



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 5 May 2010

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

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[The Deputy Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is Ani Rinchen Khandro from the Edinburgh Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Centre for World Peace and Health.

Ani Rinchen Khandro (Kagye Samye Dzong, Edinburgh Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Centre for World Peace and Health): Good afternoon, everybody. This is a very short slot, so I will cut to the chase.

The vast range of Buddhist teachings can be summarised by the following advice: refrain from doing what is harmful to oneself and others, practise what is helpful to oneself and others, and fully tame the mind. That sounds simple, and it is simple, but it is not always easy. Good intentions are not enough. To truly understand what makes an act either harmful or helpful requires honesty, impartiality, wisdom and compassion—and that is where the mind training comes in.

In today's world, so much emphasis is put on physical appearance. The time, money and energy that are spent on appearances keep vast industries in business, but does that make us happy? If we spent just a fraction of the time that we spend looking after our bodies on looking after our minds, we would soon feel calmer and happier, less stressed and more stable.

When I first saw his holiness the Dalai Lama at Samye Ling, the theme of his talk was "Inner peace leads to world peace". It resonated with me so much that it has become part of the bedrock of my belief. Most of us want world peace; yet, how can we realistically achieve it while our own minds are in turmoil? If we cannot control our minds, how can we control our actions? On an individual level, we may lose our tempers. On a global level, we may go to war. It follows that we first need to find inner peace so that our minds become stable and clear and allow us to act wisely.

If we can find time to go to the gym or the health club to look after our bodies, surely we can find even 15 minutes a day to look after our mind, giving it time to rest and recuperate from the constant bombardment, stresses and strains of modern life. You can call it meditation, mindfulness or time for reflection. You do not need to be a Buddhist or to have a particular faith; you

just need your mind. Sitting quietly, resting body and mind in the present moment, is one of the most precious things that we can give ourselves. It does not require fancy equipment; it does not cost anything. We just need to allow ourselves time to be. After all, we call ourselves human beings, not human doings!

So, let us spend the last minute of our time together doing absolutely nothing. Just relax body and mind, keeping a good posture, letting go of thoughts and expectations and allowing the mind to settle. With peace and clarity of mind, our inherent wisdom and compassion have space to grow and blossom into actions that are truly beneficial to ourselves and our world. Let us spend one minute together sitting quietly, doing nothing.

[*Silence.*]

First ScotRail (Industrial Relations)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-5722, in the name of Elaine Smith, on First ScotRail industrial relations. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament understands that a provision exists in the First ScotRail franchise agreement that provides the Scottish Government with discretionary powers to reimburse the company for revenues lost due to industrial action; supports the position of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) that it is wholly wrong for public funds to be used to support private companies such as First ScotRail in disputes with trade unions; also agrees with the STUC that the provision and use of such powers is not conducive to good industrial relations as it weakens the incentive for private companies to reach agreement; further supports the view of the STUC that such powers should not be used in the event of industrial action in the current dispute between First ScotRail and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT); welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government has been in dialogue with the RMT over the issues involved in the dispute, and believes that the interests of constituents in Coatbridge and Chryston, passengers, rail workers and Scotland would be best served by an early and agreed negotiated settlement to end this dispute.

14:05

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I pay tribute to the many members of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers who are in the gallery today and who work hard in various jobs to help keep Scotland moving.

This debate is about the current dispute involving guards, but it could be about any section of the workforce, as it goes to the heart of collective bargaining and industrial relations. I thank members who signed my motion, and I am pleased that one Scottish National Party backbencher did so as well.

My constituency interest concerns the Airdrie to Bathgate line, which will provide a new service between Coatbridge and Edinburgh. However, that must not be a second-class service and safety must come first on that line. It was, therefore, a shock to discover that the service might be run as a driver-only operation. That proposal has resulted in industrial action by the RMT, which has mounted a campaign to keep the guards on our trains, and has taken action over several days.

No worker wants to go on strike, to lose pay, to stand on picket lines and to fight with their employers, but sometimes people have no choice other than to withdraw their labour. The strike was

supported by a massive majority of the union, and shows the strength of feeling about standing up for safety and putting passengers before profits. The last thing that those union members need to find out is that their action could be undermined by the Scottish Government using public money to bail out the bosses—a company that made £18 million in profit last year.

What is indemnification? There is a clause in railway franchises that allows train companies to make claims on taxpayers' money to bail them out in the event of strike action. In response to a question by my colleague, Charlie Gordon, last November, on whether the Scottish Government intended to indemnify the ScotRail franchisee, Stewart Stevenson stated that the clause was "drawn up" by the previous Administration. Before we go any further, I must dispel that SNP myth. It is not true. That clause was not drawn up by the previous Administration; it was inherited when the franchise was drawn up in October 2005. However, when the SNP Administration extended the franchise without retendering and without any discussions with stakeholders, it chose to keep that clause in the franchise, even though it was in its power to remove it. Scottish Labour is committed to removing it when we win the election—sorry, if we win the election—next year.

It is important not only to get the history of the clause right, but to examine how it might be used. In a letter to the Scottish Trades Union Congress in May 2006, the then Minister for Transport and Telecommunications, Tavish Scott, said that one of the key principles in assessing the franchisee's behaviour would be

"adherence to the principles of collective bargaining",

and he gave an assurance that, before a decision was reached on any requests for indemnification, all parties with interests would be consulted.

In the current dispute, First ScotRail has not adhered to the principles of collective bargaining and has ignored an existing agreement. The RMT has been given clear legal advice that the 2001 agreement that there would be no further extension of DOO transferred to First ScotRail when it took over the franchise from National Express. That was explicitly confirmed in a letter dated 9 November 2004, in which the then managing director, Mary Dickson, stated:

"I can give you an assurance firstly that First ScotRail will not, during the current franchise, be removing Conductors from any of the services on which they are now present."

I hope that the minister will comment on First ScotRail's reneging on that agreement.

The most important point today, however, is not whether the outrageous union-bashing indemnification clause should exist in Government contracts—clearly it should not, and I hope that we

will hear some cross-party consensus on that today—and it is not even whether the clause should be enacted, as I am hopeful that this debate will result in all MSPs agreeing that Scottish taxpayers should not be paying one penny to First ScotRail for this dispute; it is that the very existence of the clause has incentivised First ScotRail to provoke a dispute with the RMT. That shocking fact was uncovered following the release of correspondence following my request at First Minister's questions in February.

We now know that there was clear collusion between Transport Scotland and First ScotRail, despite the existence of a collective bargaining agreement. A letter sent to Transport Scotland by First ScotRail on 26 February 2009—a year before the dispute began—says:

“As our Franchise ends in 2014 we think it unlikely we would be able to recover the costs of strike action during our Franchise and would if left to decide alone probably avoid such costs by adopting Conductor operation ... Should you decide ... to require us to use DOO, we will obviously need to discuss how any losses we incur can be recovered.”

In the response to that letter, dated 22 May 2009, Transport Scotland confirmed that in the Airdrie to Bathgate service

“these services should be introduced using the DOO method”.

It went on to confirm the possibility of a bail-out, based on the reasonableness test.

If the clause did not exist, and if ScotRail did not think that it could get its money back, it would have retained conductor operation and there would be no dispute.

Let us remind ourselves that ScotRail said that it would

“if left to decide alone probably avoid such costs by adopting Conductor operation”.

When Alex Salmond said to me:

“We continue to urge the RMT and ScotRail to resolve an unnecessary dispute”—[*Official Report*, 25 February 2010; c 24034.]

his Government agency had already colluded in provoking the strike. When Stewart Stevenson was meeting the RMT, the decision had already been made.

Serious questions now arise about the governance of Transport Scotland, including the whole issue of extending the franchise without full, open and transparent consultation and publication of all information.

When I asked recently whether the Scottish Government would meet the cost of training strike breakers, the answer was that

“no agreement has been made to pay such costs”.—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 23 April 2010; S3W-32872.]

That is welcome, since a letter dated 22 January 2010 was sent by ScotRail to Transport Scotland outlining the costs involved in covering the jobs of striking workers. It said:

“We are prepared to cap the cost at £300,000 and take the risk above this level. I shall be grateful if you will confirm that you accept this is a reasonable project cost and indicate how you wish us to recover it?”

I hope the minister will tell us that these privateers will not be recovering £300,000 of strike-breaking funding from the Scottish taxpayers, because that is not reasonable. I doubt whether the Scottish people would be happy to discover that the Scottish National Party was championing state-backed union bashing.

The RMT is simply asking that existing agreements be honoured. It is a reasonable request and one that accords with good industrial relations. Will the minister commit to removing the indemnification clause, as Labour will? Will he assure us that no public money payments will be made to the franchisee for lost revenue or strike breakers? Will he reassure the RMT that new stock will not be designed for DOO and that existing agreements will be adhered to? The minister must urgently get around the table with all those involved to ensure that existing agreements are honoured, and work in an open and honest way with the RMT to end this dispute.

14:12

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I welcome the union members in the gallery and I welcome the opportunity to take part in today's debate. I hope that it will shed some light on the facts behind this dispute. I thought that I would have been able to take part in a conciliatory debate, but I am afraid that Elaine Smith's speech has made that impossible.

Elaine Smith and others wish, whether unwittingly or disingenuously, to give the impression that the current Scottish Government is responsible for the current franchise agreement with ScotRail. I point out that question S3W-29329 was submitted in the name of Charlie Gordon, inquiring as to whether the franchise agreement includes provision for indemnification in the event of financial loss as a result of industrial dispute. In his reply, the minister makes it clear that the current franchise was signed off by the previous Labour/Liberal Administration.

Elaine Smith: Will the member give way?

Sandra White: I am sorry.

Elaine Smith mentioned that the agreement was inherited in 2005. Labour was in power in 2005—why did it not do something about it then? This is sheer hypocrisy. It is very unfortunate that certain parties have neglected to mention that important point but have, instead, deliberately misled the public into believing that this provision was introduced by the current Administration. I hope that those who are speaking in and listening to today's debate, although perhaps not on the Labour benches, will take due note of that.

Like Elaine Smith and other members, I had a number of questions regarding this provision and I wrote to the minister detailing them. In fact, I even mentioned them at the meeting with the unions, which I attended with Elaine Smith and others. In his response, the minister said:

"No money has been paid to ScotRail. No claim has been made and there is no commitment that payment would be made".

He further stated:

"Any claim would be critically scrutinised and would include seeking the views from third parties including the STUC".

Once again, I hope that members take those facts on board in considering their response to the issue.

As for the safety concerns about drivers operating train doors, such arrangements have been in operation for two decades. Indeed, instead of criticising them, one of the previous Administrations—Elaine Smith's Administration—was in favour of them, so much so, in fact, that it lauded them as a centrepiece of its transport policy. Iain Gray, the then Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, who is sitting in the chamber this afternoon, said:

"Improving access in our urban areas will improve ... prosperity, allowing more people to access jobs, education and training ... we are investing in a rail link between Larkhall and Milngavie ..."

providing

"a new metro-style high frequency train service",

while putting in place the very same arrangements that Labour members seem now to be so against.

Elaine Smith: Will the member give way?

Sandra White: I am sorry, but no.

Although Elaine Smith's motion talks about

"public funds"

being used

"to support private companies such as First ScotRail",

I note that there has been no mention whatsoever in any motion or any letter of First ScotRail's donations of money to the Scottish Labour Party. I

find that deeply disturbing and I ask the minister to look into the issue for me. [*Interruption.*] Members can look it up in the Electoral Commission's report. It is on the commission's website—I looked it up myself.

Finally, I thank Elaine Smith for welcoming the Scottish Government's positive contribution in this dispute and recognising its willingness to speak to the affected parties to reach a negotiated settlement—unlike her colleague Gordon Brown, who told Unite that its dispute with British Airways was "unjustified and deplorable". Perhaps the tide is turning. Perhaps other unions will soon realise that there is only one party that, unlike the Labour Party, will work with them rather than against them—and that is the SNP.

14:17

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): I congratulate my colleague Elaine Smith MSP on securing this debate. In the mid-1980s, when I was working on Strathclyde's suburban railway system, the rail unions and the ScotRail region of what back then was called the British Railways Board agreed on a system of driver-only operation of suburban train services in the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive area. The financial and political context for the move was the fact that the passenger transport authority, which at the time was Strathclyde Regional Council, was embarking on a decade of major rail investment of some £500 million in a national political context of the neglect and undermining of the railways under Margaret Thatcher's Government and their privatisation under John Major's Tory Government.

Moreover, the operational context for the agreement was that all suburban trains converged in Glasgow at the heart of the region, stopped frequently at stations and were never far from a railway depot or, in built-up conurbations, from coverage by emergency services. It was never foreseen that such operational arrangements would apply to interregional or intercity services.

Under the current operation of suburban trains, the absence of a ticket examiner who had been booked for a particular train need not lead to the train being cancelled and the consequent inconvenience to passengers. The situation with an intercity or interregional train is quite different, because the conductor-guard is vital to the service's safe operation.

We in Labour are not clear about the original or intended purpose of the indemnification clause in the ScotRail franchise.

Sandra White: The member says that Labour is not clear about the purpose of the clause. Was it not clear when it signed off the exact same franchise before 2005?

Charlie Gordon: The original indemnification clause appears to have been part of franchise arrangements that predated devolution, the existence of the Scottish Government and the existence of the Scottish Parliament. However, I made it clear a couple of weeks ago when rail workers were lobbying that there was obviously governmental responsibility under the previous Labour-led Executive for the fact that there was such a franchise with such a clause apparently lying dormant. I again make the point that we look askance at the use of that clause as an insurance policy for aggressive industrial relations.

When we return to power—I correct Elaine Smith's correction of herself—at Holyrood next year, we are minded to remove indemnification from any future franchise arrangements. In fairness, ScotRail's management did not plan a driver-only operation on the Airdrie to Bathgate line; it has come into the public domain that Transport Scotland instructed it to do so. That is why the minister must account today for his agency's and his Government's responsibilities for the dispute.

14:21

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): I want to focus on safety, which is the most important issue in the debate. It overrides the other issues. I want to focus on the safety of the travelling public and the safety of those who work on our railways. I seek an assurance from the minister in his closing speech that, in his view, the debate on safety has been exhausted. I use the word "exhausted" intentionally. If the debate on safety has not been exhausted, what does he intend to do to ensure that it is?

The Scottish Government has taken some action. I acknowledge that it has sent letters to the rail accident investigation branch, the Rail Safety and Standards Board and the Office of Rail Regulation. I think that the First Minister referred to those letters and to the responses to them in answer to a question that Elaine Smith asked. I think that his view at the time was that a clean bill had been given on safety. I want to look at the responses in a little detail in order to put them on the record and to get the minister's response to them.

The rail accident investigation branch's response is dated 12 April this year. It said:

"Having reviewed the file of documents"

that was sent from Transport Scotland—I think that it was compiled by RMT—

"we can confirm that the advice"

given in previous correspondence, which I have not seen, "is unchanged". It thought that the safety

issues had been resolved. It went on to say something important. It said that it would

"like to point out that the level of information in many of the reports is inadequate to assess the likely impact of the presence or absence of a guard on the trains observed."

It thought that there was simply not enough detail in what was provided to give a strong indication of the impact either way. We must ask whether that detail is available so that a confirmed view can be given.

Elaine Smith: Would the member consider speaking to the people who do the jobs—the guards and train drivers and others who work on the railways—to ask their opinions on the safest method?

Gavin Brown: Such decisions are, of course, best taken by speaking to the individuals involved and by undertaking a comprehensive study of safety, not by taking purely anecdotal evidence. There must be a combination of the two. If we take decisions that are based purely on anecdotal evidence, we will probably not reach the best conclusions.

The Rail Safety and Standards Board's response stated that there was no evidence that either driver-only operation trains or non-driver-only operation trains are "generically safer". It carried out a fairly comprehensive study in 2001, which reached that conclusion. The question for the minister is whether things have changed on the railways in the intervening nine years to the extent that a further study might be merited or a different conclusion would result. It struck me as a little strange that the conclusion was based on one study, comprehensive as it was, that was undertaken in 2001.

The third response is from the Office of Rail Regulation, which takes the view that the safety issue has been resolved. However, the letter states that, although the ORR has not reviewed all the historical accidents, it takes the view that they do not "fundamentally change the position." If the historical accidents have not been reviewed in detail, how does one reach the conclusion that the position has not fundamentally changed?

Safety is a most important issue. I have raised questions on which I would like answers from the minister in his concluding speech.

14:25

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): I congratulate my colleague Elaine Smith on securing this members' business debate on a serious subject that is of significance to people throughout Scotland. Elaine Smith and Charlie Gordon explained comprehensively the actual

situation regarding indemnification, pace Sandra White.

Sandra White: Will the member take an intervention?

Bill Butler: No, thank you.

I echo their call for the minister to confirm today that if First ScotRail were to make a claim to be compensated for costs arising from strike action, the Scottish Government would make no such payment. Such a categorical assurance that Scottish taxpayers' money would not be used in any circumstances to support First ScotRail in the dispute would be invaluable and most welcome.

I extend a warm welcome to the rail workers who have joined us in the public gallery. I thank them for the magnificent job that they do 365 days of the year to help keep Scotland moving. Contrary to the wilder flights of fancy of the tabloid press, trade unionists do not seek out confrontation and they do not strike at the drop of a hat. The reality is that unions and their members know that it is in their interest to negotiate equitable national agreements and to stick to them.

Sandra White: Will the member take an intervention?

Bill Butler: No, thank you.

The current dispute between First ScotRail and the RMT has meant that RMT conductors have been forced to take six days of strike action because of proposals by First ScotRail and Transport Scotland, which is an agency of the Scottish Government that is accountable to the Scottish ministers. That must be kept in mind. The rail workers' use of industrial action has been a measure of last resort. It has been provoked by an intransigent management that has broken a binding agreement. The action is motivated by trade union members' genuine concern about the safety of the travelling public, as Gavin Brown said, and the company's apparent willingness to ignore solemn agreements in the pursuit of profit.

It is indisputable that First ScotRail has broken an agreement. In a letter from the company dated 9 November 2004, the then managing director Mary Dickson stated:

"I can give you an assurance firstly that First ScotRail will not, during the current franchise, be removing Conductors from any of the services on which they are now present."

That is clear. Today is an ideal opportunity for the Government, in the shape of Mr Stevenson, to act as an honest broker and say that it will seek to ensure that ScotRail abides by its agreement with the RMT. I hope that the minister will be able to make that simple and straightforward commitment to the Parliament.

Let us be clear. First ScotRail has said that its franchise includes provision for a second person on all services and that the driver-operated-door trains will have a second member of staff on board. At the same time, First ScotRail has informed the unions that there will be circumstances in which trains will be able to run without a second person on board, so that only the driver will be on the train. Such a shocking admission is in direct contravention of a key part of the existing franchise agreement—that all services must still run with a minimum of two staff on board, which, incidentally, is part of the company's spurious justification for axing conductors.

The reality is that even when a ticket examiner is on a train as the second person, that member of staff, unlike a conductor, is not trained in evacuation and protection, as recommended by Lord Cullen. Although ticket examiners perform a vital role in protecting revenue, it is simply wrong to pretend that they are trained to the same standards of operational train safety as conductors.

The extension of driver-only operation is a unilateral breach by FirstScotrail of a negotiated solemn agreement. Such a betrayal of trust by management is not conducive to good industrial relations. Additionally, it brings into stark relief a question of paramount importance—namely, the need to ensure passenger safety.

The minister must be clear in his response to this debate and use his influence to ensure that FirstScotrail abides by its 2004 agreement. He must give an assurance that taxpayers' money will not be used to indemnify a private company in any circumstances. Let us be clear: both of those actions are within the minister's gift; the people of Scotland demand no less of their Government. I hope that the minister will use this parliamentary occasion to state his Government's support for the workers' case. Nothing less will do if good industrial relations are to be restored. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. Our rules do not permit interventions from the public gallery, be they applause or anything else.

14:31

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): The day before the country has a general election, it is refreshing to hear Labour members return to their party's roots given the extent to which many have moved away from those origins, particularly down south. I congratulate Elaine Smith on bringing back to this Parliament what I remember as the roots of the Labour Party.

Bill Butler: Does the member wish a membership application form? I have one in my pocket.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Perhaps we can get on with the motion now, Mr O'Donnell.

Hugh O'Donnell: I am trying not to join losing organisations at the moment.

In all seriousness, it is encouraging that we take such a liberal approach to the world that people have the right to go on strike and withdraw their labour and organisations and companies have the right to make the case against that.

On indemnity, regardless of the circumstances and the history of the dispute about which we speak today, it is fundamentally wrong that a Government of any shade should have the opportunity to use taxpayers' money to bail out First Scotrail. I would apply the same idea to what happened to the banks.

Elaine Smith: Does the member agree that it might be a good idea to renationalise the railways?

Hugh O'Donnell: The strange truth is that, yes, I agree with the member. That might come as quite a surprise, but given the current state of the railways in the United Kingdom and the mess that the Conservative party made of deregulation, I have no issue with renationalising the railways.

Returning to the subject of the debate, I do not believe that it is acceptable for any company to be protected from the consequences of decisions or of normal, national negotiations that were entered into freely with a trade union organisation as a result of Government money being available. We have heard from Elaine Smith and Charlie Gordon how the situation came about. We heard clearly that the agreement pre-dated devolution and might well have been overlooked by any of the ministers in the previous Administrations. But—and here is the but—had the current Administration consulted fully along the lines in Tavish Scott's letter to which Elaine Smith referred, and with all the parties, it could have resolved the problem without any challenge whatever. There is a golden opportunity here. If trade union organisations and employers are to negotiate on a level playing field, it is grossly unfair for a company that made and declared £18 million of dividends and profits to have a hidden advantage.

I congratulate Elaine Smith, both on her socialist stand and on bringing the debate to the chamber.

14:34

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I apologise for not being here at the beginning of the debate.

I congratulate Elaine Smith on securing the debate. Her speech represented well the RMT's case. I will raise two concerns.

In the past couple of years, I have watched with great pride the rebuilding of the Airdrie to Bathgate rail link. I acknowledge the Deputy Presiding Officer's involvement in bringing that to fruition as a member of the committee that dealt with the bill.

It has been great to see the jobs that the project has created, particularly in a recession, during which many people have faced uncertainty in the job market. I recognise the service that the line will provide not just for my constituents and those of Karen Whitefield but for people throughout the central belt. I am glad that the project was started when it was and that it did not suffer the same fate as the Edinburgh airport and Glasgow airport rail links did.

However, some Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians members in the project's workforce have talked about being brought to work each morning, finding that tasks were not on schedule and being sent away again by their employer, Carillion. I hope that the minister will look into that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer is frowning at me, so I will return to the subject of the motion, which concerns the present dispute.

Many members have talked about cost, but I will return to Bill Butler's point about ticket collectors being asked to do the same job as conductors but for less money. Is that purely a cost-saving exercise? More important, ticket collectors are being asked to do the job without the proper training. Essential evacuation and protection training matters must be dealt with if we are to have a proper answer on that issue.

I am a member of the public who frequently uses train services—particularly between Bathgate and Edinburgh—and I do so with confidence because the service has a conductor. As a single woman traveller, I often feel that it is important to have somebody else on the train to offer help should difficult circumstances arise. Many of my constituents who travel regularly on train services would express similar concerns if they found themselves on a train for which only a driver was responsible and on which the other member of staff did not have the same training as conductors have.

I ask the minister to answer my question about UCATT members, although I do not expect that answer today. In particular, I seek reassurance from him on the safety of passengers and staff and on the ability of staff to do the job that they are asked to do.

I do not want to hear in six months' time that the reopening of the Airdrie to Bathgate rail link has been delayed. The rail link was a good news story from the Parliament and it should not now become a bad news story. I support other members' call for

all the parties to get back round the table to negotiate a settlement that takes on board all the points that Elaine Smith made.

14:38

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I thank Elaine Smith for the opportunity to debate one aspect of railways. A broad consensus welcomes the substantial investment in and continuing development of railways throughout Scotland, but the debate relates to trade unions and their relationships with employers.

I commend the work of the STUC and the rail unions, one of which is in dispute with First ScotRail. In particular, I highlight a number of discussions on whether it would be possible for there to be a bid for the next franchise in 2014 in which there is a greater public interest component. Elsewhere, a co-operative venture is looking at the east coast franchise and Go! Co-operative Ltd is looking at running services in parts of England. The STUC remains interested in the proposals that we have made on that front. The discussions that we have been having over the past year will, no doubt, continue.

Of course, it is the responsibility of trade unions to represent and to protect the interests of their members. Last year, I was happy to respond to the request from the STUC and others to contact the Office of Rail Regulation and Network Rail about the programme of renewals on the rail network.

I turn to ScotRail industrial relations. I am pleased that ScotRail has guaranteed that there will be no compulsory redundancies or loss of current terms and conditions for any member of operating staff, including conductors, as part of the driver and ticket examiner operation on the Airdrie to Bathgate service.

Charlie Gordon: Will the minister give way?

Stewart Stevenson: Let me continue a wee bit. I will come back to Mr Gordon.

I was about to pick up on a couple of points that Mr Gordon made. We are looking at what has happened on parts of the Scottish network where 56 per cent of rail journeys are supervised by ticket examiners.

Charlie Gordon: Published correspondence shows that ScotRail management was not minded to have driver-only operation on the Airdrie to Bathgate line but that Transport Scotland instructed ScotRail to go ahead with those arrangements. Did Transport Scotland clear that with the minister?

Stewart Stevenson: It is important to realise that the proposal for the operation of the line came from First ScotRail. Of course, it is necessary to discuss the arrangements that are made with Transport Scotland, which supervises the franchise. The debate is about safety. I met the unions on 5 January and again in March, when I received the safety dossier. At every stage, we have sought and received advice from the Office of Rail Regulation, the Rail Accident Investigation Branch and the Rail Safety and Standards Board, on which the RMT is represented.

The advice to ministers, Transport Scotland and First ScotRail is clear. Indeed, given that we have published it, it is clear to everyone else. The advice confirms that ScotRail's proposal for a driver and ticket examiner operation on trains is a safe method of operating trains. The Airdrie to Bathgate service is an extension of the Helensburgh-Airdrie-Drumgelloch line; trains will go on to Bathgate and Edinburgh to form the new service. Currently, those trains operate with a driver and ticket examiner and the Airdrie to Bathgate section and beyond would naturally extend that operation. In Scotland, 47 million journeys a year already operate with that method.

I turn to financial issues. The ScotRail franchise contract does contain a clause that allows the franchisee to ask for reimbursement for net losses as a result of industrial action—

Bill Butler: On that point, will the minister assure the Parliament that taxpayers' money will not be used to indemnify First ScotRail under any circumstances whatever?

Stewart Stevenson: The contract that is before me is clear. I can absolutely tell Parliament and everyone else that we have not advised ScotRail on how to manage the strike. We have not made a decision to reimburse any losses that they can demonstrate, nor have we compensated ScotRail for losses from strike action or paid training costs that relate to the strike. In addition, if a claim is made, before we come to any conclusion—we are contractually obliged to do this under the franchise that we inherited—we will consult the STUC and the unions. That is an important safeguard.

Hugh O'Donnell: Will the minister give way?

Stewart Stevenson: I have to make progress. I still have quite a lot to cover in a short space of time.

It is important to note that, uniquely in the Great Britain rail network, the franchise contract for ScotRail specifies that a second member of staff, in addition to the driver, should be on board to perform revenue protection and customer care duties. Mary Mulligan raised the issue of women travelling alone. The important provision that I have described, which is unique in the GB rail

network, ensures that there is someone on board to look after the customers who use our trains. All staff who are on board are trained in evacuation procedures.

Different parts of our railway network have different technologies, so it is important that training fits those technologies. We have heard the expert opinions of the ORR, the Rail Accident Investigation Branch and the Rail Safety and Standards Board. It is clear from everything that has been said to me that driver and ticket examiner operation is an appropriate and safe method of operation for the Airdrie to Bathgate service.

Gavin Brown asked whether things have changed on the railways and whether details are available. He also talked about historical accidents. I will provide members with some context. We provided a copy of the dossier with which the RMT provided us to the three bodies that I have mentioned, who responded to its contents. They said that, intrinsically, the dossier does not necessarily give a complete picture. In the letters that they sent to us, they were clear about what is safe and appropriate. In its letter, the RSSB indicates that it carried out a review of data from March 2009 to December 2009, which showed that, where the driver opens the doors, the rate of injuries resulting from boarding and alighting from trains is one third that where train doors are opened from elsewhere.

It is important that we deliver this project on time and on budget, that we deliver the 130 additional jobs that will be created and that we continue to grow the railway network and the services on it. Since the beginning of this franchise, there has been a 25 per cent increase in employment on the railway network; there has been an increase in the number of conductors; and further services, with more conductors, are planned. The appropriate way in which to deal with the dispute is for First ScotRail and the RMT to sit down together. I urge them to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next item of business is timed for 14:50, so I suspend the meeting until then.

14:47

Meeting suspended.

14:50

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

Edinburgh Holiday Lets (Community Safety)

1. Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive, following the round-table meeting on 29 March 2010, what action it is undertaking in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council, local agencies and local communities to tackle antisocial behaviour and community safety issues arising from short-term holiday lets. (S3O-10370)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): Antisocial behaviour should not be tolerated wherever it occurs. Our framework for tackling antisocial behaviour, "Promoting Positive Outcomes", will help local agencies to work together in partnership with local communities and others so as to respond in a proportionate, appropriate and timely fashion.

I recognise the efforts that members have made—Sarah Boyack in particular—in raising the issue. I know that Sarah Boyack attended the meeting on 29 March, and I hope that she was encouraged by the commitment of local agencies, including the City of Edinburgh Council, Lothian and Borders Police and Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service, to address the matter. As was reflected by those who attended the meeting, the problem is best resolved locally. However, we remain in regular contact with local agencies, and we are keen to assist those agencies in practical ways to help to draw attention to the issue.

Sarah Boyack: I thank the minister for checking out what happened at that meeting. My constituents feel very let down following the meeting, given the lack of practical action. Although local agencies are willing to be supportive, they cannot do anything other than react. The prevention side is incredibly difficult to put into practice. Will the minister now consider prevention, and focus on the landlords of the holiday lets, rather than reacting afterwards? There was a serious public order and safety incident last month, which led to a huge police action, and there is now real fear and concern in the communities concerned.

Alex Neil: I appreciate the concern that local residents and their representatives, especially Sarah Boyack, have expressed. Tackling antisocial behaviour is primarily the responsibility of the criminal justice agencies and the police. I

am willing to meet Sarah Boyack to discuss the issue more widely.

We are planning a private housing bill later this year. If Sarah Boyack has practical suggestions to make, she should be aware that we are always open to talking to people and listening to their ideas.

Scottish Housing Quality Standard

2. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive which local authorities it categorises as being at high risk of not achieving the Scottish housing quality standard by 2015 for a significant proportion of their housing stock and what investment per housing unit is required in these authorities to deliver compliance of this housing stock. (S30-10395)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): The Scottish Government does not categorise local authorities as high, medium or low risk against achieving the Scottish housing quality standard by 2015. All local authorities have set out plans for how they will fund and comply with the quality standard by 2015 and they will report progress and updated projections to the Scottish Housing Regulator this autumn, and annually thereafter. That information will be used to inform the shared risk assessment exercise that is to be undertaken with other scrutiny bodies. We will publish draft guidance later this year to help landlords to interpret the SHQS and target their SHQS activity more cost effectively.

The estimated cost of meeting the SHQS across all local authority housing in Scotland between now and 2015, according to the landlords themselves, is approximately £6,000 per unit of the total housing stock. However, those costs have not been broken down by local authority, and they might include works that are not strictly required to meet the basic SHQS requirements.

Des McNulty: I find the minister's answer absolutely staggering. Not to have a risk analysis of what is happening by local authority in this regard—whereas there is one for registered social landlords—is quite disgraceful.

According to a paper that West Dunbartonshire Council discussed today, the council will not be able to bring all its dwellings up to the standard without increasing rents to a level that would make them unaffordable to many residents. According to a document that was circulated by Councillor Craig McLaughlin of West Dunbartonshire Council in 2008, £21 million of regeneration money was loosely earmarked for West Dunbartonshire. What happened to that early action money? Will the minister visit Salisbury Place, Clydebank east or south Drumry, in my constituency, to see the

conditions that people are living in as a result of the lack of investment from his Government?

Alex Neil: I recall that Mr McNulty was once a minister with responsibility for housing. The reality is that we inherited the target of 2015 from the previous Administration without any plan, let alone a risk assessment. As I said in my answer, we will undertake a risk assessment after the autumn, after the Scottish Housing Regulator reports on progress and updates projections. I think that Mr McNulty wrote his reply to my answer before I gave it, so I repeat—read my lips—that that information will be used to inform the shared risk assessment exercise with other scrutiny bodies. We are undertaking a risk assessment exercise for a target that is five years away.

Des McNulty: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I have in my hand the risk assessment that was available under the previous Administration. It is interesting that the minister said that we did not have a risk assessment and that he does not have one.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): That is not a point of order.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Did the minister hear the Prime Minister's interview with Jeremy Paxman on Friday night last, in which he said:

"Housing is essentially a private sector activity ... I don't see the need for us to continue with such big renovation programmes"?

Will he assure us that the Government in Scotland recognises that, in any decent society, the public sector bears much responsibility for ensuring decent housing standards?

Alex Neil: I heard the interview and was, to use a Des McNulty word, staggered by the way in which the Prime Minister completely wrote off the importance of social housing south of the border. Given the low level of investment in social housing by the Labour Government south of the border, I can understand those sentiments. However, north of the border, under this Administration, we have had record spend, approvals, starts and completions.

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): Given that the proposals in the Housing (Scotland) Bill to amend the right-to-buy rules would result in a loss of revenue to local authorities, will the Scottish Government give an assurance that it will replace that funding to ensure that, through their investment, local authorities are able to achieve the Scottish housing quality standard by 2015?

Alex Neil: As I explained last week to the Local Government and Communities Committee, of which Mary Mulligan is a member, our proposals to reform the right to buy would have only a

marginal impact on Scottish housing quality standard funding. Indeed, other factors—such as the continuation of the rental income from 18,000 houses that will remain in the rented sector instead of being sold off—mean that the overall impact of our right-to-buy proposals will have a positive effect, not only on the quality of housing in Scotland but on the number of houses that are available for rent in Scotland.

It is a pity that the main Opposition party will not come clean on whether it has a policy on modernising the right to buy or whether it is simply waiting to see what the Tories do so that it can follow in their footsteps.

Derelict and Vacant Urban Land

3. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it is taking regarding the amount of derelict and vacant urban land throughout Scotland. (S3O-10355)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): Over the financial period 2008 to 2011, we will allocate a £36.6 million vacant and derelict land fund to five local authority areas, namely Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Dundee and the Highlands. We will also publish the “Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land survey”—I am sure it will be a bestseller—which is an annual survey of all local authority areas to establish the extent and state of vacant and derelict land throughout Scotland.

John Wilson: Is the minister aware of the measures that North Lanarkshire Council is taking to rehabilitate the record amount of derelict and vacant urban land in its area, which is estimated to amount to 14 per cent of Scotland’s total? Is he aware that those measures have resulted in the council being awarded approximately £19.5 million between 2004 and 2011 to deal with the issue?

Alex Neil: Yes, I am aware of the activity in North Lanarkshire, which of course includes the very substantial Ravenscraig site. I take this opportunity to underline and reiterate our commitment to the development of Ravenscraig.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Does the minister agree that many vacant urban sites are ideal for affordable housing developments? What specific measures can he take to encourage such developments on vacant land?

Alex Neil: In addition to the five areas that qualify for assistance through the derelict and vacant urban land fund, housing associations and local authorities would qualify for housing association grant or, potentially, assistance with council house funding for housing developments in the social housing sector. As the member will know, this Government has engaged in assisting

housing associations and councils to build new houses in Scotland. In fact, between this year and next, we will build more than 3,000 new council houses in Scotland, which is a record about which I am sure that he will be very complimentary.

Scottish Futures Trust

4. James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to monitor the expenditure of the Scottish Futures Trust. (S3O-10383)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Arrangements for monitoring expenditure are guided by the management statement and financial memorandum that are agreed between the Scottish Futures Trust and the Scottish Government. Value for money is a core principle that guides the SFT’s expenditure. The SFT’s budget is approved annually by the Scottish Parliament. Funding that is drawn from that budget is paid only when detailed monthly invoices that are received by the SFT have been approved by the Scottish Government. The SFT is also required to appoint auditors to audit its accounts, which are passed to the Scottish ministers for consideration prior to the accounts being laid before Parliament.

James Kelly: Three years into this Scottish National Party Government, the Scottish Futures Trust has still not laid a brick. Meanwhile, the costs soar and the executives are paid film-star wages. What action is the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth taking to control costs? What action is he taking to generate the declared savings of £150 million? Or is that just another SNP fantasy?

John Swinney: The SFT is working to deliver value-for-money savings. I would have thought that any member of the Labour Party, which has set out a United Kingdom budget that involves swingeing cuts to public expenditure, would understand the need to maximise value for money and effectiveness in public expenditure. The SFT is undertaking that task. As I said, rigorous controls are in place to scrutinise its expenditure. The SFT is taking forward 16 specific infrastructure projects, including schools, the hub project, supporting the development of the Borders railway, the Forth replacement crossing, waste management infrastructure and a variety of other projects. Those are exactly the types of infrastructure projects that the Labour Party has been demanding be undertaken by this Government.

Roads (M74)

5. Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it plans to

rule out delaying the completion of the M74 junction 5 Raith scheme until 2013-14. (S3O-10380)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): We are considering the benefits of combining the M74 Raith junction scheme with the M8 Baillieston to Newhouse scheme and the M8, M73 and M74 network improvement schemes as a single contract to be funded by a non-profit-distributing model. The M74 Raith programme would be tied to the M8, a decision on which will be made shortly.

Charlie Gordon: If the Raith interchange scheme is put back on to the same timescale as the M8 Baillieston to Newhouse scheme, thus delaying it a year, what additional costs will fall on the Raith scheme? Can the minister guarantee that both schemes or the combined scheme will be ready in time for the 2014 Commonwealth games in Glasgow?

Stewart Stevenson: By consolidating many items of work into a single non-profit-distributing model, we are able to achieve economies of scale and reduce and manage the costs in an appropriate way. We have reached the point where we have all but completed the planning issues that are associated with that. We expect to make the remaining orders. We are making the best possible speed in bringing forward a long-awaited project.

Unemployment (Mid Scotland and Fife)

6. John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it is taking to assist unemployed people in Mid Scotland and Fife. (S3O-10399)

The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Keith Brown): Employment policy is, of course, reserved to the United Kingdom Government. However, the Scottish Government is taking every action possible within the scope of its responsibilities. In particular, skills and regeneration funding is supporting people across Scotland, including those in Mid Scotland and Fife. For example, in Fife, where the employment rate of 72.9 per cent is below the Scottish average, European social fund funding totalling £1.7 million has been awarded to the community planning partnership to help to tackle unemployment in the coming year. That is in addition to the £3.5 million that was allocated from 2008 to 2010.

John Park: I am surprised that the minister did not mention the work that partnership action for continuing employment has been taking forward. In my experience of dealing with a number of companies that have become insolvent or gone into administration, there is clearly a lack of

understanding among the administrators and insolvency practitioners about the activity that PACE can take forward. I would appreciate it if the minister looked at that issue as a matter of urgency. If he agrees to do so, I would be more than happy to provide him with a number of examples from Mid Scotland and Fife that would help him in his deliberations.

Keith Brown: In Fife, PACE activity has helped 434 employees, who were supported through intervention by Advanced Systems, the Co-op Group, Wincanton, Wallaces Express, Torith, Thomas Mitchell Homes, Ethel Austin, Fife Council and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. There is a great deal of work going on, but I am happy to look at the issue of whether people are sufficiently aware.

John Park might be aware that we have recently produced a very simple leaflet for small employers to ensure that they are fully aware of the options that are available to them. I am sure that John Park would want to acknowledge that in the case of a recession that has been imposed on us by elsewhere and a cut in the money that we have to deal with it, it is difficult to ensure that everybody gets the right solution. Perhaps it would be better if he took some advice from the Labour Party member who phoned Iain Gray this morning, who said that the Labour Party should accept responsibility for its own failures and stop blaming the Scottish National Party.

The Presiding Officer: Questions 7 and 8 have been withdrawn.

Alcohol (Minimum Unit Price)

9. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it plans to name its proposed minimum unit price for alcohol. (S3O-10367)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): As I advised the Parliament last week, we intend to bring forward a specific price before a final vote is taken by the Parliament. The Scottish Government is carefully working through the different issues that require to be taken into account to arrive at the price. I am sure that members agree that that process needs to be carried out in a careful and considered way.

Any regulation to propose a specific price will be subject to affirmative resolution procedure to ensure that there is an opportunity for Parliament to scrutinise the rationale and considerations that led to that specific price. Any order will be accompanied by a regulatory and competition impact assessment that is tailored to the proposed price.

Jackie Baillie: I note that the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill has been a long time in development. Fundamental to consideration of the principle of minimum unit pricing has to be whether it is effective. The European Commission has stated that it is important to consider a range of alternative measures that might have the same, if not a greater, public health impact, and that effectiveness is a key test. Will the cabinet secretary therefore give the Parliament an indication of whether the price will be 40p, as has been modelled by the Government, or 60p, as preferred by the majority of public health professionals, so that the Health and Sport Committee can determine effectiveness before the stage 1 debate?

Nicola Sturgeon: Yes, I will give that indication when the Government has done the work that is required to get to that point. That is a perfectly reasonable position. I had very constructive discussions on that issue with the Health and Sport Committee this morning. I am sure that Jackie Baillie will catch up with that.

The central problem is not any of the issues that Jackie Baillie raises but that Jackie Baillie has made her mind up on the issue before listening to any evidence. She says at this stage that she cannot support minimum pricing because we have not named the price. I predict that when the Government does name the price, she will suddenly decide that she cannot support minimum pricing because she does not agree with the level at which the price has been set. I urge Jackie Baillie and all members to open their minds to a proposal that can have a significant impact on health. That would do justice to the people of Scotland.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Given the Labour Party's understandable concerns about the impact of minimum pricing on low-income families and groups, I refer the cabinet secretary to her letter of today's date to the Health and Sport Committee, in which the final bullet point states:

"Low income harmful drinkers tend to drink more and are much more likely to be admitted to hospital or to die from an alcohol related cause."

Will she please expand on that?

Nicola Sturgeon: Christine Grahame raises an extremely important issue. If Labour Party members are genuine about it, they will listen to the point.

The research to which Christine Grahame refers, which has been furnished to the Health and Sport Committee today, shows two things. First, it shows that the vast majority of people in low-income groups—80 per cent of them, to be precise—do not drink at all or drink at moderate

levels and therefore would not be adversely impacted by minimum pricing. Secondly, although a small number of people in low-income groups drink at hazardous levels, people in that group are suffering disproportionate harm. They are five and a half times more likely to be admitted to hospital because of alcohol-related illnesses and are 13 and a half times more likely to die from such illnesses. Anyone who is concerned about the impact of alcohol misuse on low-income families and individuals will take those figures extremely seriously.

First Minister's Question Time

15:11

Engagements

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-2373)

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

Iain Gray: The centrepiece of the Government's programme for Scotland is the First Minister's draft referendum bill. How is it going? How many responses has he received to his consultation?

The First Minister: There have been 200 new responses to the consultation, which have—as they were asked to do—given us valuable insight and information on how the bill should develop. Therefore, I am hopeful that members will see the sense and logic of allowing the Scottish people to have a say in their own constitutional future. I certainly hope that the unholy alliance that has been developing between the Labour and Conservative parties, whereby in 74 per cent of the votes in this Parliament, Iain Gray and Annabel Goldie have been joined at the hip—metaphorically, of course—does not conspire to prevent the people of Scotland from having a say in their own constitutional future.

Iain Gray: The thing is that the people have had their say on the issue over a long time. The latest consultation is the second consultation on the third draft of a four-part referendum question that no one understands or—it appears—cares very much about. I have here all the previous consultations.

The Government's flagship policy is running out of steam. The consultation on it has received 200 responses, while the consultation on the cycling action plan, important as it is, received more responses. The truth is that no one is listening to Alex Salmond any more. Even his Braveheart bedroom bloggers can't be bothered responding to the latest referendum consultation. Exactly how much is this Alex Salmond vanity project costing the Scottish taxpayer?

The First Minister: It was not the Braveheart bloggers who managed to generate 600,000 hits on the national conversation website and to do 11,000 downloads of "Your Scotland, Your Voice". Given how badly researched the Labour Party in this Parliament is, we can safely assume that it did not manage to do one of those downloads.

I believe that the argument for a referendum is soundly based on the democratic instincts and constitutional traditions of Scotland. We now have

information that Labour supports a referendum in Wales on Wales's constitutional future, and the Prime Minister has produced a rabbit from the hat and said that he wants a referendum on alternative voting—an electoral system that, as far as I am aware, no one officially supports. Given that referendums are good enough in England and Wales, why on earth does the Labour Party oppose the right of the people of Scotland to have a say in their own future?

Iain Gray: If 600,000 people responded two years ago and there are 200 responses now, I think that that shows that people are losing interest.

I asked about the cost. Nicola Sturgeon told us in 2007 that the cost of this one-sided conversation would be £48,000. I thought that that was quite a lot of money, but three years later it is costing 40 times that amount: £2 million, including £750,000 on civil service wages alone. If Alex Salmond gets his referendum, that will be another £10 million that he intends to spend. When will the First Minister start thinking about what matters to Scotland instead of what matters to him?

The First Minister: Iain Gray is right: the cost of a referendum, whether it was on alternative voting or the equivalent of the referendum in Wales, would be £10 million in Scotland. That is an interesting figure: it is the annual cost of the Scotland Office. One of the great virtues of having a positive result in the referendum would be that we would be able to get rid of that cost not for one year, but for ever. That would be an enormous blow to the Labour Party but to no one else. No one else I know thinks that the Scotland Office is worth £1, let alone £10 million.

Iain Gray: Alex Salmond's problem is that although there is a real national conversation going on in Scotland right now, he is just not part of it. He must be the only person in Britain who thinks that the general election is about how many times he can get on television. In the election, the real national conversation is between Labour values—jobs, protecting tax credits for families, raising the minimum wage, and protecting schools, hospitals and the police—and Tory values, which are about cutting their way back into recession and tax cuts for the ultra-rich.

Let me tell members one thing that the national conversation is not about: it is not about a referendum that no one wants, with a question that no one understands, about a separation that no one believes in. The £12 million could be used to start investing in construction jobs or to re-employ the teachers that Alex Salmond has sacked and the classroom assistants that he has cut. Will the First Minister dump this expensive and pointless bill now?

The First Minister: There are many arguments for self-determination for Scotland, but I think that they have been coming to a head in this election campaign. Iain Gray will be familiar with the claims of David McLetchie, who was asked to answer for how the Tories would justify their right to run Scotland even if they won no seats here in tomorrow's election. His answer was clear: he would incorporate Labour Party votes and Liberal party votes and assimilate them into the Tory total, just as Margaret Thatcher did in the 1980s. The sad thing is that the Labour Party had no answer to it then and has no absolutely no answer to it now.

I cannot think of anyone who knows more about true Labour Party values in Scotland than Dennis Canavan, the former MSP. I have here Dennis's leaflet, which endorses the Scottish National Party in Falkirk.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S3F-2374)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the Secretary of State for Scotland in the near future.

Annabel Goldie: The chief executive of the Outward Bound Trust, Nick Barrett, supports a national citizen service as proposed by the Conservatives: "It's a great idea," he says. Stacey Adams, who is the chief executive of Raleigh International Trust, also supports it, saying that she

"would be happy to endorse the roll out of the NCS policy to Scotland."

Why, then, is the First Minister opposed to giving 16-year-olds in Scotland a chance to take part in this exciting new idea that has received such significant backing? If there is a Conservative Government in Westminster after Thursday—which I very much hope there will be—why will 16-year-olds in England and Wales get opportunities that 16-year-olds in Scotland will be denied by this SNP Government?

The First Minister: I make it clear that we are open to good ideas from wherever in the chamber they come, and we always will be. That is part of the art of minority government and why consensus has been reached on so many vital issues for Scotland. However, we want to know from the Conservative Party where the money would come from to fund the new scheme. I am sure that Annabel Goldie would not want to place the Government and Parliament in the position of having to cut funding from the thousands of volunteer places that are supported around Scotland at the moment. If Annabel Goldie can

use her influence to persuade George Osborne or David Cameron to answer the simple question that they have been asked over the past four weeks about whether they intend to tear up the current funding arrangements for Scotland without the consent or agreement of the Scottish Government or the Scottish people, perhaps we will get nearer to finding out whether, over and above all the other cuts that they plan in public services, there is a special Tory cut—a Cameron cut—aimed at the people of Scotland.

Annabel Goldie: Perhaps surprisingly, I am encouraged by the first part of the First Minister's response because he has not ruled out a very good idea, although less than a month ago he snubbed it completely. That shows that the power of Conservative argument can prevail.

I turn to the admittedly important issue of funding. The fact is that the First Minister and his Government have a perverse sense of priorities. Why does he think that it is better to spend £57 million a year on the provision of universal free prescriptions for people such as himself, who earn £150,000 a year? He is awash with money, including the resettlement allowance of £65,000 that he proposes to take, which is granted to people who give up politics, even though he apparently has no intention of doing any such thing. More is the pity. Even a fraction of the £57 million that is being used to provide universal free prescriptions would make a world of difference to the Scottish youngsters who would benefit from the scheme. Is the First Minister the only person who cannot see that?

The First Minister: Two things more than any others typify the traditional Conservative arguments in Scotland, which have been rejected so many times by the Scottish people. The first is anything that suggests—as Annabel Goldie just has—that the Conservatives are not committed to a national health service that is free at the point of need. It is not a great idea to put people who have chronic illnesses in the position of having to pay for prescriptions that they cannot afford in order that they can get the medicines that they require. The Tory party, which has taken generations to live down the attack that it does not trust or invest in the national health service, should be careful before it tries to make people pay for prescriptions by reversing the sensible policy of Nicola Sturgeon.

The other Conservative proposal that typifies conservatism in the current campaign, is that a few thousand people should, at a time when public spending is under extreme pressure, be given the benefit of millions of pounds through the inheritance tax cut. Those two policies alone will ensure that Annabel Goldie's party goes downwards, not upwards, in the ballot tomorrow.

The fact that the Conservatives are not prepared to answer about the specific Cameron cut that is aimed at Scotland will be the death knell of the Conservative party in Scotland.

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-2375)

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

Tavish Scott: Tomorrow, people will have the chance to vote for something different—to vote for real change with the Liberal Democrats. Whatever people decide, the Scottish Parliament must tackle the country's financial position responsibly. Last week, the SNP's London leader read out the usual SNP list of cuts but said that it was only a start.

"This is where we want to start",

he said. He went on:

"Beyond that, there have to be savings: of course, there have to be savings."

Last Thursday, the First Minister duly announced a programme of 2 per cent efficiency savings each year for the next three years. How will he ensure that the impact of his Government's savings will be fair?

The First Minister: As Tavish Scott should know, the SNP Government has been pursuing a 2 per cent efficiency savings programme—proofed, unlike the one south of the border—and has ensured its successful implementation, thanks to the excellent work of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, John Swinney. It is entirely reasonable that we continue such a programme, responding to the public sector challenge that will be presented to us by any one of the three London-based parties.

In fairness, Tavish Scott should have pointed to the other two aspects of the forward-looking programme that was presented by Angus Robertson and me. Tavish Scott briefly mentioned the second aspect, which is that we do not think that it is a good idea, at a time of stringency, to waste £100 billion on a Trident nuclear missile system. We also think that it is wrong to waste money on the remnants of the identity card system and nuclear dumps. We think it is wrong to waste £10 million on the Scotland Office, and we think that it is wrong to waste £100 million on the House of Lords. The choice of priorities will be one of the key decisions that is made by the Scottish people tomorrow.

The third aspect of the programme is how we invest in the economy to get Scotland back to

work and raise the rate of growth in Scotland through financial autonomy. Tavish Scott will have noticed in *The Herald* today that Scotland's leading businessman has now declared himself to be firmly in favour of that growth strategy for the future, through fiscal autonomy and getting people back to work in Scotland.

Tavish Scott: I am grateful to the First Minister for confirming that those are his plans. It was his announcement last Thursday; it is his Government. There will be 2 per cent cuts, then 4 per cent, then 6 per cent in the next three years, if the SNP has its way. That will take £3.5 billion out of Scottish public services, schools and hospitals. If anyone else proposed that, the First Minister would accuse them of living in London, but this Salmond slice is home grown. I want to know when the First Minister intends to publish the details. His economics paper last week included the admission that these were "back of the envelope" calculations. We applaud his candour, but can he assure us that the £3.5 billion Salmond slice is written on something rather more convincing? When will we get the details?

The First Minister: Is Tavish Scott now the only person who is unaware that the Liberal Democrats, in common with the Tories and the Labour Party, are planning substantial cuts to public spending across the spending departments of the UK, with spending cuts of £25 billion in Scotland? Is he the only person who is unaware that the Institute of Fiscal Studies says that the Liberal Democrats are concealing 75 per cent of their cuts programme? When we have a proofed efficiency savings programme, as pursued by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, Tavish Scott should be celebrating the honesty of this Government as opposed to the concealment of the Liberal Democrats.

I can say that some Liberal Democrats are aware of the consequences of the Liberal Democrat programme. On Monday, in Aberdeen, Vince Cable said that, as chancellor, he would be

"the most hated man in the country".

I suppose that that might be a case of going from St Vince to Stalin with no intervening period whatsoever.

Public Finances

4. Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government has studied the report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies on the United Kingdom's projected public finances and its impact on the case for Scotland becoming responsible for all taxation and spending in Scotland. (S3F-2383)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): As I have just mentioned, the Institute for Fiscal Studies'

report simply confirms the findings of the Scottish Government's analysis of the full scale of the savage cuts that the three London parties are determined to bring to Scotland.

The Scottish Government's analysis shows that, under current plans, we could see real-terms cuts of between £22 billion and £35 billion in Scottish public spending over the next 15 years if any of the three London parties has its way.

In fairness to the Liberal Democrats, I should point out that, although the Institute for Fiscal Studies confirms that the Liberal Democrats concealed 75 per cent of their planned cuts during the election campaign, it also says that the Labour Party has been concealing 87 per cent of its cuts and the Tories have been concealing 83 per cent of their cuts. That is why I heard a Liberal Democrat spokesman on the radio claiming that they were the honest party because they were concealing only 75 per cent of their possible cuts.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I thank the First Minister for that answer. The IFS report reveals that the three London-based parties are all alike in their determination to cut public services. The only difference between them is exactly how tough and how deep those cuts will be.

Does the First Minister agree that rather than punishing ordinary people by cutting services, a far better approach would be to cut the deficit by stimulating and growing the economy, an approach that has been recognised as the best option by many other nations in Europe and worldwide?

The First Minister: I agree; that has been recognised by many nations worldwide who have the advantage of controlling their own taxation systems and revenue bases. It is not just other nations that recognise that. I mentioned earlier that Scotland's leading businessperson acknowledged that in *The Herald* today. Let us have a look at Jim McColl's comment:

"We need to have a financially responsible Parliament in Scotland, with politicians taking the full responsibility for raising the money that it spends."

Scotland's recovery lies in the arguments for fiscal autonomy.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): Does the First Minister acknowledge that the real cuts that are taking place under his Government, which has an ever increasing budget, are those of the 2,500 teachers and the 1,000 classroom assistants who have lost their jobs? The cuts agenda is made here in Scotland by the First Minister. Does he agree with the Institute of Fiscal Studies report that says unequivocally that the package of measures that Labour seeks to introduce is the most progressive and least regressive, and that its impact on hard-working Scottish families makes it

the most attractive package available in what are very difficult circumstances, which the SNP has completely failed to address in any way whatsoever?

The First Minister: I am sure that the people of Scotland are taking careful note; we do not have to worry about Labour's cuts because they are "progressive" cuts. Andy Kerr denied that Scotland's budget was being cut by £500 million. Andy Kerr claimed, when economics institutes put forward the view that substantial cuts were coming, that they could not be forecast. Now that the Institute of Fiscal Studies has put the nail in Labour's coffin as it tries to conceal cuts, Andy Kerr says that we do not have to worry because they will be progressive cuts. Little wonder that Dennis Canavan is endorsing a Scottish National Party candidate.

Scottish Futures Trust

5. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government considers that the Scottish Futures Trust's spending of around £1 million on senior staff salaries and £400,000 on consultants represents good value for taxpayers' money. (S3F-2379)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Futures Trust is extremely good value for taxpayers' money. It is exactly the response that is needed to Labour's and the Conservative's costly private finance initiative experiment. Annual payments from PFI are scheduled to reach £1 billion over the next few years, a legacy that will continue to grow despite the significant funding cuts proposed by the London parties.

The SFT, in contrast, is delivering real value. For every pound spent there will be a minimum of £7 in public benefit. That commitment is being rolled out across Scotland, with 16 key projects attracting a total of £7 billion of investment.

Bill Butler: I would like to thank the First Minister for his gracious, accurate and self-effacing response but, as you know, Presiding Officer, I would never deliberately mislead the chamber. The First Minister should know that the majority of capital projects delivered by Labour employed traditional procurement methods, not that that prevents Mr Salmond turning up here, there and everywhere to cut the ribbon and take the credit for those projects. The truth is that, despite Mr Salmond's bluff and bluster, the Scottish Futures Trust is still fleecing and failing taxpayers. The SFT has failed to deliver a single hospital, classroom, transport project or school.

When will the First Minister admit to himself what the people of Scotland already know, that the

SFT is about hospitality not hospitals, consultants not classrooms and fiction not fact?

The First Minister: If I remember correctly, there was a time when Bill Butler was a critic of PFI—and so he should have been, if we consider one PFI project that he now seems to be supporting. The capital value of Hairmyres hospital in Lanarkshire was £60 million compared with the total unitary charge of £725 million that we will all have to pay in future. Shame on Bill Butler for now saying or implying that he supports PFI and its costly experiment, which will be a factor in Scottish budgets for years and years to come.

There is a point to be made here. In the record 260 schools that have now been completed and refurbished by this Government—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order. The point has been made.

The First Minister: It is a record that far exceeds that of any other Administration. Thanks to the work of this Government, more than half of those schools are not the result of PFI, public-private partnerships, traditional procurement or not-for-profit trusts. There has already been a change of emphasis that will be welcomed across Scotland by people who are fed up with paying through the nose for Labour's PFI.

National Health Service Funding

6. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government is satisfied that national health service boards can sustain service provision based on the funding allocation received in this year's budget. (S3F-2376)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Despite a cut in the Scottish budget, the NHS has received an increase in funding and we are doing all that we can to protect front-line services. NHS boards received an overall increase of 2.7 per cent in their initial allocations for 2010-11. Funding available to the boards is, of course, supplemented by the efficient government savings that are retained locally for reinvestment in front-line services. The combination of increases and local retention of savings will ensure that these priorities are safeguarded.

Mary Scanlon: With regard to assisting health services that are under threat due to growing demands, will the First Minister join me—for the first time—in welcoming the commitment made by the Conservatives not to make any in-year adjustments to this year's Scottish budget and to maintain spending on the NHS down south in future years, which will enable the Scottish Government to do exactly the same here if the First Minister shares our commitments and

priorities? Will he confirm that his Government will sustain spending on the NHS in Scotland?

The First Minister: I have already done that. I cannot welcome points about next year's budget with the same enthusiasm shown by Mary Scanlon, given the Conservatives' position that cuts will have to be implemented twice in the budget the year after. If Mary Scanlon could assist Annabel Goldie in getting a simple reply to the question whether the Conservative party wants to tear up the current funding formula without reference to the Scottish Government or the agreement of the Scottish people, I would be very much in her debt. That simple question is about the nature of the Conservative party's intentions towards Scotland. Is it genuinely concerned for Scottish public services or has it reverted to its anti-Scottish mode?

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): As the Government has a record of interfering in local health board decisions, will the First Minister ensure that Lanarkshire's out-of-hours service, which is currently under threat, is protected? Will he urge the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing to intervene in the matter?

The First Minister: Health boards implement policy. The member knows our record of protecting out-of-hours services and our commitment to the national health service in Lanarkshire and elsewhere.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Is the First Minister aware that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is planning to substitute almost 400 registered nurses with half the number of nursing assistants? The plan appears to be to cut numbers in half and then diminish the skill mix, showing complete disregard for nationally agreed workforce planning tools and, more serious, potentially compromising patient safety. Does the First Minister agree with that?

The First Minister: Patient safety comes first and the board is finding the appropriate skill mix in consultation with the unions. I would have thought that, in the face of the £500 million cuts in the Scottish budget, Jackie Baillie would have welcomed the fact that, thanks to the strength and resolve of Nicola Sturgeon and John Swinney, the national health service in Scotland has received such an increase this year. Everyone in Scotland now knows what the Labour Party plans for the future, and the credibility of Jackie Baillie and her Labour Party colleagues asking for public spending increases in Scotland has been fatally undermined by their own Chancellor of the Exchequer's threat of cuts that are deeper and tougher than those of Margaret Thatcher.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes questions to the First Minister.

Scottish Executive Question Time

Rural Affairs and the Environment

National Spring Clean Campaign

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

To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to the keep Scotland beautiful national spring clean campaign. (S3O-10427)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government funds Keep Scotland Beautiful as part of the zero waste Scotland programme to help to raise awareness of and, of course, participation in the excellent national spring clean campaign. The 2010 campaign has been by far the most successful yet. More than 83,000 volunteers took part in just over 1,400 clean-up events throughout Scotland in April. Our zero waste Scotland programme also funds Keep Scotland Beautiful to support local authorities and others in tackling litter on an on-going basis.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: A few weeks ago, I helped out with a clean-up on Leith Links as part of the national spring clean. Volunteers and passers-by expressed their anger and frustration with the small minority of people who continue to litter in their own communities, including on those fine links. What action is the Government taking to tackle littering, which continues to be a blight on our streets and our open spaces?

Richard Lochhead: Shirley-Anne Somerville highlights the sad fact that there are still many people in our society who drop litter, which is, of course, damaging to Scotland's image and our environment. I am delighted to hear that she took part in the spring clean, and hope that other members had the opportunity to do so as well.

A number of options are available to local authorities to tackle littering. They can provide infrastructure and they can make use of legislation to issue fines. Some local authorities in Scotland issue fines to people who have been caught littering, but others do not. I urge all local authorities to use the legislative tools that are available to them to tackle litter in their communities.

Deer Management

2. Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure best practice in deer management. (S3O-10413)

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): The Deer Commission for

Scotland works with land managers and stalkers to produce extensive guidance on best practice, and it holds demonstration events throughout Scotland. In addition, the prospective wildlife and natural environment bill will include provisions relating to collaborative deer management. I hope to set out proposals for that bill in the next few days.

Linda Fabiani: Can the minister assure me that recognition is given to stalkers in the central belt who deal with peri-urban deer, and that their views and requirements will be fully heard and taken into account in any future policies and training programmes?

Roseanna Cunningham: I confirm that the Government has carefully considered the issue of peri-urban deer, as deer seem to be appearing in built-up areas more frequently. That brings different challenges and problems from those that are faced with the normal way of managing deer. The issue is in our minds, and it has been in our minds when we have considered proposals for the wildlife and natural environment bill. The number of such deer is expected to increase, and I assure the member that the issue is and will continue to be at the forefront of our minds, as we expect the problem to get worse.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The minister is aware of the importance of red deer herds to the rural economies of many areas of the Highlands and Islands, such as the Helmsdale strath in Sutherland. Will she ensure that Scottish Government policy acknowledges the value and importance of red deer and gives our wild red deer herds the status that they deserve as an important part of Scotland's natural heritage rather than the status of vermin? Agencies have sometimes treated them as vermin in recent years.

Roseanna Cunningham: I hope that the member is not accusing the Government of treating the red deer herds as vermin. I have constantly asserted the importance to the rural economy of red deer, and it is worth reminding all members of that importance. Of course, deer are not farmed in the way that beasts are normally farmed, so significant problems sometimes arise that must be managed. However, most agencies and most people who are involved in Scotland's rural economy understand only too well how important red deer are to the future of Scotland.

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): Given the concern about the paths that deer use and the issues that that can cause, will the minister update the Parliament on the outcome of the investigation into the leaking of correspondence between her and the Home Office on paths in Balmoral? I suggest that she is owed an apology from some individuals in the Parliament and that the voters in the Rutherglen

and Hamilton West constituency deserve to know the full truth—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Ms McKelvie, that has nothing to do with deer management. We move to question 3.

Household Waste Collection

3. Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what its environmental policy is on the weekly collection of household waste. (S3O-10390)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): Any decision to implement fortnightly collections for residual household waste is a matter for individual local authorities, having had regard to local needs and circumstances. However, the Scottish Government recognises that the introduction of fortnightly collections for residual household waste can, when introduced in conjunction with a high-quality recycling service, significantly improve recycling rates and reduce the amount of waste that households produce in the first place.

Lewis Macdonald: The cabinet secretary will be aware that Aberdeen City Council plans to scrap weekly bin collections once the general election is safely out of the way tomorrow. What guidance has he issued to councils on the link between recycling and reduced collections of household waste? What percentage of organic waste must be separated from the general household waste stream before a local authority can scrap weekly bin collections?

Richard Lochhead: Councils have plenty of opportunities to learn from the experience of other local authorities that have adopted fortnightly collections. For instance, 19 of Scotland's local authorities already have fortnightly collections and Scotland's top 12 performing councils on recycling have adopted fortnightly collections. That speaks volumes about the link between the decision to adopt fortnightly collections and the recycling performance of the local authorities that do that. Plenty of information is available for local authorities through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and directly from the Scottish Government. However, each local authority is able to implement its own policy in that regard.

Bog Myrtle Plants (Funding)

4. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what alternative means of funding are available to subsidise nurseries to grow bog myrtle plants or fund growers to purchase plants, given that funding towards the purchasing of such plants is not eligible under the rural priorities scheme. (S3O-10356)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): As the member says, European Union rules are, unfortunately, clear on the issue—they prevent support towards the purchase cost and maintenance of such crops. However, for farmers and growers who are considering diversifying into new crops such as bog myrtle, the rural priorities scheme can provide support of up to 50 per cent—or 60 per cent for young farmers—of the costs that are associated with the provision or upgrading of buildings, new machinery or equipment and, of course, information technology. We will continue to look for other ways in which we can assist the sector. I welcome the decision last year by Highlands and Islands Enterprise to award almost £0.5 million of public funding to support Essentially Scottish Botanicals, which remains at the forefront in developing the potential of bog myrtle in Scotland.

Mary Scanlon: As the minister knows, there remains a huge economic opportunity for the exploitation of bog myrtle. The route to commercialisation of the crop lies with subsidising plant costs to promote economies of scale. Will the Scottish Government consider treating the commercialisation of the plant as a pilot to explore the vast opportunities and the potential of the industry?

Richard Lochhead: We are paying close attention to the success of the company that is involved in the field, which is an exciting one. I agree with the member about the potential, but we should not lose sight of the substantial public funding of £0.5 million over three years from Highlands and Islands Enterprise for that company. We must not leave the impression that no public support is being provided for companies to take up such commercial opportunities. I understand that current supplies of bog myrtle to the company are adequate, so it is not as though there is evidence of a requirement for further incentives to promote more growing of the crop. Of course, we will continue to monitor the situation closely, because we agree that bog myrtle has huge potential for the Scottish economy.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): Why does an industry that produces a product that is claimed successfully to mitigate the ravishes of ageing—and so should be widely in demand—need public sector support in these difficult financial times? Does the cabinet secretary share my confidence in the robustness of the private sector, which is so obviously not shared by the questioner?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am not sure that that has anything to do with bog myrtle. I will allow the cabinet secretary to respond briefly, but I am not happy with the question.

Richard Lochhead: Ian McKee has just made the best-possible advert for the use of bog myrtle in Scotland. No doubt sales will rocket and it will become an even more commercially attractive enterprise.

Waste Management

5. Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it is making on meeting its targets on waste management. (S3O-10392)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): Since devolution in 1999, local authorities have made excellent progress. Recycling performance has improved from 5 per cent to just under 36 per cent for the rolling year to September 2009. Local authorities continue to make progress towards the 2010 target of 40 per cent recycling and composting and I have every expectation that local authorities will maintain that momentum.

In addition, Scottish local authorities have continued to make progress in contributing to meeting Scotland's share of the UK landfill directive target, which is to divert biodegradable municipal waste from landfill. In 2008, Scotland's landfill total was 1.79 million tonnes of biodegradable municipal waste against a target of 1.8 million tonnes. That suggests that the 2013 target has been met already.

Michael McMahon: Has the cabinet secretary heard the expressions of concern that have been brought to my attention by companies that seek to be involved in the management of waste at local authority level? They are continually being refused planning permission to operate in the waste management field. Although it is always a good idea to wash one's hands after handling waste, surely it is not a good idea for the Scottish Government to wash its hands of ensuring that local authorities work with those companies and deal with the planning permission problems, so that waste is processed throughout Scotland and some local authority areas do not become dumping grounds when other local authorities refuse to accept the facilities in their area.

Richard Lochhead: I do not think that the member is suggesting that the Scottish Government should take away planning powers from local authorities. Of course, local authorities will have their reasons for the decisions on the applications that are lodged for waste management facilities. However, I agree with the member that Scotland has to face up to its responsibilities for managing its waste. That might require some difficult decisions in the years ahead.

The chamber will be interested to know that we are due to publish our zero waste plan for

Scotland in the next few weeks. The Parliament will have one final opportunity to influence the plan next week in our parliamentary debate. I hope that Michael McMahon and others will take part in that debate and have their views heard. I assure all members that the views of the waste management industry have been taken into account in our zero waste plan and that local authorities are at the heart of how we will develop it.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): In advance of next week's debate, does the minister agree that we need a joined-up approach, both between local authority areas so that we manage down the amount of waste that is created in Scotland, and between the domestic and non-domestic sectors so that they work together to reduce the amount of waste arisings in Scotland, rather than treating both waste arisings separately, particularly given the huge amount of non-domestic waste that is produced in Scotland every year?

Richard Lochhead: Sarah Boyack might be pleased to hear me say that I could not agree more with her point. She will recall that, like her, I have made the point many times in the chamber that, for a long time, we have picked the low-lying fruit of household recycling, which has been immensely valuable in getting the public on board for the recycling task that we face as a nation. Of course, the majority of waste is produced by the commercial and industrial sectors, so joining up the domestic with the non-domestic sources of waste is certainly the way forward. I hope that I give comfort to the chamber by saying that that has been taken on board in the zero waste plan and we look forward to hearing members' views in next week's debate.

Environmental Protection Legislation (Review)

6. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency regarding a review of environmental protection legislation. (S3O-10434)

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): We have regular discussions with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency on improving the effectiveness of environmental protection legislation and reducing regulatory burdens on businesses while continuing to protect the environment and human health.

Robert Brown: Is the minister aware that, according to SEPA's enforcement report for 2008-09, the average fine that Scottish courts imposed in environmental cases that SEPA referred for prosecution reduced from £6,538 in 2006-07 to only £2,511 in 2008-09? The equivalent figures in England were £6,326 and £7,193. In other words, last year, an offender in England would have

suffered three times the fine that was imposed on an offender in Scotland for activities such as discharging sewage into burns, allowing diesel oil to pollute a loch and illegal burning of nasty wastes. Does the minister see why people demand a review of the effectiveness of the legislation? Is she concerned that, in the words of a national newspaper, Scotland risks being the UK's "polluter haven" because of the discrepancy between fine levels in Scotland and England?

Roseanna Cunningham: I assure Robert Brown that the Government and SEPA have serious concerns about the developing trend that suggests that offences are not being taken as seriously as they should be. He might be slightly mollified when he understands that proposals are being discussed for addressing the situation. They include adopting civil sanction powers and encouraging more significant penalties when cases reach the courts. We are discussing options with solicitors on both those points. The discussions are not concluded, but I very much assure Robert Brown that it is precisely because of what has happened that we are having the discussions.

Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009

7. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what consideration has been given to planning and flood risk as a consequence of the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009. (S3O-10375)

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): The consolidated Scottish planning policy, which was published in February 2010, sets out the Scottish Government's planning policies on flooding and refers to elements of the 2009 act that are relevant to the planning system.

Helen Eadie: Does the minister recall that, at stage 3 of consideration of the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill, the Scottish Parliament agreed to amendment 13 but disagreed to amendment 14? Does she further recall saying that she would need

"to go away and have a look at"—[*Official Report*, 13 May 2009; c 17394.]

the fact that, although a flood risk assessment will have to be prepared, no one will have to consider it? When considering that, will she be mindful of the shocking intention of the developer Eadie Cairns to build on one of the least suitable pieces of land in Scotland, at St David's bay, which has a serious risk of flooding? To support that assertion, I shall send her pictures that were taken following the dreadful storms at Easter.

Roseanna Cunningham: I look forward to receiving details from Helen Eadie about the concern that she has raised. We must accept that

the 2009 act is still being brought into force, so some of what she has discussed has not commenced yet. However, I reassure her that we are discussing in detail flood risk assessments and the requirements on them in the 2009 act. I hope that the results of that will satisfy her. If not, I am sure that she will be in touch with me.

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP):

The minister will know that the Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research conference took place at Our Dynamic Earth in February. Its promotional material suggested that policy makers and decision makers from local authorities should attend. What powers does the minister possess to require councils to participate in such events, particularly from a planning perspective? Not all Scotland's local authorities attended the conference and one absentee was Inverclyde Council, which has yet again proved its inadequacy in tackling the flooding problems in Inverclyde.

Roseanna Cunningham: I assure Stuart McMillan that Inverclyde Council was represented at a Government-sponsored event, which was separate from the conference to which he referred. Sadly, I am unable to instruct local authorities to attend conferences. Nevertheless, Inverclyde Council has begun to engage directly with officials on flooding issues. I hope that the pressure that Stuart McMillan has continued to bring to bear on the council, of which I am well aware, is beginning to bear fruit.

Justice and Law Officers

Drugs (Prisons)

1. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to reduce the incidence of drug taking in prisons. (S3O-10443)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Scottish Prison Service is committed to reducing the harm that is caused by substance misuse. Security measures are in place to reduce the supply of illegal drugs into prisons. Treatment and care of and support for prisoners who are recovering from drug use is provided through services that are broadly equivalent to those that are available in the community.

Iain Smith: The cabinet secretary will be aware that, in the recent report on Perth prison by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland, HM chief inspector of prisons for Scotland said that

"89% of prisoners tested positive for illegal substances on admission ... On liberation this is 28%."

I am sure that the cabinet secretary agrees that the figures are unacceptably high.

Does the cabinet secretary also agree that it is unacceptable that many people have to wait more than a year for drug treatment and assessment, including for community-based treatment, and that 30 per cent of people have to wait more than 26 weeks for rehabilitation in residential establishments? Does he agree that some of the 89 per cent of prisoners who tested positive for illegal substances would not be in prison had they received community-based treatment? Would that not be a better way forward?

Kenny MacAskill: Yes. We all accept that we have to try to do more, and do it better. Clearly, problems at Perth prison were flagged up, but we should remember that the report from HM chief inspector of prisons was, overall, quite supportive of the prison. I have spoken to him about it and visited the prison. We also have to remember the nature of the people whom the Prison Service deals with. According to recent drug testing statistics, 71 per cent of prisoners who were tested on reception had illegal drugs in their system. By way of comparison, on liberation, the figure was down to 29 per cent. Clearly, the figure is still far too high, but significant progress is being made. The Prison Service deals with very difficult and, at times, dangerous individuals.

Kirkcaldy Business Improvement District

2. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will support the Kirkcaldy business improvement district's aims of creating a safe and welcoming town centre and reducing crime through collaboration with local police and joint initiatives such as pubwatch, radio link and child safe. (S3O-10386)

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): We are fully supportive of business improvement districts because they enable businesses to work together and have the potential to boost the local economy in these challenging times. We are providing more than £770,000 of funding to the Scottish Business Crime Centre, which is fully involved with the business improvement district's aim of making Kirkcaldy safe and welcoming by reducing antisocial behaviour and retail crime. The SBCC is providing advice and support in Kirkcaldy to help with the implementation of a whole series of excellent initiatives, including retail radio link, best bar none, safer parking areas, taxi marshals and the safer areas scheme. The SBCC provides such advice throughout Scotland, keeping very many towns safe.

Marilyn Livingstone: I hear what the minister said about the £770,000, but will the Government sustain that funding to ensure that collaboration continues? Does he agree that town centres are crucial to the social and economic wellbeing of our

communities? Will he continue to fund town centre regeneration?

Fergus Ewing: As I mentioned, we have provided £770,000 to the SBCC. Funding to deal with antisocial behaviour comes in part from local authorities. I pay tribute to the community safety partnership in Fife, which I have visited. As the member knows, I have visited Kirkcaldy to see the very good work that goes on in her constituency and which she rightly supports. I am keen to work with all partners to ensure that the necessary funding is continued, which—with the support of more than 500 local businesses—will allow all those successful initiatives in Kirkcaldy to continue, thereby further driving down crime and antisocial behaviour and making Kirkcaldy the safe and welcoming place that we know it to be.

Knife Crime

3. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on tackling knife crime. (S3O-10412)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Crime in Scotland is at its lowest level since 1980, with violent crime at its lowest level since 1986. Since 2007, we have seen offensive weapons crimes drop by 11 per cent and average sentences go up by 145 days. The average sentence for knife carrying is now more than eight and a half months. That means that Scotland is safer than it has been for a generation. However, we recognise that we cannot be complacent. That is why we are putting record numbers of police officers on the streets, providing record investment in the national violence reduction unit and supporting innovative initiatives such as no knives, better lives and the community initiative to reduce violence, which is a project for Glasgow gangs that tackles the causes and consequences of knife crime.

Bob Doris: I draw the cabinet secretary's attention to another statistic. Glasgow, for which I am a member of Parliament, is part of the Strathclyde Police area. In the past two years, there has been a fall in the number of incidents in which a knife has been used as an offensive weapon in the area. Had the number of offences remained at the level at which it stood in the final year of the previous Labour-Lib Dem Executive, there would have been 1,530 more knife crimes, but it has fallen; in the first two years of this Government, there were 1,530 fewer knife crimes.

Will the cabinet secretary stand firm on the good work that is being done in relation to the proceeds of crime, the violence reduction unit and additional police officers? Will he ensure that the message is clear—I hope, on a cross-party basis—that dangerous criminals will go to jail for more than six months and that those who are not a danger to

society will get tough, hard community payback sentences? Let us take the party politics out of such an important issue.

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. I am happy to record the thanks of the Government—and, I presume, the whole chamber—to the chief constable of Strathclyde Police, Stephen House, and every one of his officers for their actions. They have made tremendous progress. The Government is delighted to have ensured that there is a record number of police officers in Strathclyde, as elsewhere. It is important that we record and remember that homicide is at its lowest level in 10 years in the city of Glasgow and at its lowest level in 20 years in the city of Edinburgh. The Government intends to ensure that we have tough laws and that those are enforced. Equally, we intend to divert those who would otherwise fall into mischief and crime. That is why we must continue to tackle not just crime but the causes of crime.

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): The cabinet secretary may talk tough, but in reality the policies that he follows are soft touch. Is it not the case that, under his plans to scrap six-month sentences, two thirds of knife criminals would go free? Against the backdrop of such shocking knife crime statistics, is it not time for the cabinet secretary to think again?

Kenny MacAskill: The statistics are quite clear: fewer people are carrying, more police are out there, and those people who are carrying are facing severe consequences from our courts. That is down to the hard work and effort of individual officers, from the newest constable to the chief constable, and to the tough action that sheriffs and other members of the judiciary are taking, fully supported by the Government.

Racially Aggravated Crime

4. Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to tackle racially aggravated crime. (S3O-10436)

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): The Scottish Government is working towards a Scotland that embraces diversity and is a place where people of all backgrounds, irrespective of their race, faith, belief and place of birth, feel respected and have a sense of belonging. We support work that helps to tackle and prevent racism in all its guises through investing in Scottish police forces to put more police officers on our streets and in our communities. We are also providing more than £9 million of funding between 2008 and 2011 to organisations that aim to tackle racist attitudes and improve the lives of minority ethnic communities in Scotland, including refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers and Gypsies/Travellers.

Jim Hume: Scottish Government statistics that were released last week show that, in Dumfries and Galloway and in Grampian, there has been an increase in the number of racist incidents. In Dumfries and Galloway last year, the number of such incidents rose by about 50 per cent, from 64 to 96. There was an increase of a similar percentage in the total number of racist crimes. What extra steps will the minister take to ensure that those worrying statistics are addressed in Dumfries and Galloway and other rural areas such as Grampian?

Fergus Ewing: I agree that the figures that the member cites are worrying, although I point out that the figure for 2006-07 was higher still than the figure for last year to which he alluded. Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary says that the rise is in keeping with its expectations, following increased proactivity in the area. The police force's work to widen accessibility and confidence includes improved third-party reporting and close working with multicultural associations. We have assisted with funding of local citizens advice bureaux.

I make the serious point that the statistics do not record every racist incident that takes place in Scotland, because not all incidents are reported to the police. An increase in police proactivity in this area is bound to lead to more prosecutions.

I am delighted to share with members the glad news that we have delivered on our promise of 1,000 extra police officers on the streets in Scotland. As at 31 December 2009, there were 17,273 police officers in Scotland, who take seriously their duty to tackle racially motivated crime.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): Will the minister accept my congratulations on the fact that he succumbed to pressure from the Conservatives to ensure that policing resources were in place?

Does the minister agree that he would be more likely to reassure Mr Hume and the rest of us in the Parliament, who are genuinely worried about the incidence of race-related crime, if he did not follow his Government's stupid, futile and downright irresponsible policy on the inhibition of six-month jail sentences? Accordingly, will he accept that the Justice Committee, in its infinite wisdom, was quite correct to change that measure in the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill?

Fergus Ewing: Bill Aitken started well, but he tailed off rather badly.

The incidence of racist crime is a very serious matter. The Scottish picture is slightly different, in that the number of incidents has decreased for the second year in a row—modestly, but significantly.

The Crown Office takes an extremely serious attitude to all crimes involving prejudice. These are extremely serious matters, which I am sure command a cross-party consensus in the Parliament.

Knife Crime (Grampian)

5. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to tackle knife crime in Grampian. (S3O-10368)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Scottish Government is working with the police-led violence reduction unit to tackle violence throughout Scotland. Reducing violence is a force priority for Grampian Police, which undertakes a range of activities specifically to tackle knife crime. The work of Grampian Police, alongside that of local community safety partners, has contributed to a 9 per cent reduction in violent crime, a 2.5 per cent reduction in handling offensive weapons and a 21 per cent increase in convictions for possession of offensive weapons in the force area since 2006-07.

Grampian Police is actively involved in the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland's continuing anti-violence campaign, which is organised by the violence reduction unit. The force has recently been deploying Scottish Government-funded Ferroguard metal detectors throughout the Grampian area, including as part of operation oak, which promotes safety in Aberdeen city centre. Grampian Police also works in partnership with schools to educate young people about the dangers and consequences of knife carrying.

Richard Baker: Grampian Police does a great job, but last year Aberdeen was second only to Glasgow for knife murders, of which there was an increase. What dialogue has the cabinet secretary had with the force on further action to tackle knife crime locally? Given that thousands of Scots support the moves for mandatory minimum sentences to help tackle knife crime, to which the Justice Committee agreed during its stage 2 consideration of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill, is it really the cabinet secretary's intention to delete those provisions during stage 3 consideration of the bill?

Kenny MacAskill: I have regular dialogue with each and every chief constable—I met Chief Constable McKerracher not that long ago. It came as a surprise to me to find out that my predecessors had not done so. I am delighted to have that dialogue, as well as meeting representatives of ACPOS.

I was also delighted to appear at a meeting in Glasgow last week at which I was joined on the platform by Allan Burnett, former assistant chief

constable with Fife Constabulary and head of counter-terrorism in Scotland. I was delighted that, the day after he resigned, following many successful and hard-working years' service as a police officer, he chose to join the Scottish National Party. That shows the commitment that many officers have, and the reciprocation of the support that we have given, with many senior officers now supporting the Government. I assure Mr Baker that Mr Burnett is not alone—there are more to come in support for the Government.

Lothian and Borders Police (Meetings)

6. Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when the Cabinet Secretary for Justice last met representatives of Lothian and Borders Police. (S3O-10371)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): I met Chief Constable David Strang on 12 April at the latest meeting of the Scottish policing board, where a number of issues of importance to policing in Scotland were discussed. I will be meeting him for a private discussion, as I mentioned to Mr Baker, later this month.

Rhona Brankin: When the cabinet secretary had his meeting, did he discuss the prospect of voluntary redundancy being offered to members of Lothian and Borders Police's 1,400-strong civilian staff, who support front-line officers? Many of them work in the force's communications centre at Bilston Glen in my constituency. Is the situation not a direct consequence of cuts to the Lothian and Borders Police budget imposed by the Scottish National Party Government? As cutting civilian staff means that police officers will have to come off the beat to do the jobs of the civilian staff, surely the SNP pledge on police numbers is now exposed as utterly meaningless.

Kenny MacAskill: There are no cuts to the police budget. Ms Brankin should know that. Equally, any operational decisions involving Bilston—I have visited the control centre there—are matters for the chief constable, for which he will be held to account by the police board convener. Indeed, I will meet the police board conveners shortly.

I reiterate that Lothian and Borders Police does excellent work. That is why we have the lowest homicide rate in the city of Edinburgh—indeed, in the whole of Lothian and Borders—for 20 years. We also have the lowest recorded crime rate in Scotland for a generation.

Public Safety (Financial Constraints)

7. Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of any financial constraints expected to be inflicted up on it by the next United Kingdom Government, what

action it is taking to make sure that Scotland's streets remain safe. (S3O-10425)

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): Police funding in Scotland is at a record level. In 2010-11, we are increasing the police grant by 3.1 per cent, although we face the imposition on Scotland by the United Kingdom Government of a £400 million cut in planned expenditure. In addition, we are meeting the full costs of the recruitment, training and salaries of 1,000 extra officers.

The Scottish Government will fight for Scotland's interests in any future UK budget settlement and will continue to work to ensure that the resources allocated to us are used in the best interests of the people of Scotland, which includes keeping our streets safe.

Stuart McMillan: What changes, if any, at the senior levels in Scotland's police forces will occur or are planned in light of the next UK Government—of whichever colour—slashing Scotland's budget? What guarantees will the minister provide that the numbers of front-line police officers, including the welcome 1,000 extra police officers that the Scottish National Party Government has introduced, will be maintained?

Fergus Ewing: We have no plans to make changes at senior levels across Scottish forces. Our commitment to front-line policing is absolutely clear and our record speaks for itself. The most recent figures show that there are 17,273 police officers in Scotland, which is 1,039 more than there were at March 2007. We are working closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, chief constables and police board conveners to ensure that our forces work as efficiently as possible so that front-line police numbers can be maintained.

Alcohol and Drug Partnerships (Referrals)

8. Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the Minister for Community Safety monitors how many people have been referred for methadone and detox-based rehabilitation by the alcohol and drug partnerships and have sought such treatment. (S3O-10357)

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): The number of new drug treatment interventions that services offer, including substitute prescribing and residential rehabilitation, is currently monitored using the drug treatment waiting times information framework. To reduce waiting times and ensure that people can access treatment when they need it, we have introduced a national health improvement, efficiency, access and treatment target. Under that target, by March 2013, 90 per cent of people who need help with

their drugs problem will wait no longer than three weeks for treatment. We are also introducing a new data collection system, which will be in place by April 2011 and will allow us to track the treatment of individuals moving towards recovery.

Nanette Milne: It is accepted that a drug-free life is preferable to one on long-term substitutes such as methadone, and the addicts who have achieved that to whom I have spoken say that they could not have done so without a prolonged spell of residential detox-based rehabilitation, such as that provided at the Alexander Clinic in my region. Therefore, does the minister agree that his figures should be used to inform the required level of such provision? When can we expect an adequate level of residential rehab provision for those who need and want it?

Fergus Ewing: I appreciate Nanette Milne's interest in the topic. The drugs strategy, "The Road to Recovery: A New Approach to Tackling Scotland's Drug Problem", to which all parties in the Parliament agreed, recognises that there are many different routes to the road to recovery, depending on the needs of each individual.

We recognise that residential rehabilitation is one of those routes and that it works for some people. Equally, many other types of treatment and support work for other people. I am very pleased to be visiting, on a ministerial engagement on Monday, Castle Craig hospital, which is one of the establishments that provide important residential support. I look forward to visiting Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire ADPs in June to learn more about their record in Nanette Milne's area, which includes the stupendous effort of reducing from 500 the number of people waiting for assessment in 2008 to three in the most recent quarter. Many congratulations are due to everyone who has worked to achieve that stupendous improvement in performance.

Business Motions

16:20

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-6253, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 12 May 2010

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by European and External Relations Committee Debate: European Commission Legislative Work Programme

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Zero Waste Plan

followed by Preliminary Stage Debate: William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc.) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 13 May 2010

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

followed by Members' Business

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Finance and Sustainable Growth

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: NHS Quality Strategy

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 19 May 2010

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 20 May 2010

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12.00 pm First Minister's Question Time

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

2.55 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

and (b) that, for the purposes of Members' Business on Thursday 13 May 2010, "at the end of First Minister's Question Time and at the end of the meeting following Decision Time" be substituted for "at the end of the meeting following Decision Time" in Rule 5.6.1(c) of Standing Orders.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-6254, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out an extension to the stage 1 timetable for the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be extended to 28 May 2010.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-6255, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out an extension to the stage 2 timetable for the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill at Stage 2 be extended to 21 May 2010.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

16:22

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): We now come to decision time. As there are no questions to be put as a result of today's business, I close the meeting.

Meeting closed at 16:22.

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