting in June was cancelled. A letter from the cabinet secretary in August indicated that we would revert to the status quo ante. That is a disappointment to us.

Looking at where we have to go, the report refers to the effects of scrutiny. I agree with almost everything that Tom McCabe had to say on that. I, too, as a minister benefited, as all ministers do, from access to finance officers, and I therefore had additional material. When, for eight years as a minister, I appeared before committees I was deeply conscious that it was extraordinarily difficult for committees to get up to speed and to effect good and proper scrutiny over the budget. The fact that we have not made much progress on that is a collective failure at parliamentary and Executive levels.

Liberal Democrats have expressed the view, which Tom McCabe repeated, that we need some kind of budget office that is separate from other ministerial offices. This is not a personal criticism of Mr Swinney, but there is a conflict of interest. The Liberal Democrats warmly support the recommendation in paragraph 155 for a greater challenge capacity, to which Tom McCabe also referred. Those are extremely important matters if we are to have the appropriate scrutiny.

The convener of the Finance Committee alluded to the report's references to the committee structure. The report contains 10 recommendations—if I have counted them correctly—that ask committees to do very sensible things. However, I do not have a clue how on earth any of the committees will be able to do almost any of them, because the budget timetable makes it almost impossible for committees to devote the time that is required to do them. I am not making a criticism and I have been open about the fact that the problem is one that has always been with us, but the scrutiny process becomes very difficult for committees.

Although there was much in the cabinet secretary's speech that was of interest, it was disappointing that he made almost no reference to the request in the report that the Government

should indicate how it might facilitate and assist in the scrutiny process. I hope that the cabinet secretary will address the issue either in his closing remarks or at a later date, because even at this late stage we must consider how committees and therefore the Parliament as a whole can contribute constructively to the scrutiny of the budget—the scrutiny that is laid out in the report that we are commending today and which needs to be taken seriously.

We must move on as we are now about to receive the budget. I reiterate our disappointment that we were not able to assist in an earlier process but, if we are about to embark on the scrutiny process, let us not close our minds to the many sensible recommendations in the report and let us hope that the Government can assist with the allocation of time that will make the job to be performed by committees, which feed into the Finance Committee's report, a much more meaningful process and one which achieves many of the objectives set out in this excellent committee report.

16:31

**Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con):** The Finance Committee has yet again produced a very good report, so credit is due to its convener, the committee members, the clerks and SPICe. The debate, too, has been pretty good. At times it has been thought provoking and it has looked at the broader and deeper issues that we will face, not only in this year's budget but in shaping public spending in Scotland for the rest of the decade.

I am still not entirely clear where the Scottish Government stands on the cuts that we will inevitably face in this budget and, if commentators are correct in their analysis, in budgets in the years ahead. The Government stated in the letter that it wrote to the committee as a formal response to the report that it thought that the report was good and that it had a contribution to make, but the letter did not address the specific conclusions that the committee reached.

The cabinet secretary made a strong speech today with a very good analysis of where things are, but there was no detail about the strategic decisions that the Government intends to make. We have heard many times in the chamber from the First Minister—probably every week—about the £500 million of cuts and most members have referred to that today. That has gone on for months, but we have not heard the Government say what it intends to do about it and how it will shape future budgets. It is time that the Government does that.

After reading the report, I know more about Glasgow City Council's priorities than I do about



the Scottish Government's priorities. Glasgow City Council is clear that it does not believe in what it calls salami slicing—it is not going for cuts across the board but is looking at targeted cuts. Glasgow City Council probably has less information on its budget next year than the Scottish Government has on its budget next year. I did not expect a raft of figures from the cabinet secretary—especially if the budget will be published soon—but I think that the time has come for the Government to be clear about where it thinks the cuts will fall. Is the Government, as was suggested in a newspaper article, going for a 5 per cent cut across the board? One does not believe everything one reads in the press, but it is incumbent on the cabinet secretary to put his position in relation to that report on the record. Is the report untrue, or is it an option that is being actively considered? Is the Government going for a more targeted approach and are there areas that it deems to be absolutely protected? I did not expect to get a glut of figures, but the Scottish Government's strategic approach is important and ought to be put in front of the Parliament.

The public finances are of course critical. I read in the newspapers, as others will, that the Treasury believes that its tax receipts are about 20 per cent down on what they were a year ago. Regardless of whether that figure is entirely accurate, it is at least a hint of where we think the public finances are south of the border. I take on board entirely the point that the Parliament and the Government are funded largely by the block grant so it is more difficult to say what the figures are, but in the areas where the Government has responsibility and can tell us the figures, there ought to be an obligation on it to do so. How are we doing with the collection of council tax throughout Scotland compared with where we thought we would be? Are we collecting as much as we thought we would?

What about non-domestic rates? Given the number of businesses that have been going bust, are we collecting the rates that we thought, and hoped, we would collect, or are we down there, too? Although council tax and non-domestic rates account for only a proportion of the Scottish budget, when we combine them we are talking about £4 billion, which is not an insubstantial sum of money. How are we doing with that?

How are we doing with revenues in other Government or quasi-governmental departments? We read constantly that planning departments are making far less money than they did. Other Government departments or agencies such as VisitScotland and Historic Scotland have commercial activities built into their budget plans, so their business plan does not add up if they do not have the amount of commercial activity that they expected.

What about councils, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, which rely to a substantial degree on asset sales for their business plans to work? The Government could be a lot more candid about telling the Parliament how we are doing in comparison with how we thought we would be doing. We are now coming up to halfway through the financial year. The Government must have some idea—I hope that it does—about how it is getting on.

Other members have referred to a newspaper article; some have read out various quotations. I want to pick up two points that were made in the article that have not been dwelt on as much. It is important that the Government and the Parliament face up to the difficulties that we face in the short, medium and long term. However, any decisions that the Government and the Parliament make must be based on sound economics. The timing of the decisions must be based on what is best for the country, as opposed to what is good politically. I have concerns when I read reports in a newspaper that say:

"Tough decisions on spending may be politically more acceptable after a Tory Govt. elected".

Another statement that I read was:

"There may be opportunities in the political timeline that allow us to take tough decisions. Have a think about when these might be?"

The reports might not be true and the quotations might not be correct, but it is important not only that we make correct economic decisions for the good of the country but that we are seen to be doing so. I would be very interested to hear the cabinet secretary's response to those statements. Economic decisions must be taken in the broad national interest.

16:38

**Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** I echo everyone's congratulations to the Finance Committee on its very good report, which the convener introduced effectively. The report lays out some of the challenges that we in the Parliament and, in particular, the cabinet secretary and the Government face and the choices that have to be made in relation to the impact of the recession, the balance of tax and revenue and debt reduction.

Much has been made of the forecasting abilities of others, but I remind colleagues that budgetary forecasts are notoriously wrong, as Robert Reich reminds us. The CPPR forecasts have no firm basis beyond the 2010-11 budget but are nonetheless being taken as read by many. I sound a note of caution about that.

I was happy to hear what the cabinet secretary said about NHS capital and EYF compensation for

it. The long-term effect of that is an almost nil impact on the Scottish budget, because the resource, which I absolutely agree is taken in a Barnett consequential from the NHS at the rest of the UK level, which impacts on Scotland, will be able to be managed through EYF handling.

I echo the point that Gavin Brown made in his speech regarding cuts of 5 per cent. There was no response to that.

Many other speakers have commented on the handling of the recession. It has become Brown's recession or Labour's recession—Derek Brownlee tries to take that line regularly—but we all know that that is not the case, because it is a worldwide recession. In response to those comments, I welcome the Confederation of British Industry's praise last week for Alistair Darling's response to the recession and the comments by the International Monetary Fund, which said:

"The UK government response to the global financial crisis has been 'bold and wide-ranging'".

Paul Krugman, whom we have discussed before, says:

"What we do know, however, is that Mr. Brown and Alistair Darling, the chancellor of the Exchequer ... have defined the character of the worldwide rescue effort, with other wealthy nations playing catch-up."

The UK Government responded appropriately to the crisis, which was not caused by the Labour Government or Westminster but is international.

That brings me to the so-called £500 million cuts and the reduction in growth in the Scottish budget. I think that most Scots understand the effect that it may have on the Scottish Government budget if the UK Government decides to intervene in the Scottish economy with in excess of £50 billion to save not the banks per se but the financial fabric of the country and the jobs that relied on those institutions. The reduction in growth is the effect of that action. The Government—and, indeed, every other part of the public sector—is able to handle that reduction and deal with the fact that, as we all know, the budgets are still increasing in real terms. Hearing so much from other members about the £500 million without a recognition of the substantial resources that were put into the Scottish economy to resolve the current financial crisis gets a bit tiresome. That intervention has worked and we will have to pay for it in future years.

As a Labour member, I have difficulty in making sense of a debate in which we all say that we need to work together but we know that a search on "£500 million cuts" and "SNP member" in our parliamentary systems would surely bounce out hundreds if not thousands of results. It is the mantra that we hear in the media and on the television, but there is no recognition that the

figure is a reduction in growth that allows a resetting and repayment of the UK debt in order to have an impact on our banks, jobs and economy in measures such as the VAT reduction and support to pensioners, which not only the Scottish Government but many others welcomed.

I do not quote Gordon Brewer much in the Parliament—in fact, I do not think that I have ever done so—but I remember him being on television with Mr Swinney. He said:

"The SNP don't play with a straight bat. The Treasury agreed to your request to bring forward capital spending, you then put it into this economic strategy you announced with a big fanfare and claimed this extra money was for saving jobs and creating jobs in Scotland, yet when it comes to paying for it, which clearly if you bring forward money that means there is less money the following year, you try to claim that the very Treasury which allowed and encouraged you to do that is somehow responsible for slashing"—

that word was used by one of the members today—

"your budget."

That is an inappropriate way to handle the serious budget situation and the involvement of other parties in the process.

Many members have raised that issue. James Kelly raised the need to improve the Scotland performs website. Tom McCabe mentioned the Parliament's capacity. As a committee convener in a previous life and as a former minister, I share his concern. Helen Eadie gave us the classic John Swinney quotation about ensuring that the SNP costs every one of its commitments. The Scottish Government has many underfunded commitments and is trying to share responsibility with others on that.

I share the concerns that Jeremy Purvis expressed about the strategic budget review committee's role. I was extremely disappointed to read what I read in the Scottish Government senior management team minutes of 27 April, but none of that information has been shared with us at the review committee. That undermines the group's working and I am concerned about the group itself undermining the Parliament's Finance Committee. I look forward to discussion with all colleagues on that issue. I close on that note of some concern and with a heavy heart on that issue.

16:44

**John Swinney:** This has been a fascinating debate, in which members have covered new ground in taking an innovative and different approach. Today, we appear to have departed from the usual situation of civil servants writing my speech to one in which they wrote the speeches of

every other member. Mr Whitton must have thought that all his Christmases had come early. I imagine him waking on Sunday morning and saying, "Somebody has written my speech for Thursday." Mr Whitton had absolutely nothing to say for himself today; he did nothing apart from read out the infamous civil service minutes. I am glad that, on this occasion, the civil service of Scotland has broken new ground in embracing the whole concept of consensus politics by helping out Mr Whitton by writing his speech for him.

I say to the Parliament in general and to Mr Whitton in particular—indeed, to all those who read in the press quotations from documents in which ministers ask for an analysis of 5 per cent cuts in public spending—that this minister has never asked for an analysis of the impact of a 5 per cent cut in public spending. He has never asked for it; he has never considered it; and he will not consider it. That is the clarity that I hope the Parliament requires. Perhaps what I have just said will stop any further attempt to take information and suggest that something else is the case.

I turn to the substantive issue of dialogue with other parties on the strategic spending review. My interpretation of events is genuinely different from that of Mr Purvis. I want to make it clear to Parliament how we took forward the process. In the spring, we had some dialogue amongst the political parties, which was a follow-on to the agreement that I gave Mr Purvis in February, during the budget process, regarding a joint approach to the consideration of public spending. I took from the discussions a sense that it would be better to have a published starting point, because that would allow us to have a more focused discussion on how to consider the budget. More than any minister—or any minister of this Government—has accepted, I have accepted that I must secure agreement across the chamber on the content of the Government budget. I have been on the receiving end of parliamentary endorsement of my budget and parliamentary non-endorsement—if there is such a word. I will consult Mr Finnie; he is very particular on such points.

As I said, I accept the importance of ensuring that we have a process that allows us to arrive at an agreed budget. I suggested to the other political parties—I assure members that I suggested it in good faith—that the Government publish its budget, after which we would have a period of consideration of its contents. We could look at whether it met members' expectations, or whether it did not. We could also look at any changes that members wished to propose.

As I said in my letter to my opposite numbers in the other political parties, in that way we could consider alternative proposals in advance of the

submission of the budget bill. I acknowledge that it is paramount to have parliamentary agreement on a budget in any circumstances. In the particular circumstances in which we find ourselves, I want to ensure that we have the maximum possible agreement in the process. I will engage constructively with other parties on the matter. I hope that all other parties will engage constructively with me in accordance with that sentiment.

**Jeremy Purvis:** It would have been most helpful if the cabinet secretary had outlined that at one of the meetings or if he had convened a meeting. Given that he had many discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the shape of the coming budget, it does him no credit that he did not feel it necessary to convene meetings with other parties in the chamber. He had the opportunity to get cross-party consensus to shape his draft budget, but it is regrettable that he reverted to type.

**John Swinney:** Mr Purvis does himself no favours by saying that. Mr Purvis endlessly finds ways of trying to dissociate himself from the processes that some of us are genuinely taking forward. I will give an example. In the budget process last year, his emissary, Mr Rumbles, came to see me to tell me that unless I was prepared to agree a £700 million cut in income tax, there would be no further discussions with the Liberal Democrats. Members can imagine where that would have got me with the Labour Party or the Conservatives. The Liberal Democrats had no contribution to make until we got further forward. Let us therefore put aside such matters and get on with the process, in which I invite members of other parties in Parliament to engage to ensure that we can take forward the budget process in a consensual fashion.

The contributions to today's debate have been enhanced, as they always are, by the reflections of my experienced predecessor, Mr McCabe. The issues that he raised about a parliamentary budget office are perhaps not for me but for Parliament to consider. However, I have made clear that I give my support, for what it is worth, to the concept of a parliamentary budget office to try, as Mr Finnie said, to level the playing field a little in relation to these questions.

Reference was made to the establishment of a finance function within the Government that would be a challenge function to other policy areas. Believe you me—a lot of challenge goes on in the Scottish Government with regard to financing. However, the deployment of responsibilities in that fashion is a matter not for me but for the First Minister.

I point out to Mr Kelly, who talked about difficulties in the construction sector, that statistics

on construction employment show that there has been a rise in such employment. I am not sure whether Mr Kelly has looked around his constituency recently, but the M74 extension is being constructed there, and that development is making good progress. Perhaps he could give credit to the Government for getting on with the project, because his Administration did not get round to doing it.

I hope that, out of this debate, we can focus on how we address a very serious financial situation that will face the country in the forthcoming financial year and beyond. It is beyond dispute—it has not been disputed in the chamber—that we are facing a much tougher political climate. As a consequence, I hope that members in other parties will be prepared to engage with me in the fashion that I have set out. I look forward to that discussion to ensure that we can formulate a budget that reflects the priorities of the people of Scotland, protects the front-line services of Scotland and does everything that it can—as the Government is trying to do—to assist and aid economic recovery in our country.

16:52

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** As others have said, we face a challenging budget settlement; that is the context in which the Finance Committee undertook its inquiry. Like others, I thank our convener, Andrew Welsh, and, indeed, all those who gave evidence to the committee, our advisers and our clerks. They helped members to shape the report, which I believe provides Parliament and its committees with a useful framework against which to consider the Scottish Government's forthcoming spending proposals.

We have seen a period of unprecedented growth in the Scottish budget since 1999. It is without doubt relatively easy in the context of years of plenty to consider what policy priorities we want to take forward. However, we clearly face a much more difficult position now, as we look towards a tightening of our finances across Scotland and, indeed, the UK. Is this therefore a "moment of opportunity", as the permanent secretary told his management team, or will it be a missed opportunity? The answer will undoubtedly be revealed as the budget unfolds.

Derek Brownlee is right that we need a new maturity about the debate as we move forward. The choice offered by the permanent secretary and his team—whether we will be "tucked in behind Whitehall" or whether we will stand out—is intriguing. However, we discover that, as with everything in life, timing is all. Jeremy Purvis and Gavin Brown talked about civil servants—one must assume that it is ministers, too—believing that the opportunity to be radical relates entirely to

different scenarios post the UK general election. Members therefore rightly ask whether civil servants and ministers dream—or perhaps it is a nightmare—of the advent of a Conservative Government in order that they can cut deeper and further, and point the finger of blame at the Tories.

Whatever happens, it is important that the Parliament stays focused. When all around is claim and counter-claim, parliamentary committees should follow the money.

The Finance Committee report essentially does four things: it highlights the tightening of public finances in the context of the recession; it suggests the need to determine our priorities better; it discusses aligning funding to priorities and outcomes; and it emphasises the need to measure impact—in other words, how we demonstrate that we get a bigger bang for our buck. That forms the basis of the framework against which I hope the Parliament and its committees will judge the Scottish Government's budget proposals.

Other members have spoken at length about the context, and I do not intend to repeat that—I thought that what Malcolm Chisholm said was spot on. Therefore, in these closing remarks on behalf of the committee, I turn towards the future. There will be much discussion about the forthcoming financial year, and Joe FitzPatrick is right to say that it is the period beyond 2010-11 that is more uncertain. We do not yet know what the budget allocation for Scotland will be. One thing is clear, however: the settlement will remain tight, and committees need to bear that in mind and consider the sustainability of key policies as they look ahead.

The cabinet secretary is clearly not tempted by his civil servants' view that we should have an across-the-board reduction of 5 per cent, and that is very welcome. The committee thought that across-the-board reductions were a crude and blunt instrument. Instead, we need to start talking the language of priorities. Some of our witnesses questioned whether universal entitlement to some services was appropriate—services such as free care for the elderly and free public transport. Perhaps we should even target assistance and resources to those who are least well off instead, in order to maximise the impact of our funds. Indeed, Lord Sutherland has apparently called for the reintroduction of tuition fees, so that money can be reinvested to help students from poorer backgrounds with their living costs. All those issues, and many more besides, should be considered by committees on a portfolio-by-portfolio basis in determining priorities for funding.

James Kelly is right about the Scotland performs website. We need to know whether the policy priorities are making any practical difference. Let

me illustrate that. One of the key strategic priorities for the Government has been the cut in business rates. Whether we agree or disagree with that, it is clear that there is very little hard evidence of any impact. Do we know whether it has created one single new job? Perhaps it has, but we do not measure that outcome appropriately, so we do not actually know. In these times, that is just not good enough. We need to know the impact that our money has, who it benefits and the outcomes that we expect it to achieve. If it does not achieve those outcomes, we should be brave enough to change direction.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** Will the member give way?

**Jackie Baillie:** No, I will not.

To deliver the step change that is required, we need a robust central challenge function within the Government. The committee received a very large amount of evidence to support the creation of a budget office, not least because in these changed financial circumstances the machinery of government needed to be reformed and we needed a minister who was largely free of spending responsibilities. We know that Mr Swinney runs at least half the Government. He has responsibility for local government, the economy, the voluntary sector, transport and much, much more. Experts tell us that such a challenge function is potentially the most important office in government, and Mr Swinney needs to be freed up to do that and that alone. Testing times require radical solutions, and I commend that one to Mr Swinney.

Tom McCabe made an insightful speech. Scrutiny is an uneven contest for the Parliament at the moment. We need the capacity to scrutinise the budget in Parliament, and the Finance Committee has asked the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body to consider just such a “parliamentary budget office”, as he described it. I look forward to that idea being developed quickly.

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Order. My apologies, Ms Baillie, but there is too much extraneous conversation.

**Jackie Baillie:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The debate on the budget will dominate the Parliament for the next five months, but its consequences may well be felt for a lot longer. Our responsibility, here in the chamber and in committees, is to scrutinise the Scottish Government's proposals. Are its priorities right? Is the money aligned to deliver on those priorities? Can we measure the impacts properly? How do we ensure that the budget is fair and, as Helen Eadie rightly said, that it protects the most vulnerable people in our society? Let me put down

a marker: we need the fullest possible information to do that.

I accept that Mr Swinney has moderated his language, but there is no doubt that some people will still not be able to resist indulging in the blame game, with Mr Swinney cast in the role of a victim—depending on the audience—and pointing the finger at the Treasury. I confess that I find it hard to picture Mr Swinney as a victim, but it is infinitely harder to picture his boss, Alex Salmond, as the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Other people might comment unkindly on Mr Salmond's personal ambition; I will resist the temptation to do any such thing. Rather, I suggest to Mr Swinney that Mr Salmond's departure could represent his first, very welcome strategic budget saving.

I commend the Finance Committee's report to the Parliament.

## Decision Time

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-4810.1, in the name of Paul Martin, which seeks to amend motion S3M-4810, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the fire and rescue framework, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that amendment S3M-4810.2, in the name of Robert Brown, which seeks to amend motion S3M-4810, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the fire and rescue framework, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that motion S3M-4810, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the fire and rescue framework, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to a fire and rescue service that is modern and effective, with the principal aim of reducing risk, effectively responding to incidents and improving the safety of local communities; notes that the consultation document, *Draft Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2009*, has been developed in a spirit of partnership with COSLA and all key stakeholders, and notes that the Scottish Government is committed to working with local government to protect the public from fire and to reduce Scotland's poor record of fire fatalities and recognises the tremendous contribution and crucial role played by firefighters in Scotland and the need for consistent and rigorous enforcement of health and safety standards in fire and rescue services right across Scotland; recognises the vital work of fire and rescue services across Scotland, including the contribution of those firefighters on the retained duty system who provide a flexible and cost effective community service, particularly in rural, remote and island parts of Scotland; welcomes local flexibility in service delivery but notes the concerns of the Fire Brigades Union Scotland at the lack of strategic direction for the fire and rescue services, supported by clear and enforceable standards and responsibilities, and calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that the Fire and Rescue Advisory Unit and the Ministerial Advisory Group work effectively with fire and rescue authorities to deliver effective compliance with agreed and consistent objectives under the national framework.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that S3M-4526, in the name of Andrew Welsh, on strategic budget scrutiny, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Finance Committee's 2nd Report 2009 (Session 3): *Strategic Budget Scrutiny* (SP Paper 283).

## Girlguiding

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-4478, in the name of Jeremy Purvis, on Girlguiding Scotland 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes the 100th anniversary of Girlguiding Scotland (GGS) in 2009-10; recognises GGS, with 58,000 members, as the leading organisation for girls and young women in Scotland, with the first company in Scotland formed in Peebles in 1910; applauds the life-changing opportunities that GGS gives and has given to over a third of women all over Scotland, enabling them to unleash their potential and so serve their communities; acknowledges GGS as an inclusive, relevant organisation being open to any girls, regardless of creed, colour or class; notes that GGS embeds youth participation in planning and delivery and is committed to giving girls a voice, particularly through research reports such as *Girls Shout Out*; praises GGS on its recent commitment, *Change the World*, by influencing its members to work with 18 charity partners and the £750,000 raised; looks forward in anticipation to the centenary celebrations in 2009-10, and wishes Girlguiding Scotland every success in the future.

17:03

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** I am aware that many of my colleagues in the Parliament have had a much longer relationship with guiding in Scotland than I have had. Indeed, many have been guides—I confess that I have not been. [*Laughter.*]

Girlguiding has played an irreplaceable role in the lives of girls and women and their communities for a century. That is an incredible accomplishment and I congratulate all the people who processed down the Royal Mile today to reach the outside of the Parliament and who can now watch the proceedings before enjoying a reception in the Parliament. It is fitting that so many members are taking part in the debate and I am most appreciative of members who signed the motion.

Girlguiding is helping to contribute to society, through positive thinking for individuals. I commend that contribution, which crosses all boundaries and all parties. For the past century the movement has been promoting the welfare of girls by providing mentors to develop confidence and the inspiration to dream big and to develop the skills that are necessary to pursue those dreams. Countless girls have participated in programmes that have enriched their lives and enabled them to touch other lives. I am proud to be an ambassador for people in my constituency who do a remarkable job. I know that that pride will be reflected among members who represent other constituencies and regions.

During the weekend, at two events in the Tweed valley and Midlothian, I was able to join more than 1,500 rainbows, guides, brownies and members of the Trefoil Guild in their celebrations of the centenary. I particularly congratulate the 1<sup>st</sup> Peebles in my constituency, which was the first guide unit to be registered in Scotland. The group was registered on 18 June 1910. At the celebrations at Traquair house at Innerleithen in the Tweed valley, youngsters were not just aware that they were continuing a long tradition but excited about opportunities for the future.

In the coming year, the unit will celebrate the centenary of its first badge giving. One of the unit's first major activities involved the awarding of a silver cross by Lady Constable Blackburn to former guide Nettie Borthwick on 9 January 1912 for saving the lives of two children who were drowning. Had Nettie Borthwick not learned to swim in the guides, those two lives might never have been saved. Another previous highlight for the unit was in 1953, when Lady Baden-Powell opened the brownie house at Netherurd—also in my constituency—which is an institution that has provided a resource for guides throughout the nation.

Today, the guides remain firmly focused on community involvement and have created partnerships with nearly 20 different charities to develop projects with the aim of changing the world—no lesser ambition would be appropriate. Over the past year, guides have raised money for a broad range of issues, such as asthma, and for Help the Hospices, Save the Children and other charities. They have recycled Christmas cards on behalf of environmental initiatives such as the Woodland Trust. They have also travelled abroad to participate in cultural engagements in what is a global organisation. We should be particularly proud of the fact that guides from Scotland can share their experiences and have a common bond with those in both developed and developing countries.

Those are just some minuscule examples of the myriad activities in which guides are involved. Over the weekend at Traquair house, I saw some of those other activities, which range from field archery to horse racing. However, I passed on the chance to belly-dance with the guides—

**Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD):** Coward.

**Jeremy Purvis:** It is very unwise for hecklers to ask me to belly-dance.

This year's celebration also coincides with the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the equal franchise legislation. That is of particular relevance to us in the Scottish Parliament. As politicians, we need to recognise that there is still a gap in activities for young people. Research that Girlguiding Scotland

provided for Girlguiding UK's "Active Citizenship" report highlighted that many girls and young women indicated that they are still sceptical of politics and politicians and see themselves as political outsiders. That is an issue that we should not tolerate but act on. As elected representatives, in partnership with guides in our communities across Scotland, we can play a role in correcting that.

We can also ask for action in a couple of key areas. One is to ensure that public sector employers in Scotland recognise the value that is contributed by guide leaders and by those who do so much work to ensure that Girlguiding is such a professional organisation. Those people should have the support necessary to ensure the continuation of the organisation. That may require time off, but the public sector as a progressive employer will gain hugely from that work. However, work still needs to be done on that.

On issues such as stopping domestic violence against women and children and tackling poverty, the guides have told us that we need to listen to them.

As an ambassador for guiding—like the Deputy Presiding Officer, Alasdair Morgan, and many other members—I hope that the next period in the Parliament will be marked by a greater involvement with the movement to fulfil the shared goal of active citizenship. For the past century, we give our thanks; for the next century, we give our enthusiastic backing. [*Applause.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order. I know that it is confusing when members in the chamber applaud, but I remind everyone that we do not encourage applause from the public gallery.

Many members wish to speak in the debate, so speeches should be of four minutes only.

17:08

**Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP):** I congratulate Jeremy Purvis on securing the debate and add my welcome to those in the public gallery. I offer my sincere congratulations to the girl guides at the start of their centenary celebrations. With such a remarkable anniversary, I know that this will be a wonderful year for all who take part in the events that will take place.

The north-east has been playing its part to the full in the centenary celebrations, which kicked off at the weekend. More than 1,500 current and former rainbows, brownies and guides took part in a parade in Inverurie to celebrate the event. Another large centenary event took place at Seaton park in Aberdeen at the weekend. Indeed, more than 550,000 past and present members are estimated to have joined in events across the

United Kingdom. The range and scope of the activities that have been planned between now and next October are truly remarkable, but that is reflective of the truly remarkable nature of the girl guides.

The fact that there are some 60,000 girl guides in Scotland means that Girlguiding Scotland is the country's largest voluntary organisation for girls and young women. As Jeremy Purvis said, it is part of an international organisation that has more than 10 million members in 144 countries. Half the women born in Scotland have belonged to Girlguiding Scotland at some point in their lives. The influence that guiding has had on the development of many Scottish women is incalculable.

Until I did my research for the debate, I had not known that the girl guides came about when some girls gatecrashed the scouts' first rally at the Crystal palace in 1909. Baden-Powell was confronted by a small group of determined girls—representing hundreds of others—who insisted that they wanted to be scouts, too. The girl guides' website describes the reaction of critics of the idea. Some called girls' involvement in camping, hiking and similar activities a "mischievous new development", a "foolish and pernicious movement" and an "idiotic sport". I say to the girl guides, "Och well—girl power rules okay."

Today, Girlguiding still retains the goal of empowering girls and giving them greater confidence for their future years, which is why it has chosen to remain a single-sex organisation. That is a big part of what makes it such a unique and positive organisation, and it lies behind the influence that it has had on many women's lives. With the curriculum for excellence looking to recognise the worth of extracurricular activities, and schools, universities, colleges and employers looking for that extra something, achievements that have been made in the girl guides can only enhance a CV.

Unlike Jeremy Purvis, I am a product of the brownies and the guides. The highlights of guide camps stick most in my memory—I loved them. I still retain a love of camping, but I am so glad that we no longer have to lash our own pot stands and tripods using knots that we have learned. The discipline of keeping the site tidy and camp inspections is an abiding memory. Today, guides are more likely to learn how to assemble flatpacks and other equally more useful and up-to-date skills.

I pay tribute to the 9,000 trained adult volunteers who help with guiding in Scotland. However, there are some 4,000 girls who still want to join, so we must encourage more adults to volunteer. I am sure that this year's highlighting of Girlguiding will help to make more adult volunteers a reality. In



addition, my aunt would not forgive me if I did not mention the work of guide commissioners.

The past 100 years have seen remarkable changes, but the guides go from strength to strength. I am sure that in 100 years from now, when the organisation celebrates its second centenary, it will still be thriving and playing a valuable role in the lives of Scottish girls.

17:13

**David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)**

**(Lab):** I congratulate Mr Purvis on bringing the debate to Parliament. I know that he has had to put up with a bit of light-hearted banter about his involvement with the girl guides, but as we have heard, his constituency played a vital part in the history of the movement. Just as we paid tribute to the scouts when they celebrated their centenary earlier this year, it is right that this Parliament should celebrate 100 years of guiding. "Something for the girls" is what Baden-Powell was asked for, as Maureen Watt has just described, and it cannot be denied that the girl guide movement has certainly delivered.

Obviously, like Mr Purvis, I was not a girl guide, but I married someone who was, and my wife has told me how much she enjoyed her time in the movement. My daughter was the first in her troop to gain the Baden-Powell trefoil, which I believe is the guides' highest award, and I am pleased to report that she and my five-year-old granddaughter, who is now in the rainbows, attended the centenary celebrations that were held on Plymouth Hoe at the weekend. It was just one of many events that are taking place nationwide to celebrate the centenary.

There are a number of guide troops in my constituency and they were involved in last weekend's celebrations; I am sure that the same is true of the troops in other members' constituencies. When I talked to their leaders recently, they reported healthy numbers in all sections of the movement—rainbows, brownies and guides. Indeed, demand is such that in some areas there is a waiting list. One reason for that is a shortage of leaders. I fully endorse Jeremy Purvis's suggestion that employers should pay attention to those who give up their time so freely to volunteer for organisations such as the guides and perhaps allow them some leeway when they seek time off for events such as the camps that Maureen Watt remembers, which many girls enjoy.

I hope that, in this centenary year, many women of Scotland who were guides and got much from being a guide will renew their acquaintance with guiding so that the next generation can get as much from it as they did. Local authorities and

others who rent out halls for weekly meetings, for example, should ensure that they are not damaging volunteer movements such as the guides, the scouts, the Boys Brigade and the Girls Brigade by charging too much.

We have heard that the girl guide movement has made a huge contribution not just to Scotland, but to the whole of the United Kingdom. Long may it continue to do so.

17:15

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):**

I am delighted to speak in this debate in celebration of a centenary of girlguiding in Scotland. I commend Jeremy Purvis for securing the debate and for his personal efforts as an ambassador for the movement in the Borders, at the very seat of its foundation there almost 100 years ago. I was delighted to meet the excellent group of girl guide dancers from Aberdeen, who performed very well outside the Parliament this afternoon.

As I dug out my girl guide badge in anticipation of the debate, I was somewhat aghast to realise that I first received it more than half a century ago, somewhere around 1954. Memories came flooding back of my excellent guide captain who, unfortunately, could not take us camping because of a health problem; of my pride in the swallow patrol and its leader; of polishing my badge and learning to fold the triangular tie that doubled up as an elbow sling; of the sporting activities that we took part in; and of the badges gained in music, embroidery, first aid, cooking and many other subjects. I well remember the meal of mince and doughballs followed by chocolate pudding that I had to prepare for my cook's badge, and being asked to make more of the pudding, because my first attempt was not quite sweet enough. Even then, I wondered whether the examiner was simply indulging her liking for chocolate pudding.

I was a very shy 12-year-old when I joined the guides. I had dropped out of the brownies, probably because I was too immature to enjoy their activities. However, within a few years, when I was a patrol leader, I proudly carried the company colours into church and read the lesson at a thinking day service. I was a much more capable, self-confident and responsible member of the guiding family, and was interested in being an active part of my community. However, I was not at all interested in politics at that time; according to "Girls Shout Out!", which is a report produced by Girlguiding UK, today's girl guides do not appear to be interested in politics, either. That said, I suspect that my eventual interest, and then involvement, in politics grew from the seed of community responsibility that was sown in me by the girl guide movement.

I benefited enormously from my girlguiding experience, as did my daughter, who from brownie to guide developed from a quiet and uncertain little girl into a self-assured and confident young lady. When my daughter and I learned of what today's young guides are doing—of their charitable efforts, their varied work experience in the voluntary sector, their contribution to supporting young people in poorly developed third world countries, and the exciting activities and challenges that they undertake at home and abroad—we wished that we were young enough to benefit from the opportunities that are now open to them.

Girlguiding has not stood still, but has steadily adapted to ensure that it still appeals to young girls in a world that is completely unrecognisable from that of the 1950s, when I joined the guides, and which is moons apart from that of 1910, when the first girl guides took their promise to do their best to seek spiritual development, contribute to society and live by the guide law. The activities have changed, but the principles of girlguiding have not. The 10 million guides in the world today are still taught to live by the same ethical code by which their predecessors were taught to live. Today's guides learn to live healthy lifestyles, to develop skills and relationships and to celebrate diversity, and they develop a global awareness that was far beyond the reach of my generation when we were their age.

I congratulate all those—rainbows, brownies, guides and leaders—who have put a lot of effort into preparing for the celebrations to mark the centenary of girlguiding next year. I hope that everybody concerned will have a wonderful year, and that they will have many happy memories of the activities that lie ahead. I wish the movement every success as it develops into its next phase and faces up to the challenges of its next 100 years.

17:19

**Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):** I, too, thank Jeremy Purvis for securing the debate and I welcome the guiding community to the gallery. I congratulate Girlguiding Scotland on reaching its first centenary. I had a very pleasant break this afternoon when, with some of my colleagues, I popped out to meet the representatives who had rallied outside Parliament. The dancing and the festive feeling to the afternoon were really pleasant. As Maureen Watt mentioned, last weekend 1,500 rainbows, brownies, girl guides, adult volunteers and former members marched through Inverurie—one of my local towns—to celebrate the centenary. There was a real carnival atmosphere to the procession, with banners and a steel band. Those numbers

are, in themselves, enough to show how vibrant the girlguiding movement still is.

The movement now sees groups of positive-thinking girls in virtually every community in Scotland. In the north-east of Scotland, there are waiting lists for girls who want to join the rainbows, brownies and guides. I therefore issue a plea to communities across the north-east to think about volunteering and working with girlguiding groups. Accommodation is not a problem—there is plenty of that—but it can be difficult to attract volunteers to train as leaders, and without leaders the units cannot increase their capacity. I know that modern work and family pressures make it hard to find the time to volunteer, but I urge people to give it a go. Every leader to whom I have spoken has commented on how much fun it is and how rewarding it is to work alongside their packs in that environment.

Guiding groups not only offer opportunities to girls and young women, but help, through the strong networks that they build, to sustain neighbourhoods and communities. It is therefore disappointing to note that in Banff and Buchan there are 97 girls on the waiting list and we are looking for 24 leaders. In the Gordon section, 221 girls are waiting to take part in the activities and we would need about 55 new leaders to allow them all to participate. In Kincardine and Deeside, 164 girls are on the waiting list; in Angus, 190 girls are on the waiting list; and in Aberdeen, 310 girls are on the waiting list. We need a lot of new leaders, so I hope that the extra publicity that the centenary will give the organisation will encourage people to come forward. Perhaps former guides will think about coming back and helping a new generation.

I was proud to learn that three Scottish girl guides were in the first all-girl crew to sail the Lord Nelson in the tall ships race out of Liverpool to Måløy, in Norway, last year. The crew of 40 girl guides were of mixed ability, with a proportion of them having sensory or physical limitations. Their achievement was very commendable, indeed.

As other members have said, guiding has changed over the years to keep up with the times. Not only is the uniform a lot more trendy than I remember, but there are lots of choices within the badges and the work that the girls do, which allows them to reflect their own personalities. Like Nanette Milne, I am quite envious of the range of options that are now open to the girls and young women. The badges that they work so hard for are creative and visionary, and they include serious things such as environmental issues. The five principles on which guiding is based—putting girls at the centre, focusing on shared decision making, respect for the individual, commitment to a common standard and participation in a balanced

and varied programme—are all things that stand women in good stead throughout their lives.

As a former brownie and girl guide, I know that there are many benefits to joining the girl guides. I was delighted recently to be invited by the Gordon guides to be an ambassador. Given the least opportunity, I am happy to advocate for guiding and to explain its benefits of self-development, experience of team working, leadership development, development of the ability to challenge and the wide group of friends that a girl can get from being in the guides. Those are all things that we need to foster if we are to have an active and successful society.

I have enjoyed the festivities in Edinburgh today, and I hope to share in some of the forthcoming centenary events in my area. Once again, I congratulate the girl guides.

17:23

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I, too, extend my congratulations to Jeremy Purvis and welcome the girl guides and their representatives who are here. I am not an ambassador, but I am a former girl guide—meet the patrol leader of the bluebell patrol circa 1956. At that time, I was a quiet and uncertain little girl—well, uncertain, maybe. In the halcyon days of youth, on a Tuesday night in the church hall, I learned to tie knots and put them on a board. I learned to recognise wild birds, to build fires—that hardly ever worked—in the woods outside, to cook sausages on the fire and to eat them half-cooked. I learned to put up a bell tent and carry a kitbag, and I could consume Creamola Foam at midnight to wash down cold baked beans. I got badges for housewifery, for athletics—which will surprise many members—and for first aid. Those last two were not connected.

I had lots of badges all over my arms, which I wore proudly. I also spent my first time away from home without parental control—there has not been any since—with my pack when we spent a rainy week in North Berwick. A year later, we spent a sunny week in Perth.

I learned to sing

“Ging gang goolie goolie goolie goolie watcha,

Ging gang goo, ging gang goo”.

I do not know what it means, but I sang it enthusiastically.

I also flirted with handsome scouts who came to help us take down those sodden wet bell tents in North Berwick—ah, where is Colin Campbell, the scout, now? Who knows? He must be 70.

Life was good. Life was innocent. I look back fondly on those girlguiding days, which are now

unfortunately consigned to black-and-white pictures in the family album.

17:25

**Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** I am not quite sure how I follow that.

As others have done, I congratulate Jeremy Purvis on securing tonight's debate in recognition of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of girlguiding in Scotland. As he said, last weekend marked the beginning of Girlguiding Scotland's centenary year. As other members have mentioned, 100 years ago some subversive and radical young girls attended the 1909 boy scouts' rally and asked Mr Baden-Powell for something for the girls. A century on, there are now 10 million girl guides around the world, and Girlguiding Scotland is Scotland's largest voluntary organisation for girls and young women. In fact, one in five girls in Scotland under the age of 14 and one third of girls and women in Scotland have been in the girl guides at some point in their lives.

Since everyone else has felt the need to make a confession, I should do likewise. I was not a guide. I was not even a brownie. I belonged to the Girls Brigade.

**Members:** Hiss.

**Karen Whitefield:** I knew that was going to happen. The guides are lucky that I am taking part in this debate tonight. However, I am going to be really very nice about them.

As I joined the explorers and have subsequently enjoyed a lifetime's involvement with the Girls Brigade, I might not know a lot about the guides, but I know quite a lot about the value of uniformed youth organisations, and the real contribution that they make to young people's lives.

It is clear that, as we mark Girlguiding Scotland's centenary year, girlguiding is going from strength to strength and is playing an important and valuable role in the lives of young girls in Scotland and around the world. Throughout the year, celebratory events will be organised in every community, resulting in an unforgettable year for girl guides across the country, and an enjoyable experience for everyone involved.

I am pleased to say that the guides of Airdrie have never held my connections with the Girl's Brigade against me. They always invite me to their annual thinking day parade and always take the opportunity to tell me about their achievements and successes. For example, I know that members of the fifth Airdrie company recently visited the offices of *The Herald* newspaper because they had just completed their communication badge and wanted not only to learn about the theory, but to see how a newspaper goes to print. I also know that many of

the guides in North Lanarkshire are looking forward to their centenary camp next year at Netherurd, and that guide leaders from across the county are preparing a camp that no one who attends will ever forget.

The mission and vision of Girlguiding Scotland is to enable girls and young women to fulfil their potential and to take an active and responsible role in society. I am sure that members across the chamber agree that we all aspire to that vision.

Girlguiding provides valuable opportunities for young girls to explore new activities, meet new challenges, make new friends, develop a sense of tolerance and justice and gain an appreciation of the world, its people and cultures. It gives them an opportunity not only to get involved in traditional girlguiding activities such as going to camp, but to participate in a wide range of exciting and challenging adventures, some of which we have heard about tonight—including the belly dancing in which Jeremy Purvis did not take part.

At a time when too many young people are spending too much of their leisure time indoors, sitting in front of a television or playing with their Wiis and Nintendos, guiding provides young girls with an organised programme of activities in a safe, welcoming and sociable environment. It teaches young girls new skills, and equips them with greater self-confidence that enables them to develop leadership and teamwork skills and a real sense of responsibility to each other and the wider community.

As well as being engaged in a wide range of activities, guides are increasingly undertaking valuable work that is aimed at giving young girls and women a greater voice, and at highlighting the issues that they face. I strongly welcome that development. I am pleased that it is mentioned in Jeremy Purvis's motion and I encourage colleagues to read the excellent "Girls Shout Out!" report, if they have not already done so.

In 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland, involvement in girlguiding and in other youth organisations is as vital to our communities as it was back in 1909. Girlguiding Scotland has made a huge contribution in the past 100 years by changing the lives of girls throughout Scotland and empowering them to help to shape society at all levels. Although society has moved on in leaps and bounds since 1909, girls and women face many additional challenges and hurdles, and although we have made significant progress in recent years, there is still a lot to do.

Organisations such as the guides play a hugely important role in developing the experience, confidence and self-esteem of young women and girls and in providing girls with a safe girl-friendly space that enables them to successfully develop

the skills to meet the challenges that they will face throughout their lives.

As we mark this important centenary, I am confident that the next 100 years and beyond will be just as successful—although I hope that the guides will leave some of the girls to join the Girls Brigade, as a new generation realises the huge benefits that involvement in the Girls Brigade can bring personally, for their communities and for the whole country.

17:32

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** I congratulate Jeremy Purvis on securing the debate, and Girlguiding Scotland on reaching its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which is a fantastic achievement that we celebrated in Ayrshire on Saturday.

As an ambassador for Girlguiding Scotland in Ayrshire, I was particularly honoured to be invited to take part in the celebrations in Ayr last weekend, when about 1,200 rainbows, brownies, guides, senior section guides and guiders marched through Ayr, led by the Troon pipe band. Hundreds of local people turned out to support the parade, and we had a fantastic party in the citadel afterwards. It was an unforgettable day.

Today, we celebrate 100 years of girlguiding and all that this worldwide movement stands for and has achieved in that time. As other members have said, Girlguiding Scotland has almost 59,000 members and supporters. Interestingly, half of Scottish women—as Maureen Watt said—have belonged to Girlguiding Scotland at some point in their lives. However, Girlguiding Scotland could not exist without all the leaders and volunteers—currently more than 9,000—who support it. Today, we should recognise those who willingly give their time to the cause. Each year in Scotland, adult members and helpers give one million voluntary hours, which is a tremendous contribution, but with 189 girls on the waiting list in Ayrshire, we need still more leaders.

Girlguiding Scotland offers girls and young women throughout the country the chance to develop personal and social skills, and to take part in a varied range of worthwhile activities. In 2009, girlguiding means being able to take part in activities that range from abseiling to windsurfing, and environmental work to first aid. What fun!

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** And to meet scouts, I sincerely hope.

**John Scott:** Was that an intervention? I did not hear what Margo MacDonald said. I am sorry.

Girlguiding Scotland says that  
"self-development is at the core of everything we do".

The range of opportunities that it offers certainly gives girls and young women the chance to broaden their horizons and to take an active and responsible role in society.

It is particularly interesting to note that some of the organisation's most successful units are located in inner cities, and that the organisation actively states that Girlguiding operates an open-door policy to all girls and young women who want to join and are able to make their promise. Girlguiding Scotland helps its members to develop into strong and independent women who develop a large network of friends, who are good leaders and team players, and who can adapt to whatever situations they face.

Involvement in guiding not only provides girls and young women with interest and fun in their youth, but develops a host of transferable skills that become invaluable later when they are in a work environment—skills such as communication, reliability, initiative and the ability to be well organised. To sum it up in three words, guiding develops resilience.

The recent "Change the World" community action challenge campaign is an excellent example of how Girlguiding Scotland members have become actively involved in contributing to society both at home and abroad. Through a combination of raising awareness, taking direct action and fundraising for a selected charity, members have had the chance to work with 19 national and international charities and to participate in everything from building a girls school in Liberia to tackling climate change.

This evening's debate has been useful in raising awareness of the wonderful contribution that girlguiding has made to Scotland over the past 100 years. I commend Jeremy Purvis for bringing that important issue to Parliament's attention.

17:35

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop):** I thank Jeremy Purvis for lodging his motion and initiating this evening's debate. I share his admiration for Girlguiding and I am delighted that its centenary launch is happening here at the Scottish Parliament. I extend my welcome, too, to the guides and volunteers who are here today. I hope that our visitors can tell from the warmth of all the speeches the genuine sense of celebration that exists in the Parliament, which reflects the high esteem in which Girlguiding is held. As a former brownie, girl guide and ranger guide, it gives me particular pleasure to respond on behalf of the Government. This is an opportunity that I could never have imagined when I was a girl guide in

Ayr and I am genuinely honoured to play a part in today's centenary launch.

It is clear that the guiding movement views its centenary not only as a celebration but as an opportunity to offer some new and unforgettable experiences. The plans are impressive, from guides climbing Munros to the brownies taking over a train to Perth—I am not sure whether they are driving it—for their carnival express; from rainbows' princess parties to the firing of the Edinburgh castle gun on new year's day. Every guide in Scotland will have her own special memories of this centenary year.

I was intrigued to hear about the four new centenary badges that fit together to make a Scottish saltire, with the themes of adventure, community action, creativity and heritage. It is a long way from when I did my housekeeper's brownie badge in England during the three-day week, when the examiner asked me to demonstrate ironing and Hoovering without any electricity. I also recall doing my public service at St Leonard's special school and working with children with disabilities in permanent care, and the sense of duty, responsibility and pride that I had when I involved myself with those young people. It was a rewarding and life-shaping experience.

Now, as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, I can see clearly how the challenges that the current badges represent and the skills that are involved in achieving each one make a real contribution to the learning and development of young people in the present generation.

I see this evening's debate not just as a celebration but an opportunity to consider what guiding can offer in the context of education and youth work policy. We are committed to expanding the range of partners that are delivering an enhanced learning experience through the curriculum for excellence. For young people to be successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens, they need support across their life experience and opportunities that take them out of their comfort zone. The time is right for guiding and other youth work organisations to be integral partners in delivering the curriculum for excellence programme. It is fully in line with their aspirations and it will certainly benefit from the challenges and development opportunities that are on offer to young people, but it will also be enhanced by the youth sector's special understanding of young people's motivation and aspirations.

In April, I launched "Valuing Young People: Principles and connections to support young people achieve their potential"—a short publication with a set of common principles and connections

for partners that work together to support young people. Those principles are rooted in best practice and reflect the approaches of guiding and other effective youth work practice. We see the value of collaborative working in successful school and youth work partnerships. Learning and Teaching Scotland's recent report, "Bridging the Gap", shows how teachers and youth workers can work together to inspire and engage with young people throughout the country.

Every young person takes a different route to fulfilling their own potential, and for many being a guide will be a part of that wider learning achievement. I know that that is dependent upon the time and commitment of local volunteers, and I pay tribute to all the Girlguiding leaders who work with girls in our communities. Their role as mentors, role models and enablers is critical in supporting so many girls and helping them to learn new skills and develop confidence. I also thank Girlguiding Scotland's chief executive, Sally Pitches, who has made an insightful and sustained contribution to the development of youth work policy in recent years. With her colleagues in the other uniformed organisations and YouthLink Scotland, she has generously shared her experience and helped to shape how we in Government support the voluntary youth work sector. For example, "Amazing Things—a guide to the youth awards in Scotland", which was produced as part of the national youth work strategy volunteering action plan, includes the Queen's guide award as a case study and model of good practice.

Guiding also makes a distinct contribution to the national youth voice that we rely on to shape policies that matter to young people. The movement itself is ably represented in the Scottish Youth Parliament by its own MSYPs, Fiona Beaton and Kirsty Paterson-Hunter, who use the skills that they have developed through guiding to champion priorities on the national stage with eloquence and passion.

Girlguiding's potential to enhance girls' lives and prepare them for adult life is as relevant now as at any time over the past 100 years. Guiding has moved with the times, offering challenges that its founders would never have dreamed possible. Indeed, the 7<sup>th</sup> Linlithgow brownies to whom I spoke on Saturday as they were fundraising at their stall at a summer fair for Donaldson's School's sensory garden are testament to that.

Girlguiding Scotland can be assured that the Scottish Parliament recognises and appreciates its contribution to Scottish life over the past 100 years. We wish it well with the challenges of its centenary year and look forward to working with it to support girls in Scotland in experiencing the

challenges, fun and benefits of guiding for many years to come.

On behalf of the Scottish Government, I, too, salute Girlguiding Scotland.

*Meeting closed at 17:41.*

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