



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 2 June 2010

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**Wednesday 2 June 2010**

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**HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE**

**20<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2010, Session 3**

**CONVENER**

\*Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab)

\*Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

\*Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP)

\*Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP)

\*Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

\*Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

**COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES**

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP)

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

\*attended

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Douglas Wands

**LOCATION**

Committee Room 4



## Scottish Parliament

### Health and Sport Committee

*Wednesday 2 June 2010*

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Christine Grahame):** I welcome you all to the 20<sup>th</sup> meeting this year of the Health and Sport Committee. I ask everyone to switch off mobile phones and any other electronic equipment. No apologies have been received.

Item 1 on the agenda is to seek the committee's agreement to consider its work programme in private at a future meeting. Is that agreed?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Subordinate Legislation

### Sports Grounds and Sporting Events (Designation) (Scotland) Order 2010 (SSI 2010/199)

10:01

**The Convener:** Item 2 is consideration of a negative instrument. Members have a copy of the instrument with their papers as well as a cover note from the clerk that summarises its purpose. Members have no comments, so are we content not to make any recommendations on the instrument?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## European Commission Work Programme 2010 to 2014

10:02

**The Convener:** Item 3 is consideration of a paper from the clerk on European Union matters that are of relevance to the remit of the committee. Do members have any comments?

**Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** I am disappointed with what is in the paper. I was involved with Ben Wallace, the former MSP, in ensuring that the post of European officer was created. As I understand it, his job is to anticipate what is coming over the horizon. Different priorities emerge with each presidency. For example, during the Spanish presidency, it became clear that the Spanish were the main opponents of cross-border health care provision, which was defeated at that time. That is not to say that the issue will not re-emerge, although it is not flagged up in the paper. Although the paper sets out the work plan, each presidency can give rise to other issues relating to that country's priorities for the work of the European Commission, and no provision has been made for that in the paper.

It appears to me that the paper has also been drafted in a vacuum of not knowing the Government's intentions for its work. As we know, Richard Lochhead regularly goes to Europe and reports back to the Parliament. However, to my knowledge, the European and External Relations Committee has never had a report back from any minister other than Fiona Hyslop and her predecessors. I request that, as an action point, we write to the Government, asking about its plans with regard to the European Commission work programme. We should also learn, at the changeover of the presidency, what the priorities of the next presidency are.

Those are my two major concerns about the paper. We should also keep a close eye on the issues that are highlighted in it and get updates from the European officer more frequently than just once a year. I do not think that he is earning his salary as far as this committee is concerned. I expect a much more proactive report from that official of the Parliament.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I would not go quite as far as Helen Eadie, but I suddenly remembered that we had a European officer when I received the paper. This is the first that we have heard of him since our away day in August.

Like Helen Eadie, I thought that we were to be kept informed and updated on particular issues. One issue that we have discussed in the past—

both in the committee and at our away day—on which I would welcome an update, as I am not aware that the matter is off the agenda, is the European Union's cross-border health care proposal. I would like an update on the single market for health. I understand that there is a Department of Health ruling on that.

A second issue that it would be appropriate to mention is the labelling of alcohol, which has been discussed in the European Parliament and to which I know that it wanted to achieve a consistent approach. For example, some wines are stronger than others. Something simple is required. However, there is absolutely nothing in the paper on that. I do not wish to criticise the European officer, but I do not think that we are being kept fully informed and up to date on EU matters.

**The Convener:** To clarify, the cross-border health care issue has dropped off the agenda under the new presidency. It might have been useful if the report had told us what is no longer happening.

**Mary Scanlon:** I would not have known that. Given that the issue had such a high profile, I am amazed that it has dropped off the agenda and, as a member of the committee, I would like to know the reasons for that.

**Helen Eadie:** It has not dropped off the agenda permanently. I have been monitoring the issue carefully and working with the trade unions on it. The Spanish campaigned strongly against the cross-border health care proposal so, under the Spanish presidency, it was never going to make the work programme. As we know, the presidency changes every six months, which means that, under the next presidency, it is possible, although not guaranteed, that the matter will become a priority again. Cases will continue to be taken to the European Court of Justice and emerging court decisions will influence what happens. I just want to make it clear that the issue has not disappeared entirely off the agenda.

**The Convener:** I was just trying to clarify the situation. If members are content, we will ask for an update on the European cross-border health care proposal, among other issues. We will ask the officer to report to us on that by letter and then, if necessary, we can call him to a meeting to discuss the issue.

**Mary Scanlon:** On that issue, I have read a Department of Health guideline that, from memory, stated that if there was undue delay relating to surgery in the national health service in the United Kingdom, the patient had a right to go to their health board to ask it to pay for the operation. Once the person had that agreement, they had a right to be treated throughout the European Union. I do not simply want an update on what has fallen

off or fallen on to the agenda, or on hearsay. As elected members of Parliament, we are entitled to proper updates about the European Union. I want an update on the Department of Health guideline to find out whether it is still relevant, aside from the issue of whether cross-border health care has fallen off or on to the agenda.

**The Convener:** The easiest thing to do is, at the end of the discussion, once all members have spoken, to point the European officer to the *Official Report* of the meeting and ask him to address the points that have been raised. Some of the points might be for the Government to address.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** New guidelines are being issued, which come into force this summer. I have received a note of them. They are different from the previous ones. Anyone will be entitled to seek medical care in any part of Europe, in spite of the waiting lists. The Government says that that will not have an impact because the waiting lists are short. It will become a right for any individual to be treated in any part of Europe. That is a big difference.

**Mary Scanlon:** We need to know that.

**The Convener:** That is on the record.

**Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP):** Obviously, I have an interest in the issue, as the deputy convener of the European and External Relations Committee. We are confusing two different things. The presidency work programme is different from the Commission's work programme. The paper relates to the Commission's work programme. For the first time, the Commission has published a three-year programme, rather than the normal annual programme. That is helpful, because it allows us to identify issues that the Commission will consider in the next three years. The problem with the presidency work programme is that it changes every six months. The vast majority of things that various presidencies seek to do never get anywhere in the first place.

The disappointing feature of the paper is that it falls back into the mistake that subject committees have been making for some time now, which is largely to keep a watching brief on issues. The problem is that when the Commission starts to consult on an issue, it often gives only eight weeks for views to be formulated and then submitted to that consultation process. If we only keep a watching brief, we are often not in a position to submit something to the Commission when it starts a consultation.

We have a very able European officer. Ian Duncan does an exceptionally good job for this Parliament as an individual over in Europe, and I see that at first hand in the European and External Relations Committee.

It is very important for us to engage as early as possible when we pick up on issues that are relevant to this subject committee and which the European Commission is going to consider. At the moment, the European Commission is considering sport, which is within this committee's remit. It is considering sport because, under the Lisbon treaty, the Commission's competence now extends into such areas. In response to that, the sports minister in Scotland has set up a working group specifically to feed into that consultation.

The committee should not just do as Helen Eadie suggested and get people such as Richard Lochhead along to find out what they are saying in Europe about A, B or C. Those issues might not be relevant to the committee. Where an issue comes within the committee's remit, we should be looking for ministers to inform us about the Government's position.

**Helen Eadie:** That is not what I said.

**Michael Matheson:** It is. The point is that the issue has to be about our subject. Richard Lochhead does not have responsibility—

**Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD):** She did not say that.

**Helen Eadie:** No.

**The Convener:** This is not a free-for-all. Please speak through the chair.

**Helen Eadie:** Michael Matheson has just misunderstood me.

**Michael Matheson:** Perhaps I have misunderstood.

**The Convener:** Good. Please proceed because you are making an interesting submission.

**Michael Matheson:** The point is that we have to engage with the ministers whose responsibilities are relevant to this committee—

**Helen Eadie:** That is what I said.

**Christine Grahame:** Ladies and gentlemen, peace.

**Michael Matheson:** My apologies, Helen, okay? The point is that we have to engage with the ministers whose responsibilities are relevant to this committee so that we can find out what they are saying and what representations they are making on the issues. What is disappointing is that there is a live aspect to that, which the paper does not address. I refer to sport, on which the Commission is engaged.

**Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** You will be glad to hear that Michael Matheson has made my point about sport for me. Being informed on 2 June that the consultation closed on 1 June is not flagging it up. We should

have had something on 8 April to indicate that the consultation was coming up. Michael Matheson's point is that, with the advance work programme, we should be looking at the issues even earlier.

I draw attention to a helpful bit in the report. The Commission has done a considerable amount of preparatory work on the e-health programme, which is designed to cover 2011 to 2015. That is covered on page 6 of the paper. I would like the committee to get a summary report from the European officer about that preparatory work so that we can begin to consider it. In light of the *I v Finland* case, some very serious issues about patient confidentiality and consent will have to be addressed at a European level and at a Scottish level. Indeed, the case might significantly affect some of the electronic data record systems that we already have in place. I would therefore like us to ask for a summary fairly quickly, before the summer recess, so that we can consider it over the summer, before the 2011 to 2015 programme on e-health commences.

**Ross Finnie:** I have said before that I find the European reporting process extremely frustrating. I have been quite encouraged by the work of the European and External Relations Committee, on which Michael Matheson sits, because it understands a little better than its predecessors did how the system works. My view of the predecessor European committees and of the other committees of this Parliament is that they did not understand that well. We have largely sat offshore and said, "Gosh! Golly! That's awful!", "We don't understand that," or, "We haven't had this paper".

10:15

I am the only person in the room who has attended 34 meetings of the European Council of Ministers, and I had to get to grips with the system. With regard to the distinctions that Helen Eadie and, more particularly, Michael Matheson are making, the work programme develops quite slowly. It is often worked up by member states that participate in working parties.

Scotland, although it is not the member state, frequently contributes to working parties on the basis that it has civil servants who have developed a level of expertise that is recognised in Europe. The Commission's work programme rarely appears overnight, far less over a month. It can take a while to emerge, and it moves about.

Helen Eadie is right to say that matters do not just drop off the agenda. However, if there is no consensus within a working party, and the Committee of Permanent Representatives is unable to reach a consensus, there is no real purpose in bringing a paper to the Council of

Ministers. A working party will not do so: it will not waste people's time by bringing forward something on which it is clear at an early stage there is no consensus. It is up to the working party to readdress the matter and try to come up with something that will meet the objectives that have been set.

The priorities are, of course, adjusted by the presidency. Presidencies can introduce new material, but that is rarely successful—as Michael Matheson said—because the member states are used to going through the proper process. Unless the material can literally be translated into a policy objective in a matter of weeks or in the build-up to the presidency, it is not going to get there.

I say all that because we know it—we have known it for umpty-tumpty years, and the European and External Relations Committee is trying to get to grips with it. There is, in my humble opinion, a mismatch between what that committee does and what the subject committees do. A lot of that has to do with some continued misunderstanding about the process.

We quite understandably call for reports, and I can well understand the frustration that has been expressed today. However, we as a Parliament must get to grips with the procedure, shape things according to what we want and ask what the process is and how we can properly engage with it. We need to ask how that involves the European and External Relations Committee, and whether we are asking far too much—as I suspect we are—to expect that committee also to be a subject committee.

In the three years in which I have not been in government, we have never got to grips with the process and with how we should structure the committee's approach to European work accordingly. The matter perhaps ought to be raised at the Conveners Group, because I cannot believe that similar frustration is not being expressed in other subject committees.

At the heart of the matter is a slight misunderstanding of how the process works in Europe and therefore what we are looking for. We could keep a loose-leaf file in front of us, which would continually tell us about the matters that are being looked at by the Commission—golly, that would be a thick file. The current priorities could be listed at the front. In relation to matters that we had discussed over the previous 12 months, it would be clear that, if they had not emerged in a directive and had not been approved, they would still be work in progress in Europe.

Until we understand that, we will continue to ask the wrong people for the wrong reports to be placed before the wrong committee. I find that deeply frustrating.



**Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP):** As the consultation closed on 1 June, would our report on “Pathways into sport and physical activity” be familiar to the European Commission? Would it know that we held an inquiry and what the conclusions were?

**The Convener:** No, but we could submit it.

**Ian McKee:** Even after the consultation has closed?

**The Convener:** Yes.

**Mary Scanlon:** It is a bit late.

**The Convener:** I am advised that it can still be submitted.

**Helen Eadie:** I hear everything that Ross Finnie says, but I say what I say having been a member of the original European Committee, before its remit included external affairs. I have also had some voluntary activity in the area. All my adult life I have been a member of the association of democratic socialists in Europe and I am still on the executive committee of the Labour Movement for Europe in Scotland—in fact, I was its secretary.

Having been a reporter to the Scottish Parliament on this issue, I know the reality, which is that a report by the European Committee led to our having a special official in Brussels. That official's job is to look at all the emerging consultations that are relevant to the committees, not to go into great detail about directives and all these other things. For example, this committee was not made aware of the consultation on cross-border health care until it was almost completed. Even the Scottish Government did not get its submission in on time, because the work had not been done. There was no collaboration. That consultation exercise could have led to the signing of the biggest blank cheque for health care provision for the whole of Europe, and the impact on health services here in Scotland could have been tremendous. Ross Finnie is right that presidency initiatives rarely get anywhere, but members who have read up on the issue will know that that proposal came to within a tiny margin of being approved under the Spanish presidency. Douglas Wands reads these papers because we are on the European elected members information and liaison exchange. My concern is that as the proposal came so close to being approved under the Spanish presidency, there is a very real possibility that it will come back on to the agenda, so we need to be prepared.

I come back to my original point. I am sorry if the European officer takes offence, but he has not been doing his job and ensuring that we are consulted on these issues ahead of time. It is not just about the Spanish presidency and the European Commission's work programme. A vast

array of organisations are seated in Brussels, such as organisations that are interested in work on cancer, osteoporosis and sport. A whole range of work is going on across Europe and special work is currently being undertaken on alcohol. We must be mindful of all that.

**The Convener:** I suggest that we write to the European officer and ask him to respond to all the issues that have been raised by committee members that are relevant to his remit and to members' concerns that perhaps attention has not been paid to various consultations that are taking place. I also suggest that we write to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing about the interaction with Europe. We should ask about the process that is in place, her engagement in that process and the interaction that takes place. I think that we can consider that material at our meeting on 23 June.

**Michael Matheson:** That sounds all very well, but we continue to have a process problem in the subject committees. I do not subscribe to Helen Eadie's view of the European officer; I think that he does a very good job on his own in Europe for us and that he is very well respected. The problem is that, although the European officer can flag up matters to us, sometimes—for example, when consultations have already started—that happens too late for us to engage in the process. Some people say that it is too late if we leave it until a consultation officially begins and that it is necessary to engage much earlier on.

Ross Finnie highlighted an important issue that this Parliament has failed to get to grips with in the past 11 years: the subject committees should be much more engaged in dealing with European issues that are relevant to them. A piece of work is being done by the European and External Relations Committee, along with the Presiding Officer, to try to address that issue. I suspect that something will materialise in the next couple of months.

If we are asking the European officer to flag up issues for us, what exactly is it that we want to do? If we as a committee are not prepared to spend the necessary time looking at those issues or to create space in our agenda to allow us to do that, we will be asking him to spend time doing work on stuff that we will be interested in but which we will ultimately just note.

**Helen Eadie:** I would like to respond to that. The cross-border health care proposal, which, in effect, would involve the writing of a blank cheque, is something to which the committee should respond, if it comes back on to the agenda.

I hear what Michael Matheson says about the European officer. I might have to revisit my views, but given that he did not bring to the committee's

attention the consultation on cross-border health care—which we, not the official, raised—we must ask, “What is he doing?” Issues that could have a major impact on the finances and welfare of the Scottish people need to be brought to our attention. That is my point. Michael Matheson is absolutely right that none of the subject committees of this Parliament has ever taken European issues nearly seriously enough—I fully agree with him on that. They must now get to grips with the consultations that are coming up. He is also right on the sport issue. Although there is a lot on which he and I are divided, there is a lot on which I agree with him.

**The Convener:** I want to try to reach a resolution—I am not putting a lid on the subject, as I think that we need to have a fuller discussion. It would be useful for us to write to both the European officer, to ask him to comment on the issues that have been raised, and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, to ask her to comment on those that fall within her remit, and for us to have a further discussion, in the light of the responses that we receive, on 23 June, when we consider our work programme.

With regard to the proposal that we raise the matter with the conveners of other committees, I would prefer to defer doing so until after we have had our discussion on 23 June, although I can obviously ask other conveners informally—*en passant*, as it were—whether their experience is similar. If so, the issue would be extremely important.

As the Parliament moves into the next session after next year’s election, we will probably find that when it comes to how to become more proactive, we are learning as we go. I understand that there is no dispute between Michael Matheson and Helen Eadie. It is simply that there seems to be a timing issue and a process issue with regard to how Scottish Parliament committees engage with Europe and submit their material.

**Ross Finnie:** I have a final point, convener.

**The Convener:** I will take Ian McKee first, as he has been waiting.

**Ian McKee:** I suggest that we consider including as one of our recommendations to our successor committee that when it draws up its programme for investigations in session 4, it should bear in mind the issues that are likely to come up in Europe, so that its investigations fit in with Europe’s.

**The Convener:** If members agree, the discussion of all that will take place on 23 June, when we will have time to consider the various aspects of the issue.

**Ross Finnie:** Because the Commission and the European Parliament operate on such a wide

international base, it is inevitable that there will be huge cross-party, party-political involvement. That means that 90-something per cent of the proposals from Europe are not produced on a party-political basis, even if it is clear that there are party-political influences and that particular nations have particular interests. The co-operative nature of the way in which a lot of European proposals are produced leads me to ask a question about the use of Scotland’s resource.

Let us stick with health. We have a Scottish Parliament subject committee that will be interested in a number of issues. The committee has its clerks, who look at certain issues for members to the best of their ability. We have Scottish Government ministers and Scottish civil servants who do the same. We also have a European officer. We have the Scotland office in Brussels, which has representatives who attend certain committees and are part of certain working groups. If anyone can point me to a piece of thread that joins all that activity together, that would be much appreciated—please send the answer on a postcard to room M3.11. That is a fundamental issue, although I do not believe that the Scottish Parliament in its generic sense is making the best use of the resources that are available to it right across the piece. It is just as important that that point is fed into the mix.

**The Convener:** Can I close this agenda item? We will have another long discussion about it on 23 June, so it is not as if the issues will not be discussed in full. Shall we move on?

**Mary Scanlon:** No, because no one has responded to my point about the update on the debate in the European Parliament in December 2009 on the labelling of alcohol. Given that the stage 1 debate on the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill will take place next week, it would be good to know more about that.

**The Convener:** That is all in the *Official Report*. Rather than itemising all the issues that members have raised, we are simply saying to the Parliament’s European officer, “Here is the *Official Report*. We ask you to consider all the matters that have been raised by members, including the issues about the processes.” We will also ask the cabinet secretary to respond on those issues that are within her remit. Once we have received those responses, we can have an extensive discussion on 23 June. Nothing has been missed out. It will all be dealt with.

## Petitions

### Out-of-hours GP Services (Remote and Rural Areas) (PE1272)

10:30

**The Convener:** We have before us a paper from the clerks setting out details of petitions that have been directed to our committee.

Petition 1272 concerns out-of-hours general practitioners cover. I invite members to consider whether we wish to close PE1272 on the basis that the committee considered the issues that it raises as part of our inquiry into out-of-hours health care provision in rural areas, or whether we wish to propose and agree an alternative approach.

**Mary Scanlon:** I do not think that it is appropriate to close a petition when we are still waiting for the Government's response. I know that the petitioners and others were happy with our report, but I do not think that we should even be asked to close a petition before we have seen the Government's response, which is due on 18 June. Given the time that we have taken over this petition and our inquiry, it is only reasonable to wait until we have seen the Government's response, and the response to it of the petitioners, before we close the petition.

**The Convener:** I was not asking you to close it; that was just one of the suggested courses of action. I thank you for your alternative suggestion, which is reasonable.

Do we agree to keep the petition open until we receive responses from the Government and the petitioners?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

### Sleep Apnoea (PE953)

**The Convener:** Petition 953 concerns obstructive sleep apnoea. The committee is invited to consider whether it wishes to write to the United Kingdom Department for Transport and the UK Medical Research Council seeking more detailed information about the various research studies that are due to report in 2010, and inform the petitioner of the result of these studies, or whether it wants to propose an alternative approach.

I declare an interest in the petition, as I have been involved in it since the outset, on behalf of a constituent. My preference would be to write to the bodies that I mentioned.

**Dr Simpson:** What is the purpose of writing to them, when the studies are to be completed in 2010?

**The Convener:** I understand that they will be ready in the summer, and I think that we should see what comes out of the reports.

**Dr Simpson:** I do not disagree with that, but we will be able to read those reports when they come out; we do not need to write to anyone to ask about the research. What is the purpose of writing to them? The reports will be published. We should just continue the petition until then.

**The Convener:** It would simply be a reminder to those bodies not to let the issue slip off the agenda, now that there has been a change of Government. A courteous letter—

**Dr Simpson:** It is not the Government; it is the UK Medical Research Council.

**The Convener:** And the UK Department for Transport.

**Dr Simpson:** Oh, I see.

**The Convener:** We just want to ensure that the issue does not slip off the agenda, due to any change of priorities on the part of the new Government.

**Ian McKee:** I do not see what harm it would do.

**The Convener:** A courteous letter.

**Dr Simpson:** Yes, but someone has to do some work at the other end. I do not mind writing to the Department for Transport, but if its report is to be published in the first half of 2010, let us just get a copy of it. If we want to ask the Medical Research Council for the date on which its report will be published so that we can watch out for it, that is fine, but we do not want to ask for things unnecessarily. That would not be in keeping with our efficiency drive.

**The Convener:** I am impressed by the 1p stamp efficiency drive here, but I actually—

**Dr Simpson:** It is not just that; it is the time that is involved for our clerks and the people at the other end. If the information will be made publicly available, somebody here could look for it.

**The Convener:** I will not go to the wire about this, but can we please just write, Richard? Just as a gesture to keep the convener happy?

**Dr Simpson:** Okay, go ahead and write, if you want. It will be in the *Official Report* that I think that it is a waste of time.

**The Convener:** Thank you. I am not a waste of time, I trust.

## Swimming Pools (Investment) (PE966)

### Leisure Facilities (PE990)

#### Community Sports Facilities (PE1041)

**The Convener:** Petitions 966, 990 and 1041 concern the provision of swimming pools and other community sports facilities. I invite members to consider whether they wish to close the petitions on the basis that the committee considered these issues as part of its inquiry into pathways into sport, or, in the spirit of alternative approaches, whether they wish to propose and agree an alternative approach.

**Mary Scanlon:** I read PE966 from Robert Lambert and PE1041 from Leslie James Trotter. I appreciate that, given our financial constraints, we cannot provide everything to everyone, but asking for community-based sports clubs of a standard befitting a leading European nation is not unreasonable. Given the strength of feeling in the petitions, if I were the petitioners, I might be a bit disappointed with the Government's response, which says merely that

"sportscotland is committed to the provision of outdoor sports"

and

"strives to negotiate high quality replacement provision for pitches",

and that the Government

"will encourage Local Authorities to consider the importance of the availability of playing and training surfaces".

I do not know what more we can do; I just wanted to express that point.

**Ian McKee:** Are you suggesting that we should find some way of opening up all the private finance initiative playgrounds to which communities are denied access in the evenings and at the weekends?

**The Convener:** In fairness to the Government—  
[*Interruption.*]

Excuse me. I do not know what has got into you today, children, but we are all talking amongst ourselves and teacher is not happy.

Earlier, we were trying to cut back on one letter being sent for the sake of efficiencies. In fairness to the Government, I do not know where the money will come from to make improvements to swimming facilities in the coming few years. Everyone around the table is aware of the difficulties. Whoever is in Government in Edinburgh or London will have to deal with the fact of the current financial situation. Because of that, it might be realistic simply to close the petitions.

**Michael Matheson:** It is fair to say that sportscotland's "Ticking Time Bomb" report says that the problems are the result of a 30-year legacy of neglect—

**Helen Eadie:** It was more than that.

**Michael Matheson:** I am talking about the report; that is what it says. Around 80 or 90 per cent of the facilities are provided by local authorities, and it is difficult to understand how local authorities will find the resources to plough into them, given that there has been a lack of adequate investment in the facilities for three decades, as the "Ticking Time Bomb" report highlights.

**The Convener:** We should maybe close the petitions.

**Mary Scanlon:** We can look back or we can look forward, but we can also look to our report, "Pathways into sport and physical activity", which said:

"The Committee reiterates its earlier recommendation that each community planning partnership should have a sports strategy, which includes an implementation plan."

I would have hoped that, at the very least, the Government would be working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to ensure that there is some sort of commitment among local authorities to a sports strategy and an implementation plan, rather than what we have got.

We can look back over the past 30 years, but that will gain us nothing. It would be much more positive and constructive to look forward.

**The Convener:** Your comments are on the record. The Scottish Government's response to the committee says:

"The Scottish Government supports the committee's conclusion and in working with Local Authorities and sportscotland in the development of sports strategies will encourage that these take cognisance of the availability of quality playing and training surfaces."

That means that the Government is doing what you suggest that it should do, Mary.

I would like to move on. Members' comments and dissatisfactions with some matters are on the record. Can we close these petitions?

**Helen Eadie:** I do not want anyone to go away thinking that the Parliament does not recognise the importance of these facilities. As Mary Scanlon says, irrespective of what has happened in the past and how challenging the future might be, we all need to do what we can in the interests of swimming pools and so on. We must keep in mind the massive number of people who are disabled and need hydrotherapy and all the rest of it.

**The Convener:** I was making the point that, in the current economic climate, we cannot raise false hopes. However, I am sure that every member around this table has campaigned and will continue to campaign for sports and swimming facilities, particularly for disabled people, in their constituencies.

Given that the views that have been expressed are on the record, do we agree to close the petitions?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** We will move into private session to deal with the next item.

10:39

*Meeting continued in private until 11:14.*



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