



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 23 September 2010

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 23 September 2010

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

Forensic Science Services

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Good morning. The first item of business is a Labour Party debate on motion S3M-7045, in the name of Richard Baker, on the future of forensic services in Scotland.

I call Richard Baker to speak to and move the motion in 13 minutes. I advise members that time is very tight, so I ask them to stick rigidly to the advice that they are given.

09:15

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Point taken, Presiding Officer. Members across the Parliament are keenly aware of the crucial role that our forensic services play throughout Scotland in detecting crime, convicting those who are guilty and thereby—we hope—reducing crime in the future. The progress in forensic services in recent years—in scene-of-crime examination, biology services, drugs and DNA analysis, fingerprinting and other specialist services—is a vital facet of modern policing. Those services are central to solving crimes that are as wide ranging as housebreaking, car theft, sexual assault and homicide.

We can be proud of the forensic scientists who work with enthusiasm and commitment in our four laboratories. Without them, fewer cases would be solved and fewer criminals would be held to account for their crimes. Recognition of the importance of forensic services to local policing has been the catalyst behind the great anxiety in the north and north-east and in Lothian and Borders about the threat to the future of the laboratories in Aberdeen and Edinburgh.

A recommendation to the cabinet secretary by the Scottish Police Services Authority's board has been decided on, following consultation on its "Forensic Services Modernisation Options Paper". That recommendation has not been made public and—curiously—it does not appear to have reached the cabinet secretary in time for the debate, although we understand that the board decided on it more than a week ago. In any event, it is feared that the recommendation to the cabinet secretary is to close the laboratories in Aberdeen and Edinburgh or to remove from them key forensic services, which would begin to run them down.

The ultimate decision resides not with the SPSA but with the cabinet secretary. I hope that speeches from members of all parties will persuade him that the two labs should not be run down or closed and that the Parliament will express that view at decision time.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Does Richard Baker agree that the overriding reason for maintaining the service is to do so for the service user? Grampian Police and its chief constable say that they receive a first-class service now, which they want to remain and not diminish. Is that not the key point?

Richard Baker: That is the key point—I agree entirely with Mike Rumbles. We should take seriously the views that Grampian Police's chief constable and others have expressed publicly. That should inform the decision, which should be to retain the two labs.

Keeping the laboratories open in Aberdeen and Edinburgh has been the subject of cross-party campaigns and I hope that it will attract cross-party support today. From my experience of the situation in Aberdeen as a North East Scotland MSP, I know that my colleague Lewis Macdonald, as the constituency member for the Aberdeen laboratory, has been joined in the campaign by Nicol Stephen and Brian Adam—the two other city constituency MSPs—as well as Mike Rumbles in west Aberdeenshire. Several of us list members from all the parties have also been involved. In the previous debate on the subject, Mary Scanlon spoke from a Highlands and Islands perspective about concerns for the Aberdeen laboratory's future. The same has been true in Edinburgh.

Of course, it has been a joint campaign with the staff and their trade union, Unison. I am pleased that staff from the laboratory at Howden Hall in Edinburgh are here and that Unison members from Aberdeen have come to Holyrood today, because they know the importance of the decision and of the debate. We can be sure of their commitment to providing excellent forensic services.

It has been a long and trying process, particularly for the laboratory staff, to get to this stage. The first proposals were made in "Delivering forensic services to north and north-east Scotland", which was published in 2008. That was not a consultation document—rather, it gave 10 reasons why the SPSA wanted to close the lab in Aberdeen. Its flawed arguments, married to a total lack of consultation with staff, made for a counterproductive and inadequate process. At that time, as George Foulkes and Jeremy Purvis said in the chamber, fears emerged about the SPSA's intentions for the lab in Edinburgh. Since then, David McLetchie has joined those members in campaigns on that laboratory's future.

Given that, the cabinet secretary's announcement that that consultation should not proceed was welcome. Several north-east MSPs met Vic Emery, who had just become the convener of the SPSA's board as the SPSA's management emerged from a period of turmoil. We were assured that a new consultation would be embarked on to consider the service's future as a whole and that that consultation would be genuine. I concede that the second consultation was superior to the first, but a high bar had not been set. Like other MSPs, I made a submission to the process, as did Unison as the staff trade union, although I recognise that Unison has broader concerns about the new consultation process, too.

The concern remains that the SPSA entered the new process with a clear determination to run down or close the two laboratories. That fear springs from the history of the process that I have outlined and from the new consultation document. It suggests four options for change. We do not ignore the need for efficiencies at times of great strictures in public sector finances. Option two would make savings, including those from post reductions. However, it would—crucially—retain the laboratories and introduce a new information-technology-based laboratory information management system, which would benefit the efficiency of the national service and of local services in the laboratories.

The document goes into a full list of advantages and disadvantages for options three and four, but far less time is spent on scrutinising the first two options. That raises the concern that they are not being presented with the same priority. Option three would result in the closure of the laboratories in Aberdeen and Edinburgh—I will go into further detail about just how damaging that would be—while option four would mean that those two laboratories lost key services such as DNA processing, volume crime biology analysis, fingerprint examinations and drug analysis. Options three and four would not only result in greater reductions in staff but risk the loss of highly skilled staff to our forensic services in the process of relocation.

Option three might present greater savings on paper, but it does not include the cost of a courier system to transfer evidence to the central labs from local forces, for example, let alone the wider costs of a reduced service in the affected areas. Option four would run down services significantly in Aberdeen and Edinburgh, but it would not save significantly more money—about £700,000 more in year three than option two would save. That is in the context that Scotland already spends about a third less per capita on forensic services than England does, according to the figures in the consultation document.

I will spend some time on what would be lost by closing or running down the laboratories. I had the chance to visit the local lab in Aberdeen with Lewis Macdonald and Iain Gray and I was hugely impressed by the facilities and by the skills, expertise and commitment of the staff. Grampian Police's chief constable, Colin McKerracher, has said that the strong relationships between his officers and the staff at the Aberdeen lab have played a crucial role in murder inquiries. Grampian Police and Northern Constabulary have been prepared to invest significantly in the lab, because they recognise its importance to their work. The Aberdeen laboratory won an SPSA award for innovation in light of the role of staff in working on the tragic Super Puma helicopter crash.

On a range of measures, both the Aberdeen and Edinburgh laboratories are performing excellently and efficiently in their delivery of forensic services. I have seen the drugs analysis service that is provided in the Aberdeen laboratory. It is working at full capacity. Presently, chemists at the laboratory provide the police with a 24-hour call-out drugs analysis service, specifically for custody cases in which a drugs analysis result using the instruments at the laboratory has to be secured within six hours of detention in order to secure custody. Without that system at the Aberdeen laboratory, such a call-out service would not be available—it would be only a retrograde service that was not sufficient for court use. That of course raises concerns about the prosecution of cases.

As we know, the further away the scene of the crime is from the laboratory, the longer it takes to get results. The concern is that closing the laboratories would be damaging to local policing, and that it would not serve our justice system, with cases being delayed or evidence not being provided in time.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Does Richard Baker accept that the question of getting analysis results within six hours feeds into broader agendas about whether people can be detained in custody—for other reasons, but particularly for forensics reasons? Does he agree that the difficulties of keeping people in custody and of dealing with things within that time will be exacerbated if local services are removed?

Richard Baker: I certainly agree with Robert Brown, and that whole area will need to be examined. He will agree with me that it remains crucial to have as short a turnaround time as possible for drugs analysis evidence. That is another reason why the laboratories in Aberdeen and Edinburgh must be retained.

There is concern that closing the laboratories can have only a detrimental effect on public safety and tackling crime in the areas of Scotland

concerned. No wonder the plans have provoked public comment from Grampian Police and Northern Constabulary. Colleagues will go into greater detail on their concerns about the local impact of closing laboratories.

We understand that, nationally, there is a backlog of about 3,000 drugs analysis cases and more than 3,500 crime scene cases requiring DNA analysis.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Has that not been rebutted by the SPSA? The press release that the member put out last night has been challenged by the SPSA. The SPSA has told the member that those figures are not correct but he has persisted—through the media and again today he seems to have repeated a libel.

Richard Baker: Those were official figures that were in a press release. I stand by them and I will give them to the cabinet secretary immediately following the debate.

The current situation is impacting on the prosecution of justice in this country now. I cannot see how the situation will be improved by the closure of two excellent forensic laboratories.

We support the amendments from John Lamont and Robert Brown, which we believe make further important points in relation to the debate. I had hoped that we might see something of substance in the Scottish Government's amendment, and that it might have engaged properly in the debate. Unfortunately, that is not the case, and it rather seems that its amendment is an attempt to evade debate. It looks like the cabinet secretary saw our motion and reached for the panic button.

The recommendation has been decided by the SPSA. It is a recommendation to the cabinet secretary, even if, curiously, it has not reached him, despite having been decided more than a week ago. He cannot avoid the fact that it is his decision to make.

For the Parliament to support the Government's amendment would be to miss the opportunity to agree a motion that makes clear our view that we must retain excellence in forensic services for the whole of Scotland. I ask members of every party to affirm what so many of us have been saying to our constituents: that we support the retention of the laboratories in Aberdeen and Edinburgh. We should, therefore, support the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of a national forensic service which is able to serve the needs of the whole country; acknowledges the key role of forensic services and speedy access to evidence for the detection of those responsible for crimes and the prevention of further offences; notes the consultation by the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) on a number of options

for the future of forensic services in Scotland; believes that the recommendation for the future structure of the service which has now been made by the SPSA Board to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice should be made public immediately; further believes that Option 3, which would result in the closure of the laboratories in Aberdeen and Edinburgh, and that Option 4, which would see their services very significantly reduced, would be detrimental to very many communities in Scotland, and accordingly believes that Option 2 should be the basis on which services are developed.

09:28

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): I begin by stating what we agree upon. The forensic science and fingerprint service in Scotland is truly outstanding. Representatives from the Aberdeen and Edinburgh laboratories are in the public gallery and I pay tribute to them as well as to the Glasgow and Dundee laboratories. Many crimes in Scotland, serious and minor, would go undetected and unprosecuted, without a conviction or closure, were it not for the service and dedication of the staff. I pay tribute to them.

It is absolutely accepted that this is my decision, and we do not seek to hide that. I make it clear, however, that no decision has been taken and that the SPSA has not yet submitted to the Scottish Government its plans for the future delivery of forensic science.

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): We received a note from Tom Nelson, the director responsible for the modernisation, dated 14 September. He says:

"a preferred option has been discussed and debated with the SPSA Board and will go forward in the next week to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice."

That was nine days ago. Can the cabinet secretary tell us why he has not been able to secure the recommended option from the SPSA?

Kenny MacAskill: The short answer is no, I cannot, because I am not responsible for that board—I am not responsible for those matters. I can assure the member that I do not have the recommended option. Not having it, self-evidently I have not yet seen the recommendation and I cannot possibly reach any decision.

Although it is clearly too early for me to enter into any detailed discussions about the SPSA's options, I am here to listen to the various views that I am sure will be expressed in the debate. I assure all colleagues in all parts of the chamber representing all parts of Scotland, including Mr Baker and Mr Kelly, and also the staff who are present in the public gallery, that, when it comes to considering the SPSA's proposals, I am willing to take on board its views along with those expressed by chief constables, police boards and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.

Mike Rumbles: Does the minister agree that the complete lack of openness and transparency from the board of the SPSA serves democracy in Scotland ill? Does he acknowledge that there is a fear and suspicion among MSPs that as soon as the debate is over, an announcement may be made? Would he be surprised if that were the case?

Kenny MacAskill: That is gross hypocrisy on the part of a Liberal Democrat member who is one of the people who set up the SPSA. I supported the setting up of the SPSA, although that was under the previous Administration. The SPSA had a difficult birth and everybody recognises the difficulties that there have been and the changes that have taken place. It was at the request of this Government that further consultations were carried out. We were not satisfied that appropriate consultation had been undertaken previously. To the credit of the chief executive and the chair of the SPSA, that was done.

I assure Mr Rumbles that I have not received the recommendation and I have had no opportunity to read it. I will not make a judgment until I have had the opportunity to see the SPSA's recommendations and to take on board the views that are expressed in today's debate or in any other submissions that might be made.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

Kenny MacAskill: I must make some progress. Members have my assurance. That might not have been how matters were conducted under the previous Administration, but it is most certainly the way in which we seek to conduct matters.

I reiterate my gratitude for the hard work and dedication that has been shown by all the expert forensic staff in the SPSA. I understand the concerns that have been expressed by some affected staff in my own constituency and in letters from numerous members of the Parliament. I reiterate that the SPSA was established in 2007 under the Labour-Liberal Administration, with cross-party support in the Parliament, reflecting a shared ambition to deliver better and more efficient police support services, including in forensic science.

It is right and proper that the SPSA has undertaken a forensic modernisation review at this time. We expect no less, as it is clear that forensic science has moved on significantly. That is down to the efforts of science and to individual contributions that have been made by members of staff—it is they who have driven forensics on significantly.

The development of more effective and efficient services across our justice system remains the purpose of the SPSA. In the current financial climate and in the difficult times to come, its role is more important than ever.

When it began its work, the SPSA inherited forensic science laboratories in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow, which have been developed and adjusted over a long period. Speaking in a previous debate on SPSA forensic services in January last year, my colleague Fergus Ewing made it clear that the laboratories were far from ideal, and that “urgent investment” in Scotland's forensic science capacity was needed. That is why we are building the crime campus at Gartcosh, something that Mr Baker seems to wish had been done yesterday, so as to accelerate things. We have also fully funded the construction of the new state-of-the-art forensic science laboratory in Dundee, which I opened earlier this year. The two new labs will provide the SPSA with the capacity to meet ever-increasing demand for the analysis of forensic evidence and they will provide police forces and procurators fiscal with faster turnaround times and a more effective service.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary acknowledge that the proposals for investment in the Aberdeen laboratory that were in place three years ago were postponed because of the consultation process that began in December 2007, and that those plans have never been put back in place?

Kenny MacAskill: Yes. A variety of matters have been on-going at the Aberdeen lab, including the police expressing a desire to have space returned to them, given that the lab is located within the police headquarters.

What lies at the heart of today's debate is what the continued improvement of the SPSA forensic service will mean for the existing laboratories. My position is simply that we must ensure that the service that is delivered to every police force and every procurator fiscal is consistent, high quality, rapid and value for money. After all, we should bear in mind that not every police force has a forensic laboratory on its doorstep, and no one is suggesting that the ability to fight crime in Stirling or Stranraer is compromised as a result.

Robert Brown: Does the cabinet secretary not accept that a situation in which there were no forensic science facilities north of Dundee would be in a slightly different category from the Scotland-wide picture that he has outlined?

Kenny MacAskill: It seems to me that in places such as the Western Isles and the west Highlands, it is arguable where one should go for forensic services; the choice is made on the basis of what

is most effective. [*Interruption.*] Liberal Democrat members seem to be talking about centralisation but, on their watch they seem to have had no desire to provide a forensic science facility in the Northern Constabulary area or in Dumfries and Galloway, so “cant” and “hypocrisy” are words that spring to mind. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Kenny MacAskill: The process of modernising the forensic service should not discount any options to achieve the goal that I have set out.

Of course, the need to deliver services more efficiently is more pressing than ever. Although we have delivered 1,000 additional officers and crime in Scotland is at a 32-year low, we face huge budgetary challenges, from which the SPSA is not immune. The damaging Westminster cuts make it imperative that Scotland secures economic powers and financial responsibility. It is all very well for suggestions to be made about how we can expand forensic services, but given that the money for that has to come from the SPSA budget, Mr Baker and others will have to say whether money should be cut from the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency’s budget or from the broader justice budget, which would result in fewer police. Is the proposal for less money for police or less money for the SCDEA?

Richard Baker: Does the cabinet secretary not recognise that the option that we support—option two—would provide significant savings to the SPSA?

Kenny MacAskill: The member talks about significant savings, but given the size of the cuts that are coming down the line, which were started by Labour in Westminster and have been accelerated by the coalition down south, matters require to be dealt with.

When the Parliament debated the modernisation of forensic services in January 2009, it focused on the future of the Aberdeen laboratory. Since then, the SPSA has set about gathering views and evidence on how it could better meet the national needs of all Scotland’s police forces and procurators fiscal while at the same time generating the best efficiency for the public purse.

I understand that the SPSA board has now considered the findings from that exercise. Mr Kelly kindly told us about the note that he received in that regard. I emphasise that I have not yet received the board’s recommendation.

Cathie Craigie: There has been a lot of speculation in the Parliament and in the press about the SPSA’s recommendations. The cabinet secretary knew that the debate was to take place this morning, so why did he not contact the SPSA to ask it to deliver its recommendations? Has he

had any contact with the SPSA on the matter over recent weeks?

The Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you have only 45 seconds left, cabinet secretary.

Kenny MacAskill: All that I can say is that I have not received the SPSA’s report. We are open to recommendations. I will be happy to take on board the Parliament’s views, as will the SPSA. I will also be happy to receive representations from members who are present on behalf of others. We are in listening mode. We have not made a decision. We will receive the SPSA’s recommendation and will ensure that the excellent forensic science service that is provided to communities across Scotland continues to be provided. I pay tribute to the people who provide that service and will listen to them in due course.

I move amendment S3M-7045.2, to leave out from first “believes” to end and insert:

“notes that the recommendation for the future structure of the service has not yet been made by the SPSA Board to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and that the cabinet secretary, in making the decision, should listen to the views of the Parliament, and further notes the valuable work done by SPSA’s expert staff across Scotland and the positive way that they have engaged in this process.”

09:39

John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I thank the Labour Party for using its time to debate the future of forensic services in Scotland. It is all too easy to forget the difficult and challenging job that the people who are involved in the forensic service do and the role that they play in the investigation and prevention of crime.

For many people, their knowledge of forensic services will extend to what they have learned from occasionally tuning into episodes of “CSI: Crime Scene Investigation” or watching the actors in white jump suits on “Taggart”, but to the victims of crime, the role of forensic services is pivotal, as they are involved throughout the process, from the crime scene investigation through to the case being brought to court.

The passing of the Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2006 established the Scottish Police Services Authority, under the umbrella of which forensic services have fallen since 2007. The new structure brought together the existing forensic labs, fingerprint bureaux and scene-of-crime offices that were located across the country.

I have long argued in the Parliament that crime needs to be dealt with swiftly and in an efficient and effective manner. Forensic services play a massive part in ensuring that that happens; they are an imperative part of the process. They ensure that the facts are reliable and are produced in

time, they give victims the closure that they require, and they ensure that the police and the Crown Office have the information that they need to make appropriate decisions.

The services that are provided range from crime scene investigators, fingerprinting and DNA testing to drug analysis. Those are vital services that must continue to meet the demands that are put on them by service users. As the SPSA's modernisation paper sets out, demand for the services varies across the country. That variation is down to not just crime patterns and volume, but practices and policies in specific areas.

The current economic climate holds many challenges and will involve making tough decisions. It is against that backdrop that the SPSA presented its modernisation paper, in which it states:

"We continue to face considerable challenges in the short to medium term at least with likely year-on-year real term reduction to our budget, rising cost (extra inflationary) of consumables and changes to demand that will place significant pressure on our ability to meet financial targets and customer expectations."

Four options are presented, three of which offer alternatives; the other is basically the status quo. Although we realise that spending must and will be reduced, we must strive to reduce it by achieving efficiencies that do little to take away from the vital services that continue to be required. It would be irresponsible simply to look towards the option that saves the most money, regardless of the consequences.

We accept that it would be wrong to continue with no change, even though that would offer the quickest savings—it would produce total efficiencies of around £1 million in 2011-12, as opposed to the £140,000 that the other three options would result in—and we recognise that short-term spend on the evidence management solution will allow for longer-term savings.

Option three has generated the majority of concerns, as it suggests the closure of facilities in both Aberdeen and Edinburgh. Grampian Police, Northern Constabulary and Lothian and Borders Police have all expressed their alarm at the potential impact that those closures would have on local service delivery. Further concerns have been raised about the loss of specialist jobs. Given that forensics play such a crucial role in the delivery of justice, I must ask what the full consequences of such closures would be, not just for the police, but for the running of courts and, of course, for the wider public's access to swift justice.

In July, my colleague Mary Scanlon, who will speak later in the debate, lodged a motion that recognised the importance of forensic services to policing and crime detection in the Highlands and

Islands and the Grampian area, and which highlighted what the closure of the Aberdeen facility would mean for jobs in that area.

The process that the SPSA has gone through in coming to its recommendation should be transparent, and I am more than a little disappointed that the responses that it received to its paper have not yet been published, although I understand that the SPSA is awaiting authorisation to do so from those who submitted evidence. Furthermore, it appears that we will not find out what recommendation the SPSA has made or how it came to make that decision until the future structure of forensic services in Scotland has been decided, which is also unfortunate.

A new structure is inevitable, but it must allow the forensic services to continue to provide a first-class service. In my opinion, option two appears to offer the best alternative, in that it would allow services to be maintained across Scotland, thereby protecting access to services for the police and, more widely, access to justice for all. That should be our principal aim.

I move amendment S3M-7045.1, to insert at end:

“; acknowledges the concerns raised about the loss of specialist jobs, and further notes the concerns of local communities and the police about the proposed changes.”

09:44

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): First, I apologise to members for having to leave before the end of the debate—I do not usually do that, but I have a long-standing engagement to fulfil this morning.

This is an important debate on a subject that has been characterised by fixed agendas, inadequate consultation and the wrong priorities. The Scottish Police Services Authority has had, to say the least, a chequered career since its inception, but its record on handling the debate on the future of the forensic services in Scotland must stand at the nadir of its fortunes.

The SPSA's plans to merge the units at Aberdeen and Dundee go back to 2007. At that time, neither Grampian Police, the Procurator Fiscal Service, the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland nor the laboratory staff had been consulted. The users of the service and the people who provide it were left out of the loop. One might imagine that it would be difficult to progress plans in that way, and that any plans that were produced might be a trifle defective.

After huge local protest, the cabinet secretary—to his credit—asked the SPSA to re-examine the issues and engage in fresh consultation. The SPSA then constructed a consultation that merely

outlined and justified the closure of the Aberdeen laboratory; it did not even include an option for the service to remain in Aberdeen. The Minister for Community Safety described the paper as

“a question and answer paper ... not a consultation”.—
[*Official Report*, 8 January 2009; c 13920.]

The common feature throughout was that the SPSA regarded the closure of the Aberdeen service as a foregone conclusion. Perhaps uniquely, that botched consultation attracted the condemnation of all parties, including even the Scottish National Party MSPs for the area.

To echo my earlier intervention on the cabinet secretary, it would be totally amazing if the end result of all that was that there were no forensic services north of Dundee. That is a different proposition to the non-event of services in Inverness, Wick or Dumfries: we do not have such services and nobody is proposing that we should, but that is not to say that we should not have suitable and reasonably accessible services throughout Scotland.

We eventually got the 2010 proposals, which presented four options, but a proposal to close the forensic unit in Edinburgh had appeared. That seemed to be a rather bizarre result of the way in which thought on the matter had moved forward, and it went against what seemed to be a categorical assurance from the cabinet secretary in answer to a parliamentary question from Mike Pringle in February 2009.

I say to the cabinet secretary that it is highly unsatisfactory that we do not have the recommendation—which is a different issue to the Government’s response to the recommendation—today. I accept his assurance that he has not personally received it, although I bet that his officials have received it—which is not quite the same thing—and are awaiting the report going to the cabinet secretary.

Secret government is not the way forward. There is a major debate on the issue, and members must be properly informed about the proposal. It is hardly the full, frank and transparent consultation that the cabinet secretary promised in May 2008.

There are a number of specific considerations. The first is that a decision to end forensic services in Aberdeen or Edinburgh would be very costly to reverse in the event that the Government and the SPSA got it wrong and it led to the problems that staff have predicted—and perhaps some that have not been predicted. It has taken some years to build up both the facilities and the staff complement, so there is an element of irreversibility if the decision proceeds in the way that the SPSA appears to wish it to.

The second—and driving—consideration must be the effectiveness of the service, which is a point that Mike Rumbles has repeatedly made, not least during today’s debate. It is clear that police forces have confidence in the current arrangements but that there are issues of varying demand and practice that reflect different practices and procedures throughout the country. Both option one and option two in the SPSA’s paper progress that consideration with significant annual savings; I am not sure whether the two options are mutually exclusive, or if elements of both could be incorporated. The debate should take place, and the decision should be made, around that consideration.

The third consideration is the need for timely and local responses to need. Some procedures need to be turned around within hours, as I think Richard Baker said, and that will manifestly not be possible if samples have to be sent from Aberdeen to Dundee or from Edinburgh to Glasgow.

The fourth consideration is the question of scarce finance. Even in these days of financial pressure, decisions should not be dictated by that concern if the result is otherwise unsatisfactory. All four options—as has been pointed out in the debate—offer significant savings on top of the efficiencies that have been obtained in recent years.

The Liberal Democrat amendment brings out a further aspect, which is the mantra of centralisation that appears in many respects to drive things these days. We see it with the proposals to merge the Scottish police forces into a single Scottish police force, and we see its hidden hand too in the proposals to reduce the number of forensic science laboratories. I say to the cabinet secretary that although those issues cannot be approached dogmatically, Scotland does not suit a one-size-fits-all approach from Government. Centralisation can mean loss of local control and access, and it certainly means the removal of local jobs and services.

There has been a high-handedness and arbitrariness about the approach to the forensic science laboratories issue. There is a strong sense that people are going through the motions and that there is impatience with the troublesome concerns of democratically elected representatives of the relevant areas from all parties. Even now, as has been mentioned, we are in the ridiculous position of today’s debate taking place in a vacuum, because we do not know—although we can guess—the recommendation that the SPSA has made to the Scottish Government.

Members have the opportunity to tell the Government today that that is no way to proceed, that the concerns are not just valid but persuasive, that the loss of local forensic services will damage

policing in Scotland and that the uncertainty that has dogged the issue for three years should be ended.

The debate has taken place with the cabinet secretary and members of the Government sitting off to one side, almost as arbiters. They are not: the SPSA is a Government agency that is responsible to the Government, and it is working to a Government agenda. In 2008, the SPSA's director of forensic services stated:

"That's why the Cabinet Secretary has given a clear signal that 'doing nothing' around the existing lab infrastructure is not an option."

If that is not a direction of travel, I do not know what is.

If that agenda means modernisation, greater efficiency or improved standards, we are with the cabinet secretary. If, as it sounds, it means the closure of local services, the cabinet secretary should be for turning post haste. The debate gives him the opportunity to recognise a mistake in the direction of travel and to act to keep local services throughout Scotland.

I move amendment S3M-7045.3, to insert at end:

“; believes that decisions on the future of the national forensic service should be driven by the quality of the services needed and provided; regrets the history of inadequate consultation and consideration by the SPSA over the structure of the service; deplors the way in which the SPSA regarded the closure of regional services as a foregone conclusion, and considers that the controversy surrounding the issue serves as a warning as to the dangers of dogmatic centralisation.”

The Presiding Officer: Before we come to the open debate, I tell members that I have received a request for a question of an urgent nature, under rule 13.8 of standing orders, on the subject of the Scottish team's participation in the Commonwealth games in Delhi, from Bill Butler MSP. I have accepted the request, and I therefore intend to alter business to allow the question to be answered by the Minister for Public Health and Sport at 11.30 this morning. I will allow 10 minutes for that item of business, and that time will have to be removed from the debate that we are currently holding. We may have to reduce the number of speakers, but we will let those members know as soon as we possibly can.

We now move to the open debate.

09:52

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): It is now some 40 months since the Scottish Government took office, and some 33 months since staff in the forensic and fingerprint services in my constituency were told that the SPSA had launched a review that would result in advice to

ministers to close the Aberdeen forensic laboratory. That review is, one way or another, still going on. The cabinet secretary will perhaps recognise that this long-running saga will, for those scientists, be the defining feature of his term in office.

There have been times when Mr MacAskill has recognised the anger and dismay that are felt by those staff and by many other people who have an interest in the quality of forensic services in the north of Scotland. The cabinet secretary met MSPs on a cross-party basis early in 2008. He responded to the concerns that we raised, and he told the Parliament in May 2008 that he had asked the SPSA to engage in fresh consultation, which he promised would be

“full, open, transparent and meaningful.”—[*Official Report*, 8 May 2008; c 8447.]

Mike Rumbles: I agree with Lewis Macdonald, and I congratulate the cabinet secretary on taking an interest at that time, finding out what the issues were and doing something about it. Does Lewis Macdonald agree with me, however, that it seems strange that now, one week after the decision has been made by the SPSA—under the cabinet secretary's own department—he cannot be bothered to lift the telephone to ask what it has decided?

Lewis Macdonald: Indeed. I think that members will all return to that point during today's debate, because the second consultation process has fared no better than the first. When I brought a member's debate on the subject to the chamber on 8 January 2009, there was broad agreement from all parties that the new consultation document amounted to little more than a more polished package that still proposed the closure of the Aberdeen laboratory.

The Government accepted that the consultation had not been good enough and that there was a need for another look. The SPSA wrote to MSPs and other stakeholders 18 months ago to present a new set of propositions on which it intended to consult. That third exercise resulted in the publication in July this year of the options paper that we are debating today. Options three and four in that paper pose a threat to the jobs of those who work in the Aberdeen forensic lab that is just as real as it was at the initial staff meeting in December 2007. The staff union Unison states:

“Close reading of the document suggests that Option Four would appear to be the preferred option of SPSA.”

Forensic scientists are, of course, experts in the close reading of evidence, so that interpretation should be taken seriously.

Of course, option four would not result in the outright closure of the Aberdeen and Edinburgh laboratories as soon as the minister made his

decision. Instead, the laboratories would be run down to the point where they could no longer do their job. One example that I might expand on is the chemistry that is required to achieve rapid drugs analysis to secure the custody and eventual conviction of the drug dealers who ply their trade in my constituency and elsewhere. The Aberdeen lab can currently turn round large numbers of such cases because its chemists have the necessary equipment to identify new substances or complex compounds in less than six hours. Because they are on the spot, they can deliver results that can secure the necessary outcomes. Option four would remove most of those staff from Aberdeen and would leave perhaps a single forensic chemist, who would supposedly deliver urgent drugs analysis when required. However, from the briefing that we have heard, the remaining chemist at the Aberdeen laboratory would be expected to do that without the state-of-the-art equipment that is currently used to carry out much of that drugs analysis, which would be relocated away from the city along with most of the staff. The benefits of a comprehensive local service would be lost and only a token presence would remain.

Much was said before last week's SPSA board meeting about the importance of openness and transparency. In May 2008, Mr MacAskill told us that that was what he wanted of the consultation process; the new convener of the SPSA said much the same in April 2009. Instead, as we know, the board made a decision behind closed doors and, according to what has been said today, has still not managed to convey its views to the cabinet secretary.

Given the detailed treatment of option four in the document, staff are rightly concerned that the drive to close Aberdeen and Edinburgh remains, even though it might have taken a new form. The fear is that, instead of closure at Christmas, the cabinet secretary will be asked to endorse closure in two stages. He might even be invited to proclaim that by supporting option four he has actually saved, rather than closed, two of Scotland's four forensic laboratories. I hope that he will resist that temptation.

For almost three years, forensic scientists in my constituency have lived with profound uncertainty about the Government's intentions. Senior staff have gone and potential new recruits have looked elsewhere. Perhaps before the cabinet secretary comes to his closing speech today—he should pay attention to this point—he can ask officials to do what they have not yet done: pick up the phone and have a conversation with the SPSA so that he can at least tell the staff who are here today which recommendation he will consider in the next few weeks.

Kenny MacAskill: Perhaps Mr Macdonald when he was a minister acted differently, but I would have thought that it is my duty to read all the recommendations in the report without having a closed mind and, thereafter, to make my decision having taken into account the views that Mr Macdonald and others have expressed. To do otherwise would be a dereliction of my duty. I require to read the report in full and to balance that with other matters.

Lewis Macdonald: Mr MacAskill is correct that he requires to read the report in full. Nonetheless, he also has a duty to be accountable to the Parliament and to come to the Parliament properly briefed for a debate of which he has had proper notice. I am disappointed that he does not see that as equally part of his duty.

If he does not see fit to tell us in his closing speech which of the recommendations in the options paper will go forward, my constituents will face a fourth Christmas not knowing what the Scottish ministers intend to do. That will give no comfort to them and bring no benefit to the communities that they serve.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that speeches should be no longer than six minutes.

09:59

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I should first declare an interest, in that I worked in the field for most of my working life prior to coming to the Parliament, although I did not work for the SPSA or any of its predecessor organisations.

Since we last debated the issue on 8 January last year, we have had the promised full consultation process, for which I thank the SPSA. Extensive dialogue on the future of forensic services in Scotland has taken place with staff, trade unions, the police, the Procurator Fiscal Service and other interested parties. I have met Tom Nelson and the affected staff on several occasions to discuss the consultation process and the options for the future. I have also written to Tom Nelson and Vic Emery to ask them to release whatever recommendation they make to the cabinet secretary as well as the evidence that they have collated.

I express my gratitude to the staff of the Aberdeen fingerprint service and forensic laboratories who, throughout the process, have provided reasoned and well-argued responses to the SPSA's proposals and have continued to perform at their best while their jobs have been under threat.

In my view, closing or downgrading the Aberdeen lab would reduce the crime-fighting ability of Grampian Police and Northern

Constabulary, which would be an unacceptable consequence for my constituents. While bearing in mind the financial implications, I have no doubt that the number 1 priority for the SPSA should be the quality of the service that is delivered to local forces and to the Procurator Fiscal Service. I believe that a national service that is delivered to international standards and delivered locally is what is needed.

I have been provided with examples by the Aberdeen staff of how their work has been vital in the quick apprehension of suspects, which has taken those people off our streets and kept my constituents safe. A prime example is the recent bomb hoax directly opposite the office of the Procurator Fiscal Service in Aberdeen, which caused considerable disruption to local bus and train services and to local businesses. The fingerprint service was able to provide immediate assistance, which led to the suspect being identified. If the Aberdeen facility was to close or to be downgraded, at least an extra hour would be added to the time taken to process a product, which could result in a criminal being released back on to our streets.

We know that the speed of service delivery is important for public safety, but there are other implications of a two-lab model, which could also result in higher costs for the SPSA. The increased amount of handling that would occur would increase the risk of contamination of samples. To my mind, that proposal is unacceptable.

Recent examples give further cause for concern about resilience, if we move to a two-lab model. As we know, the Edinburgh lab recently had to close after being attacked. If that happened under a two-lab model, the remaining lab's staff would be swamped, because they would need to deal with all the cases in Scotland. A similar situation could arise if there was another event like Lockerbie or the Piper Alpha disaster that required one lab to work at full capacity on the incident.

For the reasons mentioned above, a two-lab model is an absolute non-starter, whereas keeping four laboratories would be of continued benefit to local communities. However, the SPSA has put forward the idea that smaller labs might be left in place in Aberdeen and Edinburgh. We have yet to receive a final recommendation on how many staff might be located in the proposed satellite laboratory facilities, but we are led to believe that the number would be between two and 12. Again, I have concerns about resilience. No description is given of what cover would be available if staff were away for a length of time due to holidays or illness. I am also concerned that the staff would be required to cover multiple disciplines instead of specialising in one area. Being posted to a satellite laboratory might be seen as detrimental to an

individual's career development and would therefore have little attraction to staff.

I am not against modernisation for the sake of it, and I agree with the review's proposals on the implementation of a new evidence management system, which will help to standardise methods across Scotland. There is a strong case for standardising operating procedures and equipment to provide better consistency of approach. A discipline-led rather than geography-led approach has much to commend it.

From the staff analysis, there is little difference between the total five-year costs of option two and option four: the difference is extremely modest. However, if we take option four rather than option two, there will be additional risks in terms of loss of staff experience, added time for transport, additional handling and potential errors, and uncertainties about the costs of transport and other matters. Are those risks acceptable? I think not.

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

Brian Adam: The SPSA has proposed four options for the future. Options one and two give scope for improving service delivery while options three and four are driven by cost. I regret that I cannot support the motion that is before the Parliament, and I have three reasons for that. It is poorly drafted, Mr MacAskill has not yet received the recommendations, and he cannot publish what he has not got.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should finish now, Mr Adam.

Brian Adam: While I prefer option two, I would prefer it to be amended by the staff in Aberdeen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have already had to ask two members not to speak, so if members speak for longer than their time I will have to ask someone else not to speak.

10:06

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): I am pleased to be following Brian Adam's thoughtful and well-argued speech. The cabinet secretary ought to listen to it very carefully indeed.

I thank the Labour front bench for initiating the debate. I know that we could have discussed all sorts of other topics, but this one is important to me and I am grateful. However, it is a pity that we are considering some flawed options and that, sadly, as I predicted during Lewis Macdonald's debate, there is now also a threat to the Edinburgh laboratory.

My primary concern is for the safety of the people in Lothians and to maintain the vital work

that the forensic staff at Fettes and particularly Howden Hall do to protect them. I also add my welcome to the staff who have come here today—in their own time and unpaid—because of the importance that they attach to the debate. I have visited Howden Hall twice, and I was tremendously impressed by the staff's great skill and dedication. Lothian and Borders Police gets a top quality forensic service from them.

I was dismayed to hear the cabinet secretary imply that, because Dumfries and Galloway does not have forensic services on its doorstep, we in the Lothians should not have them either. That really is a counsel of despair.

That brings me to the consultation process, which, I am sad to say, has been a sham. The consultative paper is flimsy, particularly because it contains no costings and misses some vital points. It is also a sham, because the management of the SPSA has a fixed view on the outcome. I met Tom Nelson, the director of forensic services, and we had a cordial and useful discussion, but he spent half the time arguing for option four, which was a bit of a giveaway that he had made up his mind in advance.

The Howden Hall staff are open to change. They believe that modernisation is right, but it can be achieved without the major structural change that is being proposed. That is why they support option two, as do Unison, Lothian and Borders police board, and I and many other members who have already spoken and will speak. Option two would allow the SPSA to develop a national service while maintaining a top-quality service for Lothian and Borders Police. It would involve radical change, but without risk. It would centralise the specialist services that are not used frequently while preserving locally core functions such as drugs analysis and DNA processing. It would preserve the 24-hour drugs analysis service as well as the biology and chemistry section. It would see the smallest reduction in staff and expertise. The other options would inevitably mean more criminals roaming the streets unchecked.

Only a few weeks ago, because of evidence that was produced quickly by the forensic lab, a man who had raped a teenage girl in Livingston was caught and pled guilty. Before the forensic evidence was obtained speedily—because the lab was close by—he was not even on the police radar.

To illustrate the value that Lothian and Borders Police places on the local lab, I will quote from a letter it wrote to the lab about a drugs operation that took place partly in Kenny MacAskill's constituency. It says that operation

“resulted in 50 drug dealers being arrested.”

It goes on:

“I can assure you that without your support the operation would not have achieved the same level of success.”

I fear that that kind of service would be lost if we were to take any option other than option two. The link between the police and forensic staff must remain close and strong to act as a deterrent to potential criminals.

The SPSA seems to be being driven by the awful desire to centralise that has come to pervade public services in Scotland since devolution.

Kenny MacAskill: If we were to go down the centralisation route, how many more miles would it be from Livingston to Gartcosh than it is from Livingston to Howden Hall?

George Foulkes: You see what I mean, Presiding Officer, about the issue already having been decided. We now have the minister arguing the case for option four and closing the laboratory. It is as plain as a pikestaff.

There is also the pressure to cut costs. Earlier, when talking about the scale of the cuts, the cabinet secretary said:

“matters require to be dealt with.”

What an ominous phrase. However, such as they are, the costings show that there is little difference in cost between the various options, and they do not include the hidden costs, particularly to Lothian and Borders Police, if Howden Hall closes, because the police own the building and many other costs would be involved. I urge Kenny MacAskill to remember that he is a Lothian MSP as well as a minister. If he takes action that could endanger his constituents as well as throwing some of them out of work, he will face serious consequences.

Earlier this year, Howden Hall was firebombed. As Brian Adam said, if we had had only two centres, that would have created some problems for maintaining the service. Thankfully, the firebomb did not succeed in destroying the centre and it is now back up and operating. It would be a tragic irony if Kenny MacAskill succeeded where a firebomb failed.

10:12

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): First of all, I apologise for missing the opening of the debate. I also declare an interest as my partner works for the SPSA on the DNA database in Dundee, and I point out that DNA services for the whole of Scotland have been carried out in Dundee for some time.

In today's debate we have heard a number of arguments in favour of the options to reform forensic services in Scotland. I favour option three,

because I believe that using the two laboratories in Glasgow and Dundee would offer a real opportunity for more effective utilisation of resources and greater standardisation and consistency of service. Option three would provide the highest level of efficiency for the lowest cost and would therefore be in the best interests of providing the best possible crime detection service to Scotland's police forces and the wider public at optimum cost.

Robert Brown: Will the member take an intervention?

Joe FitzPatrick: Perhaps later.

Option three would also secure public service jobs in Dundee, which receives cross-party support in Dundee. Clearly, if we are looking to relocate jobs to Dundee, they will have to come from somewhere else, just as they did when the previous Administration relocated jobs from Edinburgh to Inverness. There will always be issues for the staff who are involved in relocations, so there will need to be proper consultation.

Lewis Macdonald: Does Mr FitzPatrick understand that the issue is not just about the loss of jobs in the laboratories in Aberdeen and Edinburgh, but about the loss of service to the wider communities in the cities that currently benefit from the service being on their doorstep?

Joe FitzPatrick: I am absolutely clear that a national service would mean a better service for the whole of Scotland: the two-lab model would provide a better forensic service across Scotland.

Although I disagree with Brian Adam's choice of option, I understand his position. It is right and proper that constituency members should protect the interests of those whom they represent. Brian Adam is a great advocate for the city of Aberdeen, and if the decision is made to take on my preferred option and to close or scale down the Aberdeen forensics labs, it will not be because of lack of action on the part of Brian Adam on behalf of his constituents. However, the Government and Opposition spokespeople should consider the issues in the round and seek to deliver what is best for Scotland as a whole.

Richard Baker: Of course we should consider the issues in the round. Option two would retain the excellent new facilities at Dundee. We would also have a new facility at Gartcosh, while retaining the local lab in Edinburgh, which would mean winners all round.

Joe FitzPatrick: A report is being produced by the SPSA that will go to the cabinet secretary soon: he will consider it before making his final decision. It would have been responsible for the Opposition spokespeople who call themselves shadow cabinet secretaries to have considered

the report, and to have read, before making their choice, the facts from the people who are doing the work on the ground. However—and not unusually—that has not happened.

The facilities at the new police forensic laboratory at Rushton Court in Dundee could be the key to winning the battle against crime over the next decades. The centre is at the cutting edge of technology; every square inch of the new facility is carefully designed to optimise the analysis of evidence. The new laboratories are lit with natural light, which is the best environment for forensic examination, and include a range of high-spec measures that are designed to protect the chain of evidence, such as controlled air pressure, control of environmental conditions to support temperature, sensitive equipment and specialist anterooms adjacent to each main laboratory to limit and control access. For the first time, forensic experts have laboratory space that has been specifically designed for carrying out blood-pattern reconstructions.

Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD) rose—

Joe FitzPatrick: There is a wet examination room, which will use new techniques for recovery of fingerprints on plastics, while general search labs will be used for body-fluid examinations and DNA analysis.

Mike Pringle rose—

David McLetchie: Will the member give way?

Mike Pringle: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Pringle!

Joe FitzPatrick: As the cabinet secretary has indicated, the Scottish Police Services Authority report highlighted that a reorganisation of Scotland's forensic laboratories is vital to provide a more cost-effective and consistent crime detection service to the nation's eight police forces and its procurators fiscal. Option three would mean an increased role for the new Dundee lab and would fully utilise its state-of-the-art facilities, and secure public service jobs in our city.

A national forensic service is vital: it is a key element in consistency and standardisation. At the same time, we need to take account of financial challenges that face the public sector. The SPSA report identifies the real opportunities for more effective utilisation of resources through a two-laboratory structure. That is seen as the most cost-effective option. We must recognise that if we want the best service, the relocation of posts and a concentration of expertise is necessary. Although under the new structure we will still have local crime scene examination services at each of the eight police force headquarters, the overall

system will be more efficient, more cost effective and ultimately more effective at tackling crime.

The custom-built laboratory at Rushton Court in Dundee is crucial to the future of the service. With savings of £3.5 million by 2015, the two-lab option will provide the highest level of efficiency for the lowest cost, and therefore the best possible crime detection service to Scotland's police forces and the wider public, at optimum cost. However, the cabinet secretary needs to consider the evidence from the SPSA before making his final decision.

10:18

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

Members of Joe FitzPatrick's party should get used to the word "shadow" in front of their names by next year, especially given the speeches that we have heard from them today.

I thank the Labour Party for giving us the opportunity to praise once again the work that is done by the talented and skilled staff at our forensics laboratories around Scotland. I thank, too, the members of all the main parties who supported my motion, which was lodged in July, stating the Parliament's concerns about the modernisation options that could result in the closure of the Aberdeen lab.

In a members' business debate in January 2009, concerns were raised about the future of the Aberdeen lab, the lack of consultation and the secret nature of some of the discussions. Now, 19 months later, we are raising the same concerns about discussions and decisions being made behind closed doors. I would have thought that the Scottish National Party would have learned from the flawed first consultation and worked to ensure that this one would be done properly. The tone that was adopted by the justice secretary today was disappointing, to say the least. It did not sound to me like he was in listening mode. If he had wanted to know the views of the Parliament, we would have been having a Government debate today rather than a Labour debate, welcome it though I do.

The forensics lab in Aberdeen is vital to the Highlands and Islands, which is one of the main reasons why the Northern Constabulary was, understandably, disappointed when it was not consulted when a previous decision to close the lab looked likely. In fact, the information that the Northern Constabulary got was gleaned from *The Press and Journal*.

While north-east members are right to question the additional time that will be taken to transport evidence to Dundee, and the added costs that that will bring, those issues are of even greater significance to the Northern Constabulary. Cases from Orkney and Shetland can currently be

delivered to Aberdeen by police officers, who can return on the next flight or ferry to the islands. It would be far more difficult if they had to go to Dundee and back. Incidentally, I spoke to a senior police officer at the weekend who asked me to mention the excellent forensic service that was provided by the Aberdeen lab during the investigation of the recent murder on the Orkney island of Sanday. An overnight stay would add further cost and leave a police officer on the mainland while others would have to fill the void on the islands. Most important, though, is the loss of valuable time in the investigation of crimes. That is why I believe that option two is the modernisation proposal that best meets the needs of people in the Highlands and Islands and throughout Scotland.

The previous consultation process and the current discussions about the modernisation options have had a negative impact on staff morale. Staff have been questioning the future of their careers not just for months but for years. However, the discussions have also allowed the public and politicians a greater insight into the work that those staff do for our communities. The Aberdeen laboratory processes evidence from an area of 14,500 square miles, which is nearly 50 per cent of the land mass of Scotland, including three groups of islands. The lab serves more than 813,000 people from Unst in Shetland to Glencoe in the south. Any option that would result in that resource being moved to Dundee should not be accepted by the minister as a modernisation option. It is not. Such an option would have a detrimental impact on our communities and would be seen for what it is—a backwards step and not the model of modern policing that we should be aiming for.

As Lewis Macdonald said, the 47 staff at the Aberdeen lab have built up a great level of expertise. Their base at Nelson Street has enhanced the policing efforts in Grampian and the Highlands and Islands for many years. The SPSA recognises that relocation of staff will have a financial impact and could result in a loss of experienced staff, who are unwilling to move. Those jobs have in the past proved to be difficult to fill with the right people with the correct skills: that is surely another reason not to forge ahead with plans to close the Aberdeen and Edinburgh labs.

I support the amendment in the name of my colleague John Lamont, which acknowledges the concern about the loss of skilled jobs and the benefits that the labs deliver to local communities. There are genuine concerns that if the minister accepts option three or option four, the time that would be taken to process evidence would increase, as would the time to secure convictions. Both options would have a negative impact on the

effectiveness of our police forces and on the public's confidence that the perpetrators of crime will be brought to justice.

The minister has the ability to make that decision. I hope that his tone and approach will change in future debates. However, he also has a responsibility to make public the recommendations from the SPSA. I hope that he will acknowledge the wide public interest in this debate and reveal those details.

10:24

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I spoke to a class of secondary pupils recently and asked them what they want to do when they are older. As members can imagine, few hands went up when I asked who wants to be an MSP. However, after a few pupils had mentioned it, I asked who wanted to be a forensic scientist or a crime scene examiner, and a roomful of arms was raised. That is probably testimony to the power of American television and the popularity of "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation", because it certainly does not reflect the way in which the SPSA and forensic services have been treated in Scotland or reported in the media. Over the past few years, the SPSA could not have bought a good headline. It is worrying that—as I believe—that reflects a lack of political support and leadership and that it is, which is more important, very damaging for everyone working in the forensic services and to our confidence in what lies ahead.

As many members in the chamber know, many of the negative headlines were generated initially by those who were involved in the McKie campaign. As if that was not enough, the service has had to face interminable internal restructuring, job revaluation, cuts and now redundancies. Despite being established only in 2007, the SPSA has already been reorganised, most recently with a replacement of the regional bureaux with function-based or subject-based departments. The staff are not only awaiting the outcome of the fingerprint inquiry, but are facing confirmation of further restructuring, the proposed closure of regional offices and the loss of more than 100 posts. Because of the impact that they are having on the morale of all those who work in this vital public service, such changes and cutbacks are bound to have a negative effect on our ability to solve crimes and to prosecute offenders effectively.

What particularly concerns me is the SNP's failure since coming into government to show any kind of strategic leadership. Many leading lights in the McKie campaign are part of the current Administration, and that overly aggressive campaign unfairly targeted the fingerprint services and shamefully hounded decent public servants

who, by the very nature of their employment, were unable to defend themselves. What I would have hoped for when the SNP came to power, and with a newly reformed service in the shape of the SPSA, was an opportunity to invest in that service, to provide a boost to staff morale and to rebuild a sense of loyalty, belonging and pride. Instead we have had a series of decisions that have left staff not knowing which way to turn. Worse than that, in fact, is that the SNP has typically managed to face two ways at the same time with local members like Mr Adam trying to profess undying loyalty to his local service while his own leaders and front benchers are pulling the rug from under his feet with plans to break up the service, shut down Aberdeen and close or merge bureaux.

I appreciate that Government ministers are not supposed to involve themselves in operational decisions, but when so much bad news emanates from one organisation, I certainly expect the minister to take a more hands-on approach. As several members, including Cathie Craigie, have already pointed out, it is not good enough for the minister simply to sit back and say that he does not know. He should be asking questions himself.

If, as we all expect, the fingerprint inquiry, which is about to report, makes a number of recommendations about the organisation's structure or practices, why on earth is the SPSA pre-empting the findings by restructuring now? I note, too, that Audit Scotland is also due to report in a matter of weeks.

On an issue of even greater insensitivity, why has the minister approved the appointment of three new directors of service at a time when they are supposedly trying to get rid of dozens of members of staff? I have nothing against the individuals involved, but advertising such highly paid posts when the organisation is trying to make savings, and people all around are worried about keeping their jobs, strikes me as being crass in the extreme.

More objectionable still is the way in which the minister has allowed the SPSA to offer large redundancy sums to people in senior positions only to rehire them on even more generous consultancy fees. In its first year of operation, the SPSA spent just under £1 million on private firms to advise on training, management, consultancies, computers, advertising and public relations and, in the six months after that, spent a further £800,000 on consultants.

Personally, I had little or no faith in the action plan for the fingerprint service that the previous chief executive, David Mulhern, brought in. However, from what I can gather, those reforms have been abandoned less than three years after their introduction. Given that the fingerprint verification unit, too, seems to have gone, we now

have the bizarre situation in which, even before the fingerprint inquiry has reported, the SPSA has abandoned both anonymity and any kind of hierarchy of expertise in the checking system.

A very worrying development for our criminal justice system's integrity is the suspicion that these changes are already having an effect on scene-of-crime examinations and the collection of evidence. I have heard that some case loads are being reduced by simply not sending examiners to crime scenes that would in the past have automatically received the full spectrum of analysis and examination. When I have asked parliamentary questions on the subject, I have found, as with other issues to do with the SPSA, the answers to be far from satisfactory. If the information is not available to the Parliament, is not it time that the minister started asking questions for himself? The very suggestion that processes are being allowed to slip or that we do not have total confidence will be pounced on by defence lawyers. The SPSA is an accountable public body; the minister, too, needs to demonstrate that accountability.

The common theme that has run through this debate is that we need greater transparency. When public services are under siege, it is up to the Government to be straight, not secretive. Ministers need in their dealings to offer honesty and openness. The picture is not a good one. The SNP has made a mess when it had every opportunity to revitalise and renew the service. I call upon the minister now to be open and transparent. He needs to truly involve staff, and to make them feel wanted and help them feel proud. That way we will have a service that we can rely on.

10:30

Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP):

As far as the speeches we have heard so far are concerned, no one will be surprised to hear that members are standing up to seek to protect important jobs and services in the areas that they represent. That is entirely appropriate; indeed, it is to be expected, given the duty on MSPs to do their best for their constituents.

I fear, however, that we will see more of this pattern of debate in the coming months as Scotland's reducing budget bites harder and harder and more jobs are put under threat around the country. As we have no control or flexibility over the size of Scotland's budget, difficult decisions must be made that balance value for money with protecting essential services. Clearly, policing and supporting services such as forensics must be one of the Scottish Government's most fundamental priorities, so I am sure that all members agree that we must do all that we can to

continue the progress that has been made under this Administration in driving crime levels in Scotland to a 32-year low.

Although we do not know the precise cuts that the Treasury will impose on Scotland, it is clear that all budgets are facing unprecedented pressure. The SPSA report, which lays out the four options for forensic services, concludes that the most cost-effective option in the long term is the reduction or closure of services in Aberdeen and Edinburgh. However, it is important to acknowledge that all four options will deliver savings of varying amounts and that the proposals have been based on estimated projections instead of having been subjected to a detailed cost analysis. Although the intention is to conduct such an analysis after an option is chosen, surely it would be better for a decision of this kind to be based on a financial analysis that is beyond question.

That said, the decision is no simple balance sheet equation. Just as important as delivering value for money is the need to maintain the quality of the service that is available to police forces around the country. There are real concerns that centralising forensic services will make it harder for police forces to access the knowledge and expertise of the highly skilled people who work in Scotland's forensic laboratories. When forces set local priorities and seek to influence the work allocation of forensic services to match them, the efficacy of operations can significantly increase. With greater centralisation, it seems doubtful that that would continue to be as readily possible. When minutes and hours can make all the difference in an investigation, it also seems to be only common sense to conclude that it is a good thing to maintain reduced travelling times to laboratories.

Moreover, the inevitable risk with any relocation of this kind is that highly experienced members of staff who have developed invaluable skills might find themselves unable to relocate, thereby depriving the police of their expertise. The SPSA's own options paper clearly states that it has already experienced difficulty in attracting people with the right level of skills, so if centralisation goes ahead there is a real risk that the quality of the forensic services that will be available in the short term will decline.

In their in-depth response to the proposals, the Aberdeen lab staff make the valuable point that reducing the number of laboratories will have a knock-on effect on the service's resilience. In the event of power cuts, attacks or other unforeseen circumstances, the ability to continue to provide vital forensics services could be drastically compromised.

I acknowledge that this is one of the many difficult decisions that falling budgets will force upon us in coming months, and that providing value for money is a major concern. These are difficult times and making uncostered spending demands without weighing up whether the benefits justify them helps nobody. However, I believe that the case for option two is robust and has been laid out best by the Aberdeen laboratory staff. I sincerely hope that, when the decision is made, we will continue to see forensic services in Aberdeen at the forefront of efforts to combat crime.

10:35

Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): Politicians from across the north-east, from every political party, come here today not to bury the forensic lab in Aberdeen but to praise it. The only person who can bury the lab is the minister, and our fears on that front have only escalated this morning. I hope that the strength of feeling and the strength of our argument will change his mind.

The issue is vital in itself because, if the lab closes, more crimes in Aberdeen and the north-east will go undetected and more criminals will walk the streets of our city, but it also highlights another crucial issue—the increasing instinct of the SNP Government to centralise services, or the monolithic ministerial mandate. Right across not only Aberdeen but the whole of the north and north-east of Scotland, we are increasingly against centralisation, and especially against the building of a flagship new facility in the central belt.

Let us be clear that people in Aberdeen are astonished and appalled that, in the face of opposition from the local police, the local police board and the forensic service, the closure of the Aberdeen lab remains a real and present danger. My first question is why, when the minister could remove the uncertainty today, is there still doubt about the lab's future? Why does the sword of Damocles still hang over it? Why have the recommendations of the SPSA been kept secret? Why has the minister not demanded to see those recommendations before today's vital debate? Why has he not made it his priority to reveal those recommendations to the Parliament today? Minister, your excuses today simply do not stack up. It smacks of cover-up.

My next question is why the SNP is increasingly against Aberdeen and the north-east. We all know that, in opposition, SNP members would have been clamouring and clambering over each other to mount the barricades and to fight to save the lab. We now have an SNP Government that wants to close our local prison with no proposals for community or remand facilities, that wants to close

our local forensic lab, and that refuses to give our council a fair funding settlement.

Mary Scanlon: I remind the member that the issue is not only about Aberdeen and the north-east. The closure would probably have an even greater impact on the Highlands and Islands.

Nicol Stephen: I understand the point fully. At the many points in my speech where I say "Aberdeen", please include the north-east, the whole of the north of Scotland and the islands.

Why has the Government changed? Let me suggest an answer. The minister is in the closing months of his time in office and he is increasingly under the influence of the officials and the bureaucrats, whose instincts are unerringly for secrecy and centralisation. We are told that the SPSA failed to forward its recommendations to the minister before today's debate. Let me quote from section 8 of the Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2006, which established the SPSA. It states:

"The Authority must comply with any reasonable request from the Scottish Ministers to provide them with any information on the Authority's activities."

That is what is called a catch-all. It means that the minister can ask for anything. Minister, at the stroke of a pen, we could—we should—have had from you today the information that we require to make a proper decision and to have a proper debate and argument on the issue.

My simple plea is this: get a grip of these crucial issues. You do not have to centralise. You do not have to target Aberdeen, the north-east and the north. You have the power to decide. The buck stops with you. However, if you choose to close the lab in Aberdeen when you eventually get the recommendations from the SPSA, you should remember that politicians from every political party in the north-east will be against you, the police will be against you, and the forensic experts in both in the laboratories and the universities will be against you. Closure would be a criminals' charter and a decision that nobody in Aberdeen would understand or support.

Minister, please stand up for local decision making and local excellence in tackling crime. Stand up for the forensic lab in Aberdeen, because in the final analysis there can be only one correct decision. If you keep the Aberdeen forensic lab open, you will, on this issue at least, receive the overwhelming backing and support of the Parliament and all the political parties who are here this morning.

10:41

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I learned everything I know about the

issue from constituents who work at either Howden Hall or Fettes. I hope that the cabinet secretary will also meet his constituents who work in the local forensic service as that is not inconsistent with his position and responsibilities. I welcome his and my constituents and others to the public gallery today.

We all know that we have to make hard decisions about saving money in the next few weeks and do that in a way that is consistent with not having a serious adverse effect on services, but what is strange about the subject before us is not only that striking adverse effects would result from centralisation but that centralisation does not even save very much money. In the official costings in the options paper, there is very little difference between options one and three or between options two and four. Also, questions have been asked about some of the costings. To give one of several examples, the stated transport costs of centralisation are questionably low, at £160,000, and there is no allowance for the initial capital cost of vehicles for transporting samples around Scotland. Moreover, the hidden costs to customers are not addressed at all.

I will go on to talk about that, but before I do, I want to mention a general concern about the lack of detail in options three and four and the lack of detail on the views of stakeholders. An e-mail from Tom Nelson to staff said that no unanimous view has come from stakeholders. We would not expect that, but was there a clear majority view? We need to know how the selection was arrived at. There has to be a clear presentation of the selection process, with documents, to show how customers' views were taken into account. If that is not released, I am sure that it will be asked for in a freedom of information request.

Of course we need modernisation and savings, but whichever option is chosen, we already have a common IT system and a five-year transformation plan. Moreover, option two includes provision for centralising less-used services, standardising procedures and systems and integrating the four sites into one management system although, strangely, the use of automated disclosure processes is applied only to options three and four.

Brian Adam: Will the member take an intervention?

Malcolm Chisholm: I will if I have time, but I will see whether I can get through my material first.

Turning to Edinburgh, my main concern is that the excellent facility in the city should not be closed or radically downgraded. It is a highly respected facility and its closure would lead to results not being obtained fast enough and to

investigations being jeopardised. Only yesterday, the forensic service in Edinburgh had a key role to play in a massive drugs operation in my constituency, on which I congratulate the police and the forensic service. Without the forensic service, it simply would not have been possible. The 24-hour drugs service that we have in Edinburgh allows the charging within six hours that various members have mentioned, but it also allows a rapid turnaround for test purchasing and other purposes.

Brian Adam: Does the member agree that, although the SPSA produced four options in its consultation, it is clear from the submissions that we are aware of that variations on those options are already before the SPSA? Would it be unfortunate if members decided that they were in favour of only one of the SPSA options rather than modifications of them that could be beneficial all round?

Malcolm Chisholm: I listen to my constituents, and I am sure that Brian Adam listens to his constituents. Those who have put views to me are in favour of option two.

Over and above the drugs service to which I have referred, the service is important for many other types of investigation. For example, it provides crucial DNA analysis and fingerprint identifications in many cases. Local scientific experts are also able to attend major scenes quickly. Fast responses in all such areas are vital for the police and the procurator fiscal, but speed is not the only issue. I will give just one example. I have been told that, in Edinburgh, the percentage purity of drugs in all seizures over 1g is analysed, whereas the figure in Strathclyde is over 250g. Therefore, if there was centralisation in Glasgow, there would be either a greatly increased workload there or a significant loss of an element of the service for Lothian and the Borders.

Finally, there are some strange assumptions about a reducing workload in the options paper. For example, it mentions having two or three gas chromatography-mass spectrometry, or GCMS, machines for the whole of Scotland, but I have been told that control samples have not been factored into the calculations. A second example is Cozart testing. The paper assumes that that will reduce the workload, but I have been told that there has been no significant drop in demand for laboratory analysis in Edinburgh. That is the chemistry side. There has also been a big increase in biology cases and in the demand for DNA analysis.

I will conclude, as my time is up. Options three and four are full of risks. There are cost risks, but more important, risks that perpetrators will not be identified and that insufficient evidence will be generated to secure convictions. Members should

therefore reject options three and four and support option two.

10:47

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, acknowledge the invaluable service that Scotland's forensic services provide to our justice system and communities. As the director of the SPSA said:

"forensic science is the key to unlocking many investigations which in turn can save thousands of hours of expensive police time."

He said that it can also play an increasingly important role that could ultimately help prevent crime.

There is no doubt that, in the past, there have been inconsistencies in forensic service provision throughout Scotland, and there is no disagreement about the need to modernise. If crime is to be dealt with swiftly and effectively, speedy and efficient forensic services that can produce fast results for all crimes, from murder right down to robberies and housebreakings, are needed. It is accepted that that requires a national forensic service that recognises the needs of local communities, the police and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. There is ready acceptance that modernisation is required and that the status quo is not an option. It is also recognised that on-going efficiency savings have to be made, given the inevitable impact of the current financial strictures on our public services.

The consultation that the SPSA embarked on last year was welcome, as it followed what was widely seen as a flawed and biased original consultation process. I found the words of the SPSA's director in July to be quite encouraging. He said that he and his colleagues, together with customers and stakeholders, wanted to ensure that, within the available financial resources, forensic science made the best possible contribution to delivering safer communities in Scotland.

As we know, four options were presented for consideration, and the SPSA board's recommendation has now been decided. It is deeply disturbing and frustrating to many people that the chosen option is not being made public. It is clear that members across the chamber believe that we should be told what future structure for the national forensic service has been recommended. We feel very let down by the cabinet secretary.

Brian Adam: I share Nanette Milne's view that it would have been better if the recommendation had been published, but does she accept that that recommendation may not be option one, two, three or four, and that it could be a modification on

the basis of the submissions that have been made?

Nanette Milne: We do not know that. We are being kept in the dark on the issue. I hope that we can be assured that, in reaching the recommendation to the Government, the SPSA board gave all four options equal and unbiased consideration.

As a North East Scotland MSP, I have concerns that closure of the forensic laboratory in Aberdeen would have a detrimental effect on future service delivery throughout the Grampian Police and Northern Constabulary areas. There is no doubt that Lothian and Borders MSPs have similar concerns about the potential closure of the Edinburgh lab. The issue has united politicians across the political spectrum, because we all recognise how important the forensic services are to the wellbeing of the communities that we serve.

I do not intend to rehearse all the concerns that have been expressed about the potential loss of the Aberdeen lab, but I want to highlight the inevitability of an increased turnaround time, which would adversely impact on the speed with which criminals are identified and brought to justice. That could be a significant issue for the Aberdeen area, which has a particularly high incidence of drugs-related crime and a serious incidence of crack cocaine abuse. There would be significantly more movement of forensic material between the Grampian and Highland areas and the Dundee laboratory, which would lead to as yet unspecified transportation costs, security issues and environmental impacts as a result of repeated journeys by road.

From our study of the options paper, my party reached the conclusion that option two—the base case and evidence management solution—gives the most viable alternative to the status quo, as it would ensure that services would remain accessible throughout Scotland and lead to savings of £5.6 million over five years, followed by savings of £2 million a year thereafter, from 2012-13. Option two is also favoured by staff in the service, who are very receptive to change and are ready to move forward. They are dedicated and expert providers of the service, and I hope that their views have been given the attention that they deserve.

The past few years have been extremely worrying and unsettling for the many people involved in providing the essential forensic services on which we all rely. I hope that, having listened to members, the cabinet secretary's response to the SPSA's recommendation will allay our fears and lead to a modernised national forensic service in Scotland that we can all be proud of.

10:52

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP):

I always take great delight in such debates. They are full of hope, partnership and the desire to engage constructively in the subject matter, and arguments in them are presented in a positive and forward-looking manner. They are a pleasure.

To be serious, the commitment and passion that members across the chamber have demonstrated clearly show the high esteem in which they hold our forensic services in Scotland.

It is important to know the background facts, so I would like to remind members of some of the SNP Government's great achievements. I know that members always like to hear about those achievements—I can tell by the noise—and I am delighted to indulge them.

The SNP manifesto commitment on an extra 1,000 police officers has been more than achieved, and they have had an effect. They are part of the reason why there has been a 32-year low in crime rates. That is an excellent effect that the SNP Government has produced, and it demonstrates that Scotland is safer.

Anyone who has been following the news cannot have failed to notice the emphasis that there has been on tackling serious and organised crime. Drug dealers are getting longer sentences under the SNP Government. With strong political backing, our police forces are putting the bad guys behind bars. The SNP Government is tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime: the criminals.

Part of the force—the successful team—that is arrayed against those criminals is, of course, our forensic capability. That forensic prowess, from a service that is essential to policing, relies on the specialist staff who are employed in each of Scotland's eight force areas, as well as on the experts who are employed in the fingerprint departments and laboratories by the Scottish Police Services Authority. The services that are under review, which are mentioned in the motion, are the four laboratories, not the scene-of-crime teams or the fingerprint teams. The services that are under review are provided by the forensic scientists.

I have been told that the fastest way to upset a police forensic scientist is to compare their work to what happens in the "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation" television programme and to say that our forensic teams would love to be able to stroll into a crime scene, spray some magic powder, shine an ultraviolet light, and then be able to tell whodunnit and how. However, the reality is that we are talking about serious and dedicated professional scientists who deliver an excellent

service and help us to make Scotland a safer country.

They do not sweep in with sirens and flashing lights and they do not make arrests—they leave that to the police. They do not make prosecution decisions or construct a case—they leave that to the procurators fiscal. They do not decide what can and cannot be used as evidence or take sentencing decisions—they leave that to the courts. What they do is to provide analysis of the evidence that is presented to assist those other people to do their jobs. They do that well and conscientiously and without fanfare. They work as quickly as possible, but take as much time as is needed to get the job done properly, and they make sure that it is done properly. They will continue to do that.

The idea in the motion that the possible reorganisation would somehow threaten the

"speedy access to evidence for the detection of those responsible for crimes and the prevention of further offences"

is an insult to those scientists. They will not hold up the processing of evidence and nor will they take longer than is necessary. Neither the individual scientists nor the SPSA would suggest any reorganisation or new practice that would impact adversely on their ability to do their job well and in good time.

Employment concerns will surface in the mind of anyone whose place of work is under review. Everybody's place of work seems to be under review these days and everybody is nervous about it.

Mike Rumbles: The member's certainly is.

Christina McKelvie: I am sure that members across the chamber, including Mr Rumbles, will understand those employment concerns. Trying to use them to make a partisan political point cannot be understood. That is little-boy politics, when this country—at this time perhaps more than at any other—needs real, grown-up politics.

While the Cabinet Secretary for Justice waits for the recommendations of the review—I note that the motion suggests that they have already been delivered—the Parliament could have spent its time better on other topics. As eloquent as the debate is, it can add nothing without the report having been delivered.

We should praise and thank the forensic scientists of the SPSA. Without their help, the job of our police forces, prosecutors and courts would be much harder. We should do those scientists the courtesy of waiting until all the evidence is before us before we debate the future of the service that they provide. The SPSA was established in 2007 and has done a tremendous job since then. It is

reviewing the tools that it needs to do the job effectively. We should allow it to complete its review and we could do with some adult politics when it has done so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): I call Peter Peacock, who has three minutes.

10:58

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): As my time is limited, I move straight to the remarks that the cabinet secretary made about Northern Constabulary—I speak from its perspective and that of west Grampian—and the fact that it should not be concerned about a move of services from Aberdeen to Dundee, as Dundee is not much more distant than Aberdeen. The point that comes out the most is that the current arrangements work perfectly adequately and have served the region well. I am not aware of any analysis that suggests failings in the current arrangements that could be remedied by the move that is on the cards.

Northern Constabulary brings a regional perspective to the debate. In our country, it is important that we disperse jobs and share the prosperity of highly skilled jobs throughout the country. We should resist the centralising tendencies that all bureaucracies tend to bring to the table.

As members are aware, there is a debate about the future configuration of police services. One scenario that is being developed—although no one knows whether it will come to pass—is the merging of Northern Constabulary and Grampian Police. In the light of the possibility—it is only a possibility—of such wider reorganisation, it seems premature to remove services from Aberdeen, which is in the Grampian Police area, to another force area.

One option is to leave some services in Aberdeen but ask Northern Constabulary to refocus and send some of its work to Dundee. That would split the way in which the force works and interrupt the trusting and strong relationships and good working practices that have developed over a period. It would also leave less capacity in Aberdeen, which might have consequences for the work that would still go from Northern Constabulary to Aberdeen, so there is a risk attached to that option.

There are strong transport connections from parts of the Highlands to Aberdeen, particularly the ferry and plane services from Shetland and Orkney, and also from Wick. Those connections can aid the speed of response. However, there are no similar direct connections between Inverness and the wider Highlands with Dundee.

The Northern joint police board has expressed concern that every one of the options presents some risk for the force, as Malcolm Chisholm set out, and it has stated that it is not necessary to entertain that risk given the satisfactory nature of the current arrangements. When ministers decide on the issue, they need to be aware of Northern Constabulary's position on the matter, which Mary Scanlon and other members have mentioned. There is clear concern about the direction of travel, the interruption to good existing services, the potential loss of expertise and experience, the loss of transport connections and the lack of attention to volume. For all those reasons, I hope that the minister will listen carefully to that perspective in making a decision.

11:01

Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): As George Foulkes and others did, I welcome to the public gallery the staff from the forensic laboratories in Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

The debate has more importance than almost any other debate in which I have taken part in the past four years, because wrong decisions with regards to forensic laboratories in Scotland would have serious consequences for the solving of crime throughout Scotland, but most particularly in Edinburgh and in Aberdeen and the north, as Peter Peacock highlighted. I accept that the minister has not yet seen the recommendation from the SPSA, but I hope to provide him with reasons not to accept options three or four, if that is the proposition from the SPSA.

We heard recently that crime rates are falling. The figures that were published at the beginning of September show that recorded crime decreased by 10 per cent between 2008-09 and 2009-10 and that, in the Lothian and Borders area, the number of incidents fell from 70,524 to 64,943, which is a reduction of almost 8 per cent. It is even more encouraging that, in 2009-10, the figure for crimes and offences that are cleared up by the police as a percentage of those recorded reached its highest-ever level, at 49 per cent, which is up by 5 per cent from 2000-01.

I believe that much of that improvement in solvency rates is a result of quick forensic examination by labs on the spot locally. Lothian and Borders Police is at the forefront of that, because the lab in Edinburgh gives quick access and turnaround of cases. As Robert Brown said, the loss of the labs in Edinburgh and Aberdeen would have a serious effect on the capacity to turn round cases quickly, not just in those areas, but in other places.

I recently met a large number of the staff at the Edinburgh lab. As Lewis Macdonald and others

said, they are concerned for their future. They explained to me that many of the cases with which they deal are sent by other police forces, particularly Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary. That is because, as Ken Macintosh highlighted, the closest lab, which is in Glasgow, is busy and the turnaround time is not good. Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary therefore sends its cases to Edinburgh, where the lab is much quicker and the range of cases that are dealt with is much greater. Malcolm Chisholm referred to the fact that even seizures of 1g of drugs are frequently analysed. He also referred to the crime bust on drugs in his constituency. That sort of thing happens all the time in Lothian. The loss of the lab in Edinburgh would produce much greater delays, which would lead to less solved crime. In the long term, will we be able to maintain the solvency rates at 49 per cent or will we go backwards and have less crime solved as a result?

MSPs from Lothian recently met Chief Constable David Strang, his deputy, Steve Allen, and other senior police officers. Any one of them will confirm that senior police officers in Lothian are extremely concerned at the prospect of losing the lab in Edinburgh. Indeed, the deputy chief constable has written to the chief executive of the SPSA expressing serious concerns about the possibility of option three or four being adopted.

The week before I met the chief constable, the police board in Edinburgh voted unanimously not to support options three or four and to support option two. I understand that it is not the only police board or authority to take that stance; I understand that Grampian Police and Northern Constabulary have also voiced very serious concerns about proposals to adopt options three or four.

I am not sure that I agree with Richard Baker about the quality of the consultation. I thought that Maureen Watt made a very good speech that highlighted a number of issues that the consultation did not address, particularly the cost analysis and what will happen to the staff.

When I visited the lab in Edinburgh, the staff said that they were the ones who were telling the police and the procurator fiscal's office that the consultation was going on and what it was saying. There seemed to be a real lack of awareness among the front-line services about what the SPSA was proposing.

The SPSA wants to save money and in its options paper it outlines various ways of saving anywhere between £1.75 million and £3.5 million up to 2015. The review must be not just about saving money. As David Strang and others said, the most important thing is to ensure that the service continues to be provided on the same basis as it is provided now.

I agree with Brian Adam and Nicol Stephen that if the service is diluted by closing either or both the Aberdeen and Edinburgh labs, we will end up with greater delays in solving crime, which will allow criminals to get away with their crimes: they will be back on the street and crime rates will start to go up again. What will we do as a consequence of that?

I hope that the minister finds the necessary savings, which the SPSA wants, to which he—or somebody else—referred, from another part of his budget. I suggest that those savings might come from police budgets or other budgets. Police forces might not like that, but the national forensic service is the most important service that we have. If we want to keep the present high-quality forensic service in Scotland, we have to reject options three and four. I urge the minister to accept option two.

11:07

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)

(Con): This debate has reflected the wholly unsatisfactory nature of the consultation process on the review of forensic services, which bears all the hallmarks of a rush to reach a predetermined conclusion, despite all the usual warm words and blandishments about openness and engagement.

Intriguingly, the SPSA options paper states:

“Once we have captured and assessed views on the options from staff, customers and stakeholders across Scotland, it will be for the SPSA Board to agree the way forward to recommend to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice.”

The SPSA might well have captured views, but it has certainly not released them. Indeed, this whole process is an affront to the very concept of openness in decision making.

The SPSA board took a decision on the recommendation that it would make to the cabinet secretary at its meeting on 13 September. That decision was made on the basis of a report from its executive officers, to which was appended a summary of the responses received from the various stakeholders who had participated in the six-week consultation on the options paper. That report, and that summary, remain secret.

I am told by the SPSA that it is now seeking permission to publish the responses, but quite why the consultation was not conducted on the basis that all responses would be published as a matter of course, unless there was a very good reason to the contrary, is beyond me.

I have a copy of the submissions that Lothian and Borders Police and the Lothian and Borders police joint board made, but that is because the police made them available to me and other members—it is no thanks to the SPSA. I would

like to have known what other police boards and other police forces had to say for the purpose of this debate, but I do not know, because that information is deliberately being withheld.

The Government amendment states that the SPSA has still to make a recommendation to the cabinet secretary. That is sophistry of a very low order, because, as we all know, the SPSA board has already made a decision. Does anyone here truly believe that neither Mr MacAskill nor any of his officials know what that decision is? If that were the case, Mr MacAskill would have a great career ahead of him in the United States military as the supreme exponent of the don't ask, don't tell policy.

Why is there an apparent delay in submission? Why do we have this elaborate pretence and charade that the cabinet secretary does not know, which leaves him today without a shred of credibility? Why have the responses and the SPSA board report not been published in time for today's debate, which was known about a week ago?

This Parliament's ability to have a debate on the four options that is informed by the various submissions, and our ability as individual MSPs to take a wider-Scotland view, as well as argue quite properly for our local interests, is severely circumscribed by the elaborate and secretive nature of the process put in place by the SPSA in cahoots with Mr MacAskill and the Scottish Government. That is a disgrace and an insult to the Parliament and the staff who work in forensic services. That is the answer to the SNP members who have complained about the motion and the timing of the debate. If the SPSA had published all the evidence, we could have had a more informed discussion on it, but it has not and that is the SNP Government's fault.

As the constituency member for Edinburgh Pentlands, I have had representations from constituents who work in the Edinburgh laboratory. Along with George Foulkes, I met a staff deputation here in the Parliament at the end of last month. Clearly people are concerned about the loss or relocation of their jobs and the impact that that would have on their family, which is understandable. We have been here before with job dispersal programmes, which have a difficult human dimension, however good they might sound in practice. However, what shone through in our discussion was not just the professionalism and skill of the staff, to which other members have referred, but a real concern about the effect that the adoption of any option that involves the closure or scaling down of the Edinburgh laboratory will have on the quality of the service available to police and prosecutors in the Lothians and the Borders. That concern is quite properly

reflected in the submissions that our police board and our chief constable made. Just like George Foulkes and Mike Pringle, as an MSP for Edinburgh, I am not prepared to vote for such an option.

I am strengthened in that view because, even in these difficult financial times, the savings that can be achieved by adopting any of the four options in the paper are speculative, marginal and superficial, because in some cases they would result simply in the transfer of costs from the SPSA budget back to the Lothian and Borders Police budget, which might please one set of accountants but would make no overall difference to the public purse.

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

David McLetchie: I must finish.

I ask the Parliament to support Richard Baker's motion, the amendments in the name of my colleague John Lamont and the amendment in the name of Robert Brown, on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. I also invite the cabinet secretary to respect the decision that Parliament makes today when he finally gets round to reading his papers and making his decision. He and his department have a reputation for being at odds with this Parliament. This would be a very good time to get on side.

11:13

Kenny MacAskill: I reiterate what we agree on: the excellent service provided by the forensic science and fingerprint service, to which Mary Scanlon referred in relation to incidents in Orkney and to which others referred in relation to incidents in the city of Edinburgh and elsewhere. I know how grateful the Lord Advocate was to the service when forensic science played a fundamental role in ensuring that justice was done after the recent tragic murder of Moira Jones in the city of Glasgow. It is appropriate that we put on record once again our support for forensic science staff.

It is regrettable that Nicol Stephen, as a former Deputy First Minister, should seek to traduce those who work within the justice department, whether at St Andrew's house or elsewhere. We as a Government think that we are blessed and well served by all those who work within justice, whether at local or national level, in agencies, as part of the police or Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, in prisons or anywhere else. Mr Stephen's comments were unfortunate and disrespectful to those who previously served him.

However, let us also accept that there have been difficulties. I refer both to the genesis of the SPSA, which happened, of course, under a

previous Administration, and to the initial consultation. As I said, as a Government, we accepted that the initial consultation was not done appropriately, and we ensured that the SPSA went back and did it again. I reiterate that we have made no decision. Matters are on a steadier keel under Vic Emery—

Margaret Smith: The cabinet secretary touched on the importance of taking advice. Will he take advice from Steve Allen, the deputy chief constable of our police force in Lothian and Borders, who said that the

“financial assumptions in the report lack detail and rigour”

and that “further work” still needs to be done to ensure that the decisions that are taken are taken properly? I agree with him: the decision should be option two.

Kenny MacAskill: I made it clear at the outset that I am prepared to listen to anyone who seeks to correspond with me and that I will await the report from the SPSA. I will take cognisance of that and I will take on board the views of the chamber. As I said, I am prepared to take representations from elsewhere. Clearly, Mr Allen falls within that category. I would have thought that that was self-evident, but for the avoidance of doubt, I reiterate that if Mr Allen or anyone else at Lothian and Borders wishes to speak to me, I am more than happy to hear them.

As I said, the SPSA came into being under the previous Administration. At the time, the Parliament felt it necessary to set up such an authority; we agreed with that. Clearly, changes are coming, and we require to address them. Some of them are financial, and we are required to take them on board.

It is regrettable that Labour has come—certainly, its front-bench spokesmen have—with the argument that it is simply no fair that somehow or other the report has not reached my desk. They are immensely upset about that. The report will come, but it is not here and it is not with civil servants. I am assured that it has just not arrived. I do not know whether it has been despatched or not. The fact of the matter is that I do not have it. *[Interruption.]* I say to Mr Rumbles that the Lib Dems may say that they would have acted differently, but I think that I have to read the report. I assume that it is not going to be two sides of A4—

Mike Rumbles: Will the minister give way?

Kenny MacAskill: No. Mr Rumbles has had his chance to speak—and usually from a sedentary position.

I will read the report and give it the consideration that it deserves. I will take into account the points that others have made. We

should recognise that the changes also have to be taken into account.

It is appropriate that John Lamont and Robert Brown are keeping a more open mind on the subject. Brian Adam made a significant and sensible point in his speech. As he said, we should remember that I will get the report from the SPSA on the four options. *[Interruption.]* I say to Mr Rumbles that I do not have to accept any recommendations. He and Mr Stephen may feel that they are required to accept the report as gospel—

Mike Rumbles: Will the minister allow me to answer that?

Kenny MacAskill: No. I will accept no interventions, sedentary or otherwise, from Mr Rumbles.

The fact of the matter is that I will await the report, I will consider it, I will take account of the positions that are stated in representations, and I will then make a decision.

We have to accept that the SPSA is affected by matters, the first of which is the significant financial challenges that we face. Mr Pringle articulated the Lib Dem position, which is that savings can come from a cut in police numbers. We do not view that as a sensible strategy.

The SPSA could make cuts elsewhere, and I listened to the points that the Tories made in that regard. However, let us look at the arguments that the Tories and the Lib Dems in particular have made about the matters that we are debating. The Home Secretary south of the border has announced that the Security Industry Authority may be abolished. The UK Border Agency took unilateral action at Stranraer and Cairnryan that had a fundamental effect on justice in Scotland. I say to David McLetchie that I recall no one discussing those decisions with us—there has been no consideration of them. I view the decisions as extremely detrimental to the safety and security of communities from the north-east to the south-west of Scotland. I will take no criticism on these matters from members who represent the coalition forces south of the border.

Richard Baker: There is, of course, the cabinet secretary's duty to ensure that the Executive consults properly the Parliament on issues of this import. Advice could surely have been given on the SPSA recommendations. When he makes his decision, will he give a statement to the chamber so that members can question him on the matter?

Kenny MacAskill: Whether statements are made is a decision not for the Government but for the Parliamentary Bureau.

David McLetchie: No.

Kenny MacAskill: If Mr Baker wishes such a statement, no doubt he will arrange for that to happen, and, as a member of the bureau, Mr McLetchie will deal with the matter.

The SPSA has to address matters. We face significant financial challenges. We can cut police numbers, we can cut the SPSA—

Mike Rumbles: Will the minister take an intervention?

Kenny MacAskill: No. I am coming to the end of my time.

We must also recognise that forensic science has moved on. How we deal with these matters is subject to change. Some will be scientific changes and some will be innovative and significant changes that come from those who work within the SPSA, who have driven forward the boundaries of forensic science. Equally, as Mr Brown said, we have made legislative changes, in the length of detention, for example, and change has come from Supreme Court judgments. All of that has an impact on how we conduct forensic science.

Mike Rumbles: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I think that you have now consulted the standing orders. The minister has misled the Parliament, whether intentionally or unintentionally—I assume unintentionally. He must be aware that it is not up to the Parliamentary Bureau to decide on ministerial statements. The request for such a statement must come from the Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr MacAskill.

Kenny MacAskill: I will take that on board. If the chamber feels that a parliamentary statement should be made, I am more than happy to make one. Mr Baker and Mr Rumbles frequently ask for parliamentary statements. A limited amount of time is available—[*Interruption.*] We can discuss and debate the matter—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you have to stop now, minister.

Kenny MacAskill: I have made no decision. I will listen to representations from outside the chamber and from within it, and I will act accordingly to ensure that our communities are safe and secure.

11:21

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party. Unlike Christina McKelvie, I believe that the debate has been excellent. Indeed, it was an excellent use of parliamentary time.

We heard from Lewis Macdonald about the 33 months of uncertainty that the forensic service has had to go through and the effect that that has had on staff. That view was also articulated by Ken Macintosh. We also heard from David McLetchie about the unsatisfactory nature of some of the consultation. The debate has acted as a platform to allow members across the chamber, from all parties, to articulate their views and concerns, and their support, in particular, for option two.

Given the SPSA's spend of £30 million, it is absolutely correct that we examine the best way forward for the service in the 21st century. Like other members, I pay tribute to those who work in the service. There is no doubt that forensic investigation has advanced tremendously in recent years. As many members pointed out, great use of science, DNA and information technology is made—indeed, that is crucial to securing convictions. George Foulkes used the example of DNA evidence in a recent rape case. There are 2,000 unsolved rape cases in Scotland; the conviction rate for that offence is at its lowest for 25 years. There is no doubt that the use of DNA and the support of our forensic services are absolutely crucial.

It would have been better if the cabinet secretary had been able to bring forward the published option from the SPSA, but that is something that we are becoming used to from the SNP. We saw it when there were demands for the budget to be published and when the SNP failed to bring forward its much-vaunted referendum bill. People get the impression of an Administration that is beginning to drift as it reaches the end of its time in office.

It is extremely unsatisfactory that, nine days after the SPSA board discussed the issue, the cabinet secretary has not been able to bring the recommended option to the Parliament. Indeed, he told the chamber that he has not yet had the recommendation. That is the answer of a jobsworth. It is not good enough. In the 21st century, people are looking for cutting-edge leadership, but they are getting something that is akin to Bill and Ben, the flowerpot men.

As other members have said, it is clear that there is strong support in the chamber for option two.

Joe FitzPatrick: The Labour Party has decided to support option two before it has even seen what the SPSA has to say. Why is it so anti-Dundee?

James Kelly: Having been a frequent visitor to Dundee in recent years, I assure Mr FitzPatrick that I am not anti-Dundee. Option two will allow us both to retain the facilities at Edinburgh and Aberdeen and to seek to maximise the use of the

new facilities at Dundee and Gartcosh. It is completely untrue that we are anti-Dundee.

Option two will enable us to retain more local expertise, to maximise service delivery and to make the most of efficiencies, as Ken Macintosh said. In February, Strathclyde police authority indicated that it had issues with cases coming from Dumfries and Galloway and that it was unable to address the resulting backlog of work, which had to be diverted to Edinburgh. There are efficiency issues that need to be addressed to enable us to maximise our handling of demand.

Like other members, I think that there are weaknesses in the other options. I point out to the cabinet secretary that option two represents a saving of £5.663 million. Maureen Watt was correct when she said that we must look not just at the bottom-line numbers but at the effect that each option would have on the service that is delivered.

There are obvious weaknesses in options three and four, in particular. There is the issue of relocation of staff. Linked to that is the issue of losing key staff members. Anyone who has looked at organisations in the public or private sector will know that they operate well when they build up staff expertise over a number of years. It is one thing to have a lot of qualifications, but nothing can beat experience. If we close some existing labs, we will lose some of the available expertise and experience, which will undermine the effectiveness of forensic services in Scotland.

Options three and four fail to take into account the need for local analysis in turning around urgent casework. Robert Brown alluded to the six-hour deadline for interviews, which must be taken into account. As Malcolm Chisholm said, there are also transportation issues that need to be addressed.

It speaks volumes that the cabinet secretary clearly does not have the support of his chief whip, Brian Adam, who spoiled an excellent speech by bailing out towards the end. I point out that the motion is absolutely competent. The SPSA has made its recommendation—it just has not got it down to the cabinet secretary's office. Perhaps it has been lost because of leaves on the line or some other spurious excuse.

It is time for SNP list members to stand up for their constituents; after all, ballots are now closed in the SNP selections for list candidates. I call on SNP list members to stand up for their constituents and to stand against the SNP machine. Let the Parliament take this chance to speak as one in support of a strong forensic service that will solve crimes in the pursuit of justice, on behalf of the whole of Scotland.

Emergency Question

11:29

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Under rule 13.8 of standing orders, an emergency question from Bill Butler, on the Commonwealth games in India, has been selected. We have up to 10 minutes for the question and any supplementary questions, which will need to be very brief.

Commonwealth Games (Delhi)

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the current situation is regarding Scotland's participation in the Commonwealth games in Delhi, given the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland's concerns about the welfare of Scottish athletes in particular and the preparations for the games in general.

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Serious health and safety concerns about the accommodation and environment at the athletes village in Delhi remain and must be addressed as a matter of urgency by the Indian authorities. This morning there was a meeting of the chefs de mission, which was attended by the Chief Minister of Delhi. She has taken over control of the situation and has guaranteed action to address the outstanding concerns. There appears to be growing confidence among the chefs de mission that things will now improve, but they will monitor the situation closely to ensure that there is delivery on the assurances that have been given.

The Commonwealth Games Federation will conduct an on-site inspection of the athletes village on Friday morning. We hope that the outcome of that inspection will allow Commonwealth Games Scotland to reassure athletes that the village is suitable for habitation.

Yesterday the First Minister chaired an emergency meeting of the Glasgow 2014 strategic group, at which Commonwealth Games Scotland gave all partners an update on the latest situation in Delhi. We will hold another meeting later today, to provide further updates.

Our people on the ground have reported that the sporting venues for the games seem to be in reasonable order and that there are no security concerns additional to those that were previously anticipated. The Scottish Government and its partners remain committed to the 2010 Commonwealth games and the presence of a strong team in Delhi. However, the safety of our athletes is paramount. All of us support wholeheartedly Commonwealth Games Scotland's

decision to delay our athletes' departure for Delhi. My hope and expectation is that team Scotland will fly to Delhi in time to compete in the games.

Bill Butler: All of us want the Scottish athletes who have worked so hard and sacrificed so much to be able to participate in the games and to be successful. However, as the minister said, the health, safety and security of our team, officials and supporters are paramount. It is right that the Government has been working closely with the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland in that regard.

Have Scottish ministers contacted directly counterparts in the Indian Government to seek assurances that matters can be put right? Will the minister continue to do everything in her power to assist the Indian Government? In addition, has the Scottish Government made contact with the other home nations? If so, what has been the result of those discussions? Finally, in the minister's judgment—and I realise that circumstances can change very quickly—what is the likelihood of the Scottish team being able to begin to leave for Delhi on Saturday?

Shona Robison: Bill Butler is right to say that our athletes have spent many years preparing for this event and are keen to go, but they are guided by Commonwealth Games Scotland. They have been very professional, especially when the media have asked them questions about their participation. Not one Scottish athlete has said that they will not attend the Delhi games, as long as Commonwealth Games Scotland says that it is safe for them to do so.

Bill Butler asked about representations. I have made representations to the Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports in the Indian Government, asking for issues and concerns to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Yesterday afternoon, the First Minister spoke to the Indian consul general in Scotland, Mr Anil Anand, and again raised concerns and sought assurances. A lot of discussions are taking place behind the scenes to get momentum. Yesterday I had a conference call with my counterparts in England, Northern Ireland and Wales to discuss concerns and the current position and to co-ordinate our action behind the scenes to put pressure on the Indian authorities to take action.

As I said in my initial answer, I expect that team Scotland will fly to Delhi in time to compete in the games. Whether it flies on Saturday will be a matter for Commonwealth Games Scotland. The Commonwealth Games Federation's site visit to the village tomorrow will be important in that decision-making process.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Because of all of the concerns that have

arisen in relation to the Delhi games, will the minister take this opportunity to give a progress report on Scotland's preparations for its games in 2014?

Shona Robison: Yes. Of course, 70 per cent of the venues in Glasgow are already there, and good progress is being made on the national indoor sports arena and the velodrome, which are on schedule. A commitment has been made to ensure that the handover of the athletes village will happen six months out from the games in 2014. Glasgow will absolutely be in a state of readiness for the Commonwealth games in 2014.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Is the minister aware that the organisational problems in Delhi could cause reputational damage to the Commonwealth games as an institution, with the risk of a negative impact on the games in Glasgow in 2014? What steps can the Government take to mitigate any negative impact?

Shona Robison: Nanette Milne's question is important, but the Commonwealth games brand is 80 years old. The brand has seen its ups and downs during its 80 years but it is a strong brand that will continue for many years to come. I am sure that the brand will survive the Delhi difficulties. The games that we put on in Glasgow will be a tremendous sporting event and, I am sure, will do the brand a great deal of good.

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): Notwithstanding the difficulties that have emerged and the urgent need to secure assurances, does the minister agree that to suggest or give the impression in any way that the organising committee in India is somehow the enemy is not conducive to securing a resolution or to the best interests of the games in Glasgow in 2014?

Shona Robison: I agree with Ross Finnie. It is important that such an impression of the Delhi organising committee is not given. At the end of the day, the brand and its protection are important. We want the Delhi organising committee to resolve the difficulties.

One of the problems has been that for some months the Commonwealth Games Federation has been seeking assurances from the Delhi organising committee. Assurances were quite often given without necessarily reflecting the reality of the situation. I think that we all appreciate some of the cultural issues around the way in which decisions are perhaps made.

The important thing for all of us is to concentrate on getting the real concerns fixed. If there are issues to do with the way in which things have been handled, they are for a later stage. At the end of the day it is about getting issues fixed so that the games can go ahead.

Jack McConnell (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): The minister will be aware that the difficulties in the Edinburgh games in 1986 had an impact way beyond the games. In particular, the boycott by African nations affected relationships between the rich and poor members of the Commonwealth.

An important aspect of the events of the next 10 days is that they do not have the impact of making countries from the poorer part of the Commonwealth think that in future their input might be less welcome, because countries that appear to be from the richer part of the Commonwealth questioned the organisation of the games. What action can the Scottish Government take to ensure that difficulties that are based simply on issues to do with organisation do not affect political relationships between Commonwealth countries of the north and the south, thereby ensuring that the games in Glasgow in 2014 are not affected by political challenges, which might lead to threats to pull out of the games?

Shona Robison: Jack McConnell made important points. It is important that we focus on the fact that the issues are organisational issues.

I should say that countries from the north, south, east and west are expressing concern on behalf of their athletes—quite rightly—about the state of preparedness of the athletes village. We cannot get away from those real concerns.

The political relationship with India is important. Through Scotland house, we will make a great deal of effort during the Delhi games to make connections and enhance our relationship with India at a political level. I am sure that there will be no lasting damage to that relationship beyond the games.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Notwithstanding practical problems on the site, does the minister accept that non-participation by Scotland or any of the home nations would have serious repercussions for Glasgow 2014?

Shona Robison: I am very confident indeed that the Scotland team will be in Delhi to participate and I am sure that it will do very well. I am sure that the Parliament wants to get behind the Scotland team. *[Applause.]*

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:40

River Esk (Management)

1. John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has had discussions with the United Kingdom Environment Agency regarding the management of the River Esk in the south of Scotland. (S3O-11376)

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): Officials have regular discussions with their counterparts in the Environment Agency concerning the management of the border river Esk.

John Lamont: The minister will be aware of difficulties in recent weeks regarding the rod licensing regime, which the UK Environment Agency administers. During the past few days, the agency indicated that it is prepared to reach a compromise on the issue. The minister is aware that the issue causes great concern to the local communities. There are reports of a decline in business. People are deciding no longer to fish on the rivers because of their difficulties in getting the relevant licence.

Will the minister assure me and my constituents that the Scottish Government will do whatever it can to reach a solution with the UK Environment Agency, so that the issue can move forward and fishing on the rivers can return to normality?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am happy to give John Lamont that assurance.

Ministers in Scotland currently have no role in relation to rod licences for salmon and freshwater fisheries in the border River Esk. John Lamont might know that the management of rivers on the border is subject to agreements with the UK Environment Agency, so that although English law applies on the Esk north of the border, Scottish law applies on the Tweed south of the border. There is a reciprocal arrangement, which needs to be taken into consideration.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I refer the minister to Sheriff Drummond's observations in the case that concerned the matter. Sheriff Drummond said that there is scope to resolve the issue within current legislation, without the need to change the law. I presume that he meant English legislation that perhaps predates the setting up of the Scottish Parliament. In the circumstances, will the minister and her

department consider exploring the matter with their counterparts in England?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am happy to do that. I will have to look at the detail of Sheriff Drummond's remarks. It is the case that the legislation that governs much of the matter goes back to the mid-1970s, and it might be time to reassess whether it is working for where we are now. I am happy to agree with Christine Grahame and John Lamont that we should take matters forward in conversation.

Use of Consultants (Guidelines for Public Bodies)

2. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what guidelines it has issued to public bodies regarding the awarding of contracts to consultants. (S3O-11406)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): The Scottish Government has had tough guidelines in place to control its use of consultants since December 2008. The guidelines are published on our website and set a good example for other public bodies to follow.

Bill Butler: The minister is no doubt aware that during the past few weeks, the *Sunday Herald* and the *Scottish Mail on Sunday* have run articles about the amounts that public bodies have spent on consultants, the manner in which certain consultants have been appointed and the need for consultants to be appointed in the first place. Given the content of the articles and the vast sums of money that public bodies and the Scottish Government are spending on consultants, can the minister assure the Parliament that he is satisfied that contracts have been properly awarded and were fully justified?

Bruce Crawford: As I said, guidance was issued in December 2008 on the use of consultants in the Scottish Government. We published the guidance to provide a common definition of consultancy services, to address probity requirements in the engagement and use of consultants and to ensure that we get maximum value when we use consultants. The guidance applies to all business areas, and agencies and non-departmental public bodies have been asked to implement similar procedures.

I am sure that Bill Butler is aware that under the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, which the Parliament passed recently, consultancy expenditure will be reported.

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): Is the Scottish Government considering encouraging public bodies that award contracts to take account of criteria such as pay differentials and matters that are measured by social return on investment methodology?

Bruce Crawford: The member makes a reasonable point. I should point out to the chamber what the Government has done. John Swinney sent a very strong message to non-departmental public bodies and agencies in June when he asked them to provide leadership in their organisations. In that message he said that we—the Scottish Government—

“cut our centrally-held marketing budget by over five million pounds or over 50 per cent. We now have a presumption against external recruitment, strict controls on staff headcount numbers, and robust limits on the use of consultants”.

He expects non-departmental public bodies and agencies to follow suit.

Rail Freight (South-west Scotland)

3. Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it plans to improve freight rail services in south-west Scotland. (S3O-11418)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Although the mode of transport for freight is a commercial decision for freight companies and their customers, the Government is committed to encouraging the transfer of freight to rail from less sustainable modes. We recently completed a widespread consultation with the rail freight industry to help us shape options for future rail freight opportunities across Scotland. That will feed into our next high-level output specification for Network Rail for the period beyond 2014. In the meantime, to enable companies to transport freight by rail or water rather than by road without financial penalty, we continue to offer support through freight mode shift grant schemes.

Cathy Jamieson: I thank the minister for the answer and, in particular, welcome his support for moving freight from road to rail. In that context, is he aware of the Ailsa Horizons proposal for a freight facility at Grangestone industrial estate in Girvan? Does he agree that such a development would not only boost the local economy but work towards the Scottish Government's goal of ensuring that freight is removed from the road and put on to the railways?

Stewart Stevenson: I am always very happy when I hear of companies that want to bring forward new proposals. In my visits around the country and my interactions with groups such as the Freight Transport Association, I have strongly made the point that we could do with more good-quality applications. I will certainly consider any such applications in a supportive way and with a view to seeing what support we can give.

Banking Services (Rural Areas)

4. Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it has had discussions with the banking sector regarding the provision of services in rural areas. (S3O-11444)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The Scottish Government continues to be regularly and fully engaged with the banking sector on a range of issues. I understand that banks are fully committed to finding flexible solutions, an example of which is the agreement reached by a wide range of banks to enable their customers to pay money into and withdraw money from their bank account at their local post office. That is already benefiting customers in small rural areas.

On providing business support at a local level, I am hosting an event on Monday 8 November, which will bring together all those who can support local, small business start-ups and business growth to discuss how that might be improved. They will include representatives from the banking sector, and the event will offer an opportunity to pull out intelligence and resources.

Aileen Campbell: Will the minister join me in welcoming the expansion plans announced by Airdrie Savings Bank, Scotland's last independently owned bank, which has announced its intention to open one or two new branches in the next 18 months? Does he share my concern that that stands in stark contrast to the plans by the publicly owned Royal Bank of Scotland to reduce significantly the opening hours of its rural branch in Abington, South Lanarkshire, despite making great play of its commitment to customer service, and with what appears to be very little consultation?

Jim Mather: The Airdrie Savings Bank goes from strength to strength. It was lauded in September 2008 in *The Economist*, and it is now looking to take its ethos forward, with the focus on community and customer service very much to the fore.

We need to talk to the banks to ensure that, in places such as Abington, even with reduced hours, we have an alignment with the local community to enable local economic growth to happen and existing businesses to thrive. I suggest to the member that she might want to sit in on the session that we are having in November.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I have had representations from constituents who are concerned about the lack of a helpful attitude on the part of banks in rural areas. It is next to impossible to get an account, and if somebody does get one the charges are exorbitant. That is entirely

counterproductive to economic development in rural areas. Will the minister agree to look at the problem? I have written to him about it previously.

Jim Mather: I will indeed look at the issue and make it part of the on-going dialogue with the banks. Again, I suggest to Mr Stone that he might want to bring his views to the session on 8 November.

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

Road Accidents (Access to Police Reports)

6. Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has given instructions to police forces regarding how people whose roadside walls, fences or buildings have been damaged as a result of vehicle accidents access their reports. (S3O-11382)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): No. Chief constables are responsible for operational matters in their force area, which would include arrangements for making information on road accidents available to landowners or their agents.

Jamie McGrigor: On 8 April this year, the cabinet secretary told me in a letter that

"farmers or other land owners whose property is damaged have the right to request certain information from the police free of charge",

including

"details of the vehicle involved, including make and registration, the driver's name and, if known, the insurance company and policy number covering the vehicle."

That advice was clear and unambiguous. Then, in another letter on 9 August, he told me that

"the decision whether or not to release personal details ... rests with the police"

and that

"in most cases the police will be reluctant to do so."

Who got at the justice secretary? What changed his mind? How can a right belonging to my constituents—one set out in black and white by the justice secretary—be done away with in a matter of weeks? Will he please instruct the police to provide the information that he believed in April should be people's right, so that they can avoid costs for accidents that are, after all, not their fault?

Kenny MacAskill: No. I can understand the frustrations felt by Mr McGrigor's constituents, but let us be clear. First, I cannot direct the police. Secondly, we are talking about reserved law—the Road Traffic Act 1988, which as I recall came in under a Tory Government. It states that it is the

legal responsibility of the driver of the vehicle to report any accident that causes damage to property. That would be to the landowner, but if the driver did not know the landowner it would be to the police.

The police have an obligation and, when they know the landowner or the landowner requests it, they usually go out of their way to provide information such as the name of the driver and the vehicle's registration. Under data protection requirements, however, they cannot provide any information beyond that, such as a personal address. To me, this appears to be a matter of the police trying to be as supportive as they can of those in rural communities. There are instances when the police might not have provided the information and might not be aware of the landowner, but my understanding and experience of the police is that they will try to co-operate.

Let me say to Mr McGrigor that I cannot direct the police. If he has difficulties with the legislation, I am more than happy to argue with the Home Secretary or the Lord Chancellor that we should devolve road traffic matters to this Parliament and deal with the issue ourselves.

Road Improvements (A92)

7. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what actions it has taken to improve the A92. (S3O-11403)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): In the past three years, we have invested more than £1.8 million in maintenance and safety improvements on the A92 trunk road between Glenrothes and the Tay road bridge. This year, we plan to spend more than £1 million on this section of the A92.

Claire Baker: The minister may be aware of the increase in serious accidents on the A92 over the summer. He has previously received representation on the A92 from members and the Glenrothes area futures group but, in light of increasing concerns about the safety and suitability of the A92, will he agree to meet me and other interested parties to discuss a way forward?

Stewart Stevenson: I acknowledge the loss that the two families experienced in August on the A92 and extend my sympathies to them. Investigations by the police and Transport Scotland's operators into the circumstances of such accidents will inform what we do.

I am always happy to meet members who have an interest in road safety, and if Claire Baker cares to contact my office we can make the appropriate arrangements.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the minister say anything further about the Scottish Conservative proposal, first mooted by my distinguished colleague Lord James Douglas-Hamilton more than a decade ago, to upgrade the A92 to dual carriageway status as far as the Melville Gates junction?

Stewart Stevenson: The member has heard from me on this issue before. We have completed the strategic transport projects review. The necessity is to address safety issues—my exchange with Ms Baker has addressed some of those issues—and the next step is to maximise the use of the road system. We are investing a great deal in trying to improve road safety in a variety of ways, working with drivers and trainers and looking at parts of the road network where investment will improve road safety.

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): The minister is well aware that, in 1999, the incoming Labour Executive did away with the Conservative plans for dualling the A92. I thank him for the money that has been invested in that road in the past couple of years. However, he is well aware—because I have written to him about a constituent in the past few weeks—that despite the money, people lack confidence about the safety of the junctions at Cadham and Balfarg. I would be grateful if he would meet me to discuss the matter further, as I mentioned in my letter to him.

Stewart Stevenson: I note what Tricia Marwick says about Cadham and Balfarg. We continue to engage on and consider the issues at a range of junctions. On the existing dual carriageway section, we are taking steps to close some central crossings. We are improving the A92 in response to the various incidents.

I am always happy to meet Ms Marwick to discuss the issue and I extend to her a similar invitation to that which I extended to Claire Baker.

Sheltered Workshops

8. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive for what reason it has not used the European Union directive for reserving contracts for supported factories and businesses to award a contract to sheltered workshops. (S3O-11410)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The Scottish Government recognises the important role that supported businesses play in the economy and the community and for their customers. Unfortunately, the Scottish Government does not have a large demand for the goods and services that supported businesses commonly supply. However, through the Marine Scotland directorate, we use Capability Scotland's St Jude's laundry for laundry services

in Aberdeen. We are also looking to use supported businesses in other projects, such as the Scottish crime campus in North Lanarkshire.

Helen Eadie: I thank the minister for his answer and for “Supported Businesses in Scotland”, which is newly published. The document is good, but it does not go far enough, because it merely encourages public bodies to have contracts with supported businesses. According to that booklet, the public sector has purchasing power of £9 billion for goods and services. The minister can do more than encourage.

The Presiding Officer: Quickly, please.

Helen Eadie: I believe that the minister should direct. Will he please comment on that?

Jim Mather: We have engaged very much with supported businesses. I am delighted that Helen Eadie has drawn attention to the Scottish procurement directorate’s publication, “Supported Businesses in Scotland”, which profiles each of the 24 supported businesses that operate in Scotland.

We and the United Kingdom Government believe that every public body should aim to have at least one contract with a supported business or factory. The procurement directorate is working hard on that and will continue to do so. I would welcome any support from Helen Eadie to push that forward further.

Birds of Prey (Protection)

9. Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to protect bird of prey populations. (S3O-11432)

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): Protection for Scotland’s wild birds of prey is delivered through robust legislation and through the designation and appropriate management of protected areas, in accordance with the requirements of European law.

We are tackling wildlife crime according to the recommendations of the 2008 review of wildlife crime arrangements that was carried out by Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary for Scotland and the Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland.

We are providing funding for the national wildlife crime unit and for several projects that are targeted at reducing wildlife crime, including a fund that the Scottish police are to deploy in specialised wildlife investigations.

Elaine Murray: Last week, the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee heard evidence from a Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals officer that he had once discovered 25 poisoned birds on one estate. What consideration

has the minister given to making estate owners more responsible for preventing wildlife crime on their land? Is she considering lodging amendments to the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill to address the situation?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am sure that Elaine Murray would not want me to pre-empt decisions that might be made. We are looking actively at a range of potential measures for which the bill’s progress through the Parliament affords the opportunity. I have read with interest the evidence to the committee, which has heard from a wide range of people.

Several different routes can be taken, as the member knows. We are actively considering all those potential routes. That is important because, every time such a report is publicised, it does Scotland no good in the international community. Most people are appalled when they see raptors destroyed in such a manner.

The Presiding Officer: Before First Minister’s question time, I know that members will wish to join me in welcoming to the gallery the Parliament of Sardinia’s vice-president, the Honourable Michele Cossa. [*Applause.*]

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-2576)

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

Iain Gray: Two weeks ago, I called for a cross-party campaign, together with trade unions, on the aircraft carrier contracts. I am pleased that that has happened.

At one of the meetings in St Andrew's house, I could not help noticing on the wall a large, North Korean-style slogan, with a great leader-style quote:

"Our one central purpose is to increase Scotland's economic growth."

It was signed A Salmond. If that is the First Minister's purpose, has he not failed miserably?

The First Minister: Here was me thinking that Iain Gray was going to centre on a consensual point about all the parties represented in the chamber uniting to defend Scottish jobs. As we unite to defend the key jobs in the defence sector in Scotland, which is reliant on the air force bases and the carrier contracts, we should also reflect on the other challenges to Scottish economic recovery. Those challenges are partly in the public sector, with the swingeing cuts that are forecast—two thirds from the previous Administration and one third from the current one. There is also the inability to get finance to our small and medium-sized business sector, which is crippling many companies. Those are the challenges that Iain Gray should focus on.

Despite everything, I am still prepared to welcome the consensus that we have established to fight for Scottish jobs, and we should all be proud of that.

Iain Gray: Those are indeed the challenges of the day. The question of the day is this: why is Alex Salmond's Government failing them?

Let us take yesterday's report from the independent Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which said that Scotland is getting poorer faster than England. One of the report's authors spelled it out:

"It had enjoyed a good three years between ... 2005-2008 but since then things have slipped away steadily and are still getting worse and that is before one has talked about the possible effects of the cuts."

Is that not a damning indictment of the First Minister's Government?

The First Minister: I do not worry so much about Iain Gray's inability to predict the future; it is more when he cannot correctly interpret what has happened. Actually, Scotland went through the recession better than the rest of the United Kingdom did, with a lower fall in output. Our difficulty is a fragile economic recovery. When we try to build an economic recovery, we must consider how public sector investment can be maintained and how the private sector can be given the funds to enable it to invest. Those are the challenges for Scotland. The biggest asset in meeting those challenges would be for the Parliament to have the economic powers to raise the Scottish growth rate and take us forward to prosperity.

Iain Gray: The First Minister is simply in denial. Let us interpret the present. As of today, unemployment in Scotland is still going up, whereas it is going down in the rest of the country. Compared with last year, there are 50,000 more Scots sitting at home because they cannot get a job. They see Alex Salmond sitting at home in Bute house doing nothing and they are asking, when is the First Minister finally going to take some responsibility?

The First Minister: Let us talk about what the Government is doing today to increase Scotland's economic prospects. Today, the Minister for Housing and Communities will be announcing a £130 million investment in the Scottish national housing trust, and 12 local authorities have agreed to participate. That will generate 1,000 jobs in the construction industry. Today, I will be announcing officially that Scotland's renewable energy target is being lifted from 50 per cent of consumption in 2020 to 80 per cent of consumption in 2020, thanks to the 35 major renewables schemes that the Government has authorised in its term of office. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Mrs Craigie, stop please.

The First Minister: That is the action that will secure Scotland's prosperity.

I turn to the other thing that is desperately needed. Just as we suffered during Labour's recession, we do not want to see our recovery impeded by a coalition that is determined to cut public investment without securing the private funds that are required to stimulate the economy. On that subject, Iain Gray and Labour have nothing to say, because they will not accept that this Parliament and this Government need to have the economic powers to do the job for Scotland.

Iain Gray: The 136,000 Scots on the dole are sick of hearing from Alex Salmond what he cannot

do rather than what he can do. It is not just the unemployed who are suffering; it is the 260,000 children who are living in poverty. The rate in Scotland is increasing—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Iain Gray: It is increasing twice as fast as the rate in the rest of the country—on his watch.

The Salmond slump cost Scotland 40,000 jobs. He cut 3,000 teaching jobs and 4,000 jobs in the national health service. This First Minister inherited a Scotland where employment was higher than it was in the rest of the country, unemployment was lower and child poverty was dropping faster. He has thrown all that away. This First Minister is leaving Scotland poorer than he found it.

Now the Tory cuts are coming.

The Presiding Officer: Come to a question, please, Mr Gray.

Iain Gray: Is that not a legacy of miserable failure?

The First Minister: I think that Iain Gray should occasionally glance at what the Joseph Rowntree Foundation said about the poverty record of the previous Labour Government—it tore it to shreds.

Iain Gray should also know that, when I met the Scottish Trades Union Congress yesterday, it pointed out to me that the number of construction jobs in Scotland had risen by 20,000 in the last quarter, which Iain Gray does not realise or does not accept. I had a look at the comparative statistics on Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. In the last quarter, construction employment in Scotland went up by almost 9 per cent; in the UK, it was down 5 per cent. I know that those statistics are new to Iain Gray, but he really must keep up with the results of the public investment in housing and other things that the Government has supplied.

As far as what will happen in elections is concerned, I am grateful to Bill Jamieson for the election strategy that he offered me today. He said:

“Salmond needs only to whisper the two most deadening words in Scottish politics, a whispered name that could cause his most raging critics to slump comatose on the parliament floor. It is a name that reduces barking dogs to a whimper and makes the most neurotic cats sleep through a march past of mice. Throw away the sedatives and repeat until the urge to fall asleep closes totally in: Iain Gray.”

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-2577)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I met the Secretary of State for Scotland last week and I have no immediate plans to meet him again.

Annabel Goldie: “Via, veritas, vita”—the way, the truth, the life—is the motto of the University of Glasgow, whose principal, Anton Muscatelli, has warned that, in 2013, his university will “run out of cash”. That is certainly showing the way, telling the truth and facing up to life.

Anton Muscatelli accepts, as do many of his Scottish colleagues and Liam Burns of the National Union of Students Scotland, that the present funding system for universities is no longer an option. Change has to be made and made urgently. The clearly growing consensus is that graduates will have to make a contribution. Does the First Minister agree?

The First Minister: I saw Anton Muscatelli's remarks; Annabel Goldie will, in fairness, wish me to record that he was quite clear that it was investment in the university sector by this Administration that had enabled Scottish universities to maintain their competitiveness and to survive rather better than those south of the border.

There are huge challenges coming up in university funding, as we await the announcement of the review south of the border. As Annabel Goldie knows, and as the parliamentary motion that was passed in June made clear, this Government will set out in a green paper the options for university funding.

I make it clear to Annabel Goldie that tuition fees are not part of our proposals for university funding. Restricting access to university cannot be the right way to fund the university and education system in Scotland.

Annabel Goldie: Having listened to that, I believe the First Minister's motto should be *veni, vidi, procrastinavi*: I came, I saw, and I haven't a clue.

At this stage, given the crisis that confronts our universities, talk of a green paper is far too little, far too late. For the record, the Scottish Conservatives rule out up-front fees, and we rule out a pure graduate tax, but we rule in a graduate contribution from income that is based on fairness and ability to pay.

We have put our cards on the table, but from the First Minister and the Scottish National Party we have had three years of dither, delay and indecision. Will Alex Salmond show some leadership? Will he accept that graduates will have to make a contribution—yes or no?

The First Minister: We have had three years of better funding of the higher education system in Scotland than there has been south of the border,

which is acknowledged by every major figure in the university and college sector in Scotland. The challenges that are coming—which are going to come quickly—will be put forward in the Browne report, which was commissioned by the previous Labour Government and taken forward by the coalition Government. It is right and proper that we publish a Scottish response to that, which we will do by the end of the year, but we need a Scottish system of funding.

Looking south of the border, I do not think that the systems of funding for universities have been in the interest of students or the institutions themselves. The draconian cuts in the university sector south of the border that were announced by the previous Government and are perhaps intensified under the current Government will not be in the interests of English education.

As we meet these challenges, let us find a Scottish solution that is compatible with Scotland's traditions—a point, incidentally, that Anton Muscatelli made yesterday.

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-2578)

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

Tavish Scott: I acknowledge that the First Minister chaired a meeting last night on the Commonwealth games in Delhi and I recognise, as I am sure we all do, the delicate and difficult balance between the safety and security needs of Scotland's athletes and the enormous damage to the games if countries choose, for whatever reason, to boycott Delhi 2010. We all united to support Glasgow 2014. Is it not in Glasgow's interest that team Scotland competes in India? Can the First Minister tell Parliament what officials are in Delhi to give up-to-the-minute reports that will allow team Scotland to go?

The First Minister: Team Scotland has a substantial delegation in situ at present. When I chaired yesterday's meeting of the strategic group, we had direct information from people in Delhi who were reporting on the conditions as they found them. That puts us in a rather better position to assess the conditions in the athletes village than many of the other competing countries.

I agree with Tavish Scott that it is in the interests of everyone—not just Glasgow, but the entire Commonwealth—that the Commonwealth games go ahead successfully. However, he must understand that we have—and Commonwealth Games Scotland in particular has—a duty of care

to our athletes. We cannot send people into unsafe conditions.

There was a meeting this morning of the chefs de mission, which was attended by the Chief Minister of Delhi. She has taken control of the situation and is offering guarantees on action to address the outstanding concerns. That is progress this morning. There will be an inspection of the village by the Commonwealth Games Federation tomorrow, in which our officials will take part. We will have a direct report on the federation's view of the improvements that are promised, and we will then be in a good position in Scotland to assess the next decision on the Commonwealth games.

Tavish Scott: I certainly understand the duty of care to athletes, but does the First Minister accept that he has an enormous task to help to build confidence in the Commonwealth games to ensure that 2014 is as big as it can be? Usain Bolt will not be competing in Delhi because the games come at the end of a long athletics season. Our own Andy Murray will not be at the inaugural Commonwealth games tennis competition because of a clash with the Shanghai open. Scotland's most successful Olympian, Chris Hoy, will not be taking part because the games clash with another championship that awards qualifying points for the Olympics. Given the need to avoid huge sporting events taking place at the same time, is it not important that the First Minister now speaks with the international sporting bodies to clear the way for Glasgow 2014 so that we can have the best athletes available in the biggest games possible?

The First Minister: Let me say two things. First, there has been a lot of concentration, rightly, on the state of the athletes village. I should say that we are perfectly satisfied with the inspection of the sporting facilities themselves and we have no greater concern about the security implications than we had previously. Assuming that those problems are addressed and solved, we have no doubt whatsoever that the Delhi Commonwealth games will be a magnificent and hugely successful sporting occasion for the people of India and for the Commonwealth as a whole.

Secondly, on clashes with other world and European events, one of the difficulties for the games in Delhi has been the timing, which is required because of the weather and the temperature and conditions for athletes. Of course, the Glasgow games will take place at a different time of year. The time has been established to avoid clashes wherever possible, although I do not say that it is impossible that there will be clashes. We cannot promise that every world-ranked athlete will compete in every Commonwealth games but, as I am sure Tavish

Scott knows, across the range of events the Delhi Commonwealth games will have top-ranking athletes, with people in the top 10 in the world competing in virtually every event. The Commonwealth games is a fantastic multisport event, and I think that the Delhi games will be amazing. I know that everyone in the Parliament and everyone in the city of Glasgow will work hard to ensure that Glasgow emulates and, if possible, betters the Delhi games.

The Presiding Officer: I will take a supplementary question from Jackie Baillie.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): As the First Minister will be aware, the Vale of Leven public inquiry has already delayed taking further evidence about the C diff outbreak from September till the end of October, but we discovered today that it will now be delayed until early 2011. Although I believe that it is important that the inquiry does a thorough job, can he confirm that the timescale for the publication of the inquiry's report will now be put well beyond the Scottish Parliament elections?

The First Minister: I think that, just occasionally, Jackie Baillie should accept that, if we launch a public inquiry, it is a matter for the chair of the inquiry how he or she decides to hear evidence and publish a report. If a Government tried to dictate or alter the timetable one way or another, that would obviate the whole purpose of having an independent public inquiry. When Jackie Baillie starts to think about it, she will see that the suggestion of politicking is rather beneath the standards that we should accept in the Parliament.

Prisoners (Right to Vote)

4. Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on prisoners having the right to vote. (S3F-2579)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government does not agree that convicted prisoners should be entitled to vote while they are serving a prison sentence.

Stewart Maxwell: Like many in the Parliament, I am totally opposed to rapists, murderers and drug pushers getting the right to vote. They have given up their right to participate in decent society by their actions. It is a disgrace that forces outside Scotland are trying to force such a change upon us. Even worse is the fact that, thanks to incompetence by the previous Labour Government at Westminster, some of these criminals may now try to claim compensation from taxpayers across the United Kingdom. Does the First Minister agree that voters in Scotland should not have to suffer any more bungled handling of elections by

Westminster and that responsibility for our own elections must be devolved to the Scottish Parliament as soon as possible?

The First Minister: I agree with that. Apart from anything else, I think that it is quite remarkable that any member should believe that it is right and proper for this Parliament to have legislative competence and authority over climate change—perhaps the greatest issue facing the planet—but not over the running of its own elections. How can anyone possibly believe or sustain that position? If the Scotland Office's track record on running elections were beyond reproach, there might be something of an argument to be had, but I do not think that anyone would argue that either.

Incidentally, looking at the previous Government's two consultations and its prevarication and delay on the thorny issue of prisoners and voting, I do not think that it covered itself in glory either.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): The previous Government resisted making the changes for exactly the reasons that the First Minister gave earlier. However, he might be aware that the current UK Government is reviewing the policy. Have any discussions taken place with the UK Government on what impact there might be on retrospective claims by prisoners who are now registered to vote, and what costs there might be to the Scottish Prison Service or the Scottish Government?

The First Minister: According to our legal advice, any costs would apply to the UK Government, which might concentrate minds.

Something about Mr Baker's question puzzles me. He said that the Labour Government had avoided coming to a position. It did so by introducing its first consultation paper on the issue in December 2006 and a second consultation paper in 2009, closing the consultation in December 2009 and then handing the thorny problem over to its successor Westminster Government. I think that it would be wrong for convicted prisoners to have the right to vote and the public would be outraged if compensation claims on the matter were made on any Government, whether in Scotland or the UK. However, Richard Baker should face up to the fact that the previous Labour Government's strategy in dealing with the question was to wait until it was out of office.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): The First Minister is missing the point. The UK is signed up to the European convention on human rights, so it is under the obligation to follow the protocol that refers to free and fair elections. Is he not aware that the European Court of Human Rights has made a decision on the matter? Is he suggesting

that, if Scotland were independent, it would opt out of the European convention on human rights? What is the Scottish Government's position on that?

The First Minister: A couple of things would improve if Scotland were an independent nation. First, we would have the same protection against compensation claims as any other country has at the moment, instead of theoretically being liable for 10 years of compensation claims—members will remember that in connection with another thorny issue. That would be a distinct improvement if Scotland were independent.

Secondly, I know that the Liberals are understandably keen on the European Court of Human Rights and the European convention on human rights. However, I cannot believe that, back in 1997 when there was blanket signing up to the ECHR, those of us who argued very strongly that human rights should be observed across the European continent thought that one of the key issues would be to give convicted prisoners the right to vote. For most people, that does not seem to be what we would consider to be an important human right.

Teacher Numbers

5. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the recently published public sector employment statistics, which showed a reduction of almost 3,000 in teacher numbers between 2007 and 2010. (S3F-2581)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We are concerned that the number of teaching posts has fallen and about the impact that that has on the lives of unemployed teachers. Given the political responsibility for such issues, it should not be forgotten, however, that Glasgow City Council alone was responsible for 25 per cent of the drop in teacher numbers last year, and that the 12 councils where Labour is in or shares administration are responsible for two thirds of the drop in teacher numbers. I hope that Des McNulty will have a word with some of his colleagues across local government and persuade them to give a higher priority to the employment of young teachers.

Des McNulty: "It wisnae me"—what a surprise.

As the First Minister knows, and the Scottish Parliament information centre will confirm, Scottish National Party-controlled Renfrewshire Council has the highest percentage reduction in teacher numbers. Under the nationalists, Scotland no longer compares attainment in maths, science and reading literacy skills with other countries. Instead of data and delivery, all parents and teachers get

is bluster and self-congratulation from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. When the education statistics that are due out in December confirm yet another significant drop in teacher numbers year on year, and the performance of this cabinet secretary is shown to be even worse than that of the previous one, will the First Minister send for him and demote him back to his old job?

The First Minister: If that is Des McNulty's second question, obviously he could not challenge the information that was delivered in my first answer. It is true that the 12 councils with a Labour administration are responsible for two thirds of the drop in teacher numbers. Many teachers and their families watching this broadcast will think that Des McNulty is weeping crocodile tears, when he is unable to convince his colleagues. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: I will explain why it is that, while education budgets over the past three years have been rising and while local government's share of the Scottish budget has been rising, certain education authorities have found themselves under pressure. It is not just the lack of political commitment from Labour councils to employing teachers; it is also the rising private finance initiative payments that are affecting education budgets. In 2008-09, PFI payments were £244 million—a rise of £62 million on the previous year. The next time that Labour members pronounce that PFI was the best thing since sliced bread, they should look at what it is doing to education budgets the length and breadth of Scotland.

Public Sector Salaries

6. Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the First Minister how many people employed in the public sector are paid more than he is. (S3F-2588)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): As the member will know, ministerial salaries in Scotland have been frozen since 2008. I mention that because the BBC statistics that I saw this morning did not reflect that. We have statistics for the number of people throughout the public sector in Scotland who are paid more than £150,000. Our statistics say that 529 people are in that position; 500 of them are clinical staff in the national health service.

Jeremy Purvis: I am sure that the First Minister would be able to say how many of them received a bonus this year.

The freedom of information responses confirmed by the BBC research show that 936 people in publicly funded bodies in Scotland are

paid more than the First Minister is. I am sure that he would want me to stress that those 936 people are not necessarily more important than he is. Does he agree that the pay bill for the highest earners in the public sector in Scotland is too high? Would he support measures in the upcoming Scottish budget to make it transparent which bodies pay employees more than the First Minister and for such salaries to be approved specifically by Parliament?

The First Minister: As Jeremy Purvis knows, it is not just ministerial salaries that have been frozen. The pay of senior civil service staff has been frozen for 2010-11. The policy for non-departmental public body chief executives is also to impose a freeze on basic pay for those staff.

When I gave the statistics about pay in the national health service, Jeremy Purvis asked how much of that was in bonuses. Surely he cannot be unaware of the Scottish Government's action to try to restrain distinction awards in the NHS. I have a long list of the actions that have been taken. The previous Labour Government refused to take any action south of the border. I am pleased to say that, on 20 August, the current Secretary of State for Health at least announced a review of the distinction awards scheme, directly as a result of the initiative taken by Nicola Sturgeon. *[Interruption.]* I hear Mr Rumbles rumbling, but I have here a list of the pressures applied by the Scottish Government to try to restrain the distinction awards that make up the vast majority of the pay of highly paid staff. I say to Mr Rumbles that we froze those awards this year. We did not even wait for the consultation document from the coalition Government. However, we are delighted to acknowledge that, after only five months in government, the new Administration has finally got round to publishing a consultation document, and that it might do what Nicola Sturgeon did last spring.

12:29

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Health and Wellbeing

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

1. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing last met the chief executive of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and what issues were discussed. (S30-11411)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Ministers and Scottish Government officials regularly meet senior staff from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to discuss many issues that are important to local people.

Patricia Ferguson: The cabinet secretary is aware of changes to community health and care partnerships in Glasgow to create a citywide partnership and three area partnerships. Some communities in the north Glasgow CHCP, such as Milton and Possilpark, will merge with communities in the east Glasgow CHCP. She is also aware that many of those communities rate poorly in the Scottish index of multiple deprivation—indeed, 10 of the 20 worst zones are in the area. Will she therefore assure me that she will make the case to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde for distributing that funding to the new area CHCPs on the basis of need rather than population?

Nicola Sturgeon: Of course I will convey to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Patricia Ferguson's concerns and comments. I encourage her, as a local MSP, to make her points directly to the health board, too. She is right to raise the relationship between how we spend money—not least in the health service—and how we tackle deprivation and poverty. I am sure that health board officials would be happy to discuss those issues with her further.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): Has the cabinet secretary discussed with Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board its decision earlier this year to cease the provision of specialist services—particularly for back pain—to patients in the Ayrshire and Arran Health Board area? If she has had no such discussions, will she look into the situation? A number of patients now appear not to be getting the treatment that they require.

Nicola Sturgeon: I have not had specific discussions about that issue with Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board, but I am of course more than happy to look into it. I will raise it directly with the health board if that is necessary.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Services for Vulnerable People (Equality Duties)

3. Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what legal requirements regarding equality legislation local authorities have to take account of when considering changes to services for vulnerable groups. (S3O-11467)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): Local authorities are subject to the public sector equality duties. They must have due regard to the need to promote race, disability and gender equality across all their functions.

Sandra White: The minister will be aware of the statement by United Kingdom equalities bodies that they may seek judicial review of the UK budget should it fail to comply with equality laws. Will that apply to local authorities, too?

Alex Neil: I am aware of the Fawcett Society's challenge to the emergency budget south of the border. There is no doubt at all that local authorities, like every other public body, must adhere to the law, which states that we must have due regard to our specific and general equality duties. The new Equality Act 2010 will start to come into force next month, and the full new public sector duty will come into force no earlier than April 2011.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Likewise, will the minister clarify whether health boards consider equality legislation? Was NHS Lanarkshire required to undertake an equality impact assessment before withdrawing podiatry care from my elderly vulnerable constituents, who are now expected to cut their own toenails, which is impossible for most of them; to pay about £20 for that service each time; or to face possible impaired mobility and the pain of ingrowing toenails?

Alex Neil: I am very much aware of the toenail issue in Lanarkshire, as I am dealing with several constituents who have raised the matter. Like all health boards and other public bodies, NHS Lanarkshire must abide by the equalities legislation. Whether to undertake an equality impact assessment of any decision is a matter for the health board.

Breast Cancer Ward (Victoria Infirmary)

4. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is aware of any patient concerns regarding the proposed closure of the breast cancer ward at the Victoria infirmary in Glasgow. (S3O-11426)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes. I have been in correspondence with some members of the Parliament and members of the public in relation to concerns about the closure of ward B at the Victoria infirmary. I take those concerns seriously.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has told me that ward B had not been a dedicated breast surgery ward for many years, and that in recent times an average of three breast patients were cared for in the nine-bed ward. The board has also explained that the demand for in-patient beds has significantly decreased as a result of many treatments increasingly being provided on a day-case basis. Indeed, I understand that discussions with the local breast surgery service are under way to explore the opportunities to increase further the use of 23-hour beds within the new Victoria hospital.

Ken Macintosh: I ask the cabinet secretary to expand on some of her remarks. She is aware that, under the remit of the south Glasgow monitoring group—of which she was a member for many years—no named services were allowed to be moved from the Victoria to the Southern general hospital. As far as I am aware, when she and I were members of that group, the breast cancer unit was not closed or moved, so I am trying to work out when exactly it was closed down. Was it since she refused to renew the group's remit? More important, was she consulted on the unit's closure and the treatment of breast cancer patients at the Victoria infirmary? Is she aware that the closure of the ward may mean breast cancer patients ending up on a mixed-sex ward?

Nicola Sturgeon: I gave Ken Macintosh the detail behind the reasons for the actions that Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board has taken.

He was also a member of south Glasgow monitoring group and will be aware that it was set up by one of my predecessors—if memory serves me correctly, it was Malcolm Chisholm—for a set period of time. It actually operated for longer than that period and fulfilled the remit that it was given. He will also be aware of the Government's policy on mixed-sex wards. That pertains in this case as it does elsewhere.

I remind members from all parties that the plans to concentrate in-patient breast surgery beds were

made in the context of the acute services review, which ministers approved in 2002. Labour members seem to have short memories these days, but I must remind them that the Labour Party was in office at that time. I will continue to ensure that all decisions in all health boards reflect the best interests of patients and the ambitions of our quality strategy, which is to ensure that we have quality services throughout the health service.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will be aware that the planned provision at Gartnavel royal hospital has yet to happen. Does she agree, therefore, that the closure of ward B was precipitate, because a gap has been left in the service for women suffering from breast cancer?

Nicola Sturgeon: If Jackie Baillie had listened to my initial response, she would have heard me outline the reasons behind the decision that the health board has taken: the demand for in-patient beds is decreasing—that is a good thing, because it means that many more patients receive their treatment in the community—and the average figure for the number of breast patients in the nine-bed ward over recent times was three.

Such decisions must be made carefully. I understand the concerns that have been expressed and will always discuss them with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. However, Jackie Baillie should reflect on the answer that I have given and on the various factors that are at play in the decision.

The Presiding Officer: I ask members who have asked a question to allow the minister responsible to give a response without interruption.

NHS Scotland Resource Allocation Committee Formula (Rural Areas)

5. Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to ensure that rural areas are fairly treated by the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee formula. (S3O-11393)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): A review of the impact of the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee formula on remote and rural areas of Scotland has been undertaken by the technical advisory group on resource allocation—TAGRA—as agreed in the Parliamentary debate on remote and rural health care in June 2008.

TAGRA has examined two issues in the policy area. First, it has investigated the relative impact of the formula in island, remote and rural areas compared with urban and city areas. Secondly, it

has looked at the sustainability of health services in those areas and whether there are greater relative challenges than in other areas. As part of that work, TAGRA has conducted a series of interviews with a group of national health service boards to identify whether there are unavoidable cost pressures that are not captured in the current resource allocation formula. I expect the group to report its findings to me in the next few weeks.

Jeremy Purvis: I am very grateful to the cabinet secretary for that extremely full answer. She will be aware of the concerns that I and other members have raised for more than two and a half years about the fact that the additional costs in rural areas are not reflected in resource allocation. Just yesterday, in the debate on telemedicine and telecare, special reference was made to the extra burdens on rural areas in the provision of health care. Health boards have been given illustrative figures for the new capital allocations using the NRAC formula. Will she look favourably on the additional burdens on rural areas when she receives TAGRA's report?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am aware of the concerns that Jeremy Purvis and others have expressed on the issue. It was those concerns that led directly to the establishment of the technical advisory group. I will not pre-empt the group's report, but I assure Jeremy Purvis that I will look carefully at all those issues.

It is important that I stress, and that he is aware, that no capital allocations have been made to health boards for the next financial year. That will, of course, remain the case until we know the detail of the comprehensive spending review.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The three island health boards receive quite different levels of funding per capita under the current funding formula, much of the basis of which is historic. I ask that that be investigated and research be done to ensure that NHS Orkney, NHS Shetland and NHS Western Isles receive the funding that they need to meet the health needs of their populations.

Nicola Sturgeon: Mary Scanlon will be aware that NRAC's remit was to refine and improve the Arbuthnott formula. The new adjustment that is used by NRAC is based on the urban/rural classification, which includes specific categories for islands. That allows the adjustment to be built up from smaller and more meaningful geographical units, which makes it fairer for boards with mixed geographies. However, I take on board the point that she has made about islands, and I will reflect on it when I receive TAGRA's report in the not-too-distant future.

People with a Visual Impairment (Health Information)

6. Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD):

To ask the Scottish Executive how it is supporting access to health information for people with a visual impairment. (S3O-11391)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government is committed to the provision of accessible health information that is clear, accurate, up to date and available in formats that meet the needs of all citizens. We are working with a wide range of partners, including NHS inform and health rights information Scotland, to ensure that people with a visual impairment have access to the health information that they need.

Hugh O'Donnell: In light of the minister's comprehensive answer, what action does the Government intend to take in relation to the Royal National Institute of Blind People's recent report on the implications of failing to provide health information in a suitable format to people who are partially sighted? What action will the Government take on the recommendations in that report?

Shona Robison: We will certainly look at the report in some detail to see what improvements require to be made. I add to what I said in my original answer that we have developed the translation, interpreting and communication support strategy, which is very much about equal access to health care and the provision of information for all groups, including people with a visual impairment. NHS Health Scotland is working with a range of partners to implement the strategy, to ensure that boards can achieve effective communication between services and service users who have communication support needs.

The health service has done a lot to make improvements in this area. Is the situation perfect everywhere? No, it is not, but there is a recognition that sometimes more imagination needs to be used, along with a bit of common sense, when dealing with patients who have a variety of communication requirements.

Life Expectancy (Effects of Deprivation)

7. Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the findings regarding the effects of deprivation on life expectancy made by the registrar general for Scotland in the latest annual review of demographic trends. (S3O-11468)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government recognises the effect that deprivation has on life expectancy. Our commitment to tackling Scotland's health inequalities was set out in

"Equally Well: Report of the Ministerial Task Force on Health Inequalities". The review of "Equally Well", which was published in June, confirmed the importance of early intervention in realising the task force's vision for addressing inequalities and of the need to ensure that resources are allocated accordingly.

Bill Wilson: Presently, the Government's success is measured predominantly by gross domestic product. Does the minister agree that success could be better measured by criteria that reflect the population's health and wellbeing than by GDP, which in developed countries does not relate to those issues?

As a small aside, I have surveyed a large number of non-governmental organisations, and I have yet to find one that likes GDP.

Shona Robison: Bill Wilson makes a valid point about using health and wellbeing as a measurement. Although GDP has an important role to play in measuring success, health and wellbeing are—as he notes—important.

I mentioned the equally well initiative in my first answer, and we are, across Government, taking forward initiatives in a number of other important areas, such as the achieving our potential framework, which has been designed to have a lasting impact on poverty and deprivation.

I make the point, however, that—as I am sure everyone is aware—the issues are long standing and will not be resolved overnight.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The latest registrar general report shows a continuing drop in deaths from alcohol-related diseases, which over a number of years have fallen by 20 per cent for men. After rising for 15 years, the equivalent death rate for women has now been stable for a number of years. We all agree that the levels are still far too high. However, does the minister have any idea from her advisers which factors underlie that drop, so that we can identify, support and improve the positive factors?

Shona Robison: There is no doubt that the impact on health of alcohol misuse continues to be a real issue for Scotland, and in fact has doubled in the past 10 years. We cannot be complacent about that. I tell the member—although I am sure he is aware—that recent statistics have shown that women in Scotland are more likely than men in England to die from alcohol misuse. That shows the scale of the challenge.

The Government cannot be criticised for presenting a set of radical proposals to begin to address the issue of alcohol misuse. It is just a pity that members on Richard Simpson's side of the

chamber have not seen fit to support many of those radical measures.

Computed Tomography Scanner (Orkney)

8. Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on there being no CT scanner available in Orkney and what the implication of this is for patients. (S3O-11389)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Within our framework of national priorities and guidance, it is for national health service boards to assess local service needs and to provide or obtain services to meet those needs.

I know that NHS Orkney has been examining a range of options for future hospital service provision in the islands, and part of that is a business case for a local CT scanner. I understand that the NHS board will consider the recommendations that emerge from the business case later this year, and I look forward to learning the outcome.

Liam McArthur: I thank the cabinet secretary for her response, and I acknowledge the personal interest that she has taken in the issue. However, I hope that she acknowledges that there is now a real sense that the continued absence of a CT scanner locally is impeding the delivery of the type of care to which my constituents, like those of other members, are entitled.

The cabinet secretary mentions the consideration of the business case. However, does she understand that there is an intense sense of frustration that any savings that arise from a locally based scanner would accrue largely to NHS Scotland and the Scottish Ambulance Service budgets, while the capital and revenue costs of the scanner would fall to NHS Orkney?

Nicola Sturgeon: I absolutely recognise the strength of feeling. Liam McArthur will remember that I met him and some local campaigners when I was last in Orkney, towards the end of last year.

Having said that, it is not only right but essential that NHS Orkney looks at the issue and balances the importance—which the member has acknowledged—of having that type of provision with affordability and other factors.

We will continue to work closely with NHS Orkney to help it to deal with any issues that it confronts in relation to the matter. I do not want to pre-empt the business case that will emerge and the recommendations that will flow from it, but I assure Liam McArthur that I will continue to take a close interest.

Cleft Palates

9. Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what it is doing to support children and young people with cleft palates and related conditions. (S3O-11388)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): We remain committed to improving the lives of children and young people with cleft palates and related conditions. Indeed, the long-established national managed clinical network in cleft lip and palate has a strong children's component. The provision of specialist paediatric surgery is key to successful treatment, as are the range of services and follow-up care that are available locally, such as specialist speech and language therapy services and orthodontic treatment.

Jim Hume: I have in my hand a letter to the cabinet secretary from the Cleft Lip and Palate Association, which expresses its concern that, from the end of October, no specialist speech and language therapists will be available at the Royal hospital for sick children in Edinburgh. Without those therapists, children with speech problems will be unable to undergo surgery due to the lack of the required pre-operative assessments. The repercussions stretch beyond the Lothians, as the two therapists involved also serve Fife and the Borders. Will the minister guarantee that replacements are actively being sought and will be in place as soon as possible to ensure that there is no gap in provision?

Shona Robison: I am aware of the letter to which the member refers. As the cabinet secretary's recent official reply to CLAPA confirms, we have been in touch with NHS Lothian and we are advised that another speech and language therapist has been identified to support the service. She has started working with the two current specialist SLTs before they leave next month. In addition, the unit is advertising for a temporary SLT to cover for the maternity leave of the lead specialist SLT. However, I acknowledge that the number of specialist cleft SLTs is limited so there can be no guarantee that the Edinburgh unit will attract suitably experienced applicants. It is unfortunate that both of the specialist cleft SLTs at the hospital are leaving at the same time, but I am assured that NHS Lothian is taking all reasonable steps to rectify the issue in order to minimise the impact on the service. Finally, we have asked NHS Lothian to keep the situation under close review and to report back to the Scottish Government if any problems emerge that might have an adverse impact on the service.

NHS Forth Valley

10. Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when the Cabinet

Secretary for Health and Wellbeing last met the chair of NHS Forth Valley and what issues were discussed. (S3O-11457)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I chaired NHS Forth Valley's annual review in the new Forth Valley Royal hospital on 16 August 2010. We discussed a wide range of matters affecting past and present performance and planning for the future with the board chair and his senior management team. I also met the chair on 30 August at the last regular meeting of NHS board chairs.

Michael Matheson: I draw to the cabinet secretary's attention concerns that have been raised with me by NHS Forth Valley staff about the availability of parking for staff at the new Forth Valley Royal hospital. Will she outline what advice the Scottish Government gives to health boards when planning for such new facilities on what parking should be provided for staff? Will she also advise which public authority has the final say on what level of parking should be provided? Is it the local authority or the local health board?

Nicola Sturgeon: Those are essentially local matters. The number of car-parking spaces in the new Forth Valley hospital was determined as part of the process that was undertaken by the health board in securing detailed planning permission from Falkirk Council. The planning permission that was granted by Falkirk Council focused on the board's need to reduce the percentage of journeys to the hospital that are undertaken by car, with a target of 70 per cent or less having been set for 2010. Accordingly, given that planning permission, it would not be possible to provide additional car parking at the hospital. I hope that that answers Michael Matheson's question.

Housing Benefit (Reform)

11. Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on the United Kingdom Government's approach to the reform of housing benefit. (S3O-11417)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): We have real concerns about the impact that the proposals might have and we are taking steps to ensure that the views of the people of Scotland are heard in Whitehall. It is essential that any changes do not affect the most vulnerable households, which simply cannot afford a reduction in their housing benefit. Officials are in regular contact with their counterparts in the Department for Work and Pensions. I have stressed to UK ministers, both in correspondence and in person, the importance of genuine and extensive consultation on their welfare reform proposals.

Hugh Henry: I thank the minister for that very clear statement. I share his concerns. It is worrying to listen to some of the comments being made by the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, about people who live in poverty and people living on benefits. The more that all of us in this chamber can do to dissuade the UK Government from its approach, the better.

Many of my constituents are not council tenants but private tenants who rely on housing benefit to pay their rent. Do the minister and his colleagues see the provision of housing benefit to private tenants as merely a way of propping up landlords' private income?

Alex Neil: No, we certainly do not. We see it as an absolutely essential source of income for many tenants in the private rented sector, which makes up 8 per cent of the total housing stock in Scotland. Many of the people who live in the private rented sector are among the most vulnerable members of our community who have low levels of income. It is absolutely essential that those people continue to get access to a reasonable level of housing benefit that covers their housing costs while they rely on welfare benefits until they can get a job, if they are fit and able to work. Housing benefit is not a subsidy to private landlords; it is clearly a way of supporting some of our more vulnerable people who happen to be living in the private rented sector.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Does the minister agree that, rather than the private rented sector or the public rented sector, it is people who will suffer greatly because of these so-called welfare reforms? Does he share my fears that we will be creating ghettos in areas where rent is too high for people to afford, particularly in the private sector? Does he also agree that, instead of knocking people, we should say that some do a very good job? For example, the Glasgow Rent Deposit and Support Scheme helps people in these increasingly difficult times.

Alex Neil: Sandra White has expressed some of my concerns, and I agree with her latter point.

This week, apparently, the DWP sent out a letter to 200,000 people across the UK who rely on mortgage interest payment support from the DWP. They were informed that, within two weeks, they will suffer up to a 40 per cent reduction in those mortgage interest payments. It is bad enough that they will suffer such a reduction, but to get only two weeks' notice of it is totally inhumane and unacceptable.

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): In yesterday's *Evening Times*, Councillor Matt Kerr said that proposed changes to housing benefit for temporary accommodation were

"nothing more than crude social vandalism"

that would lead to the return of huge, inappropriate hostels. What is the minister's view?

Alex Neil: I agree with the councillor.

The Presiding Officer: Question 12 was withdrawn.

Housing Strategy (Community Benefit Clauses)

13. John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what consideration it is giving to the use of community benefit clauses in its housing strategy. (S3O-11434)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): The Scottish Government includes community benefit clauses at the heart of a number of its policies. They feature in our economic recovery plan and in policies ranging from the energy assistance package to their use across public sector procurement, including social housing developments.

John Park: During the past few weeks I have been in dialogue with the construction industry and the concern has been raised that, even with the use of community benefit clauses, the lack of funding for those who are over 20 makes it more difficult for construction companies to employ people who, through no fault of their own, need to develop new skills to get on in the workplace. Will the minister have a look at some of the areas in which community benefit clauses can be used to provide opportunities for those adults? At the same time, will he make representations to his Cabinet colleagues about how there might be better support to ensure that community benefit clauses assist people who are over 20 to find apprenticeship opportunities?

Alex Neil: We are conscious of the need to ensure maximum opportunities for everyone, irrespective of their age group. I draw the member's attention to what will happen with the energy assistance package in the coming months, when we will ensure that people of all ages benefit from new training, apprenticeship and accreditation schemes for the installation of central heating systems and related skills.

I also draw the chamber's attention to what is happening through the Cordale Housing Association, in Dunbartonshire. Not only has it developed a community benefit system relating to apprenticeships, it has developed a comprehensive local supply network and is making maximum use of the benefits of the substantial investment that it is making in social housing in that area, to the benefit of not only local businesses, but local people.

Triage Services (Aberdeen)

14. Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures are being put in place to minimise the impact of the closure of triage ward 6 at Woodend hospital in Aberdeen on health care in the region. (S3O-11397)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Ward 6 at Woodend hospital is not a triage ward; it is an intermediate care ward for older people. NHS Grampian's introduction of patient triage in the hospital has helped to improve arrangements for assessing and diagnosing patients and has reduced their length of stay. It has also supported better and quicker planning for their discharge home or to more appropriate care. All of that means that fewer beds are required. Using resources efficiently while improving the quality of patients' experience is something that we look to all national health service boards to do.

Nicol Stephen: Has the triage system not been a significant success since it was developed and introduced in July 2009? I am told that ward 6 is not an intermediate care ward, but an intermediate assessment ward and very much part of the triage unit. Is it not the case that 2,000 patients have passed through the triage system and that that has helped to reduce the average length of stay in hospital, for those involved, from 21 days to between nine and 14 days and has also allowed 205 patients to be discharged directly home? Is it true that there were not enough staff to operate the unit safely due to a freeze on posts and appointments?

Nicola Sturgeon: With the greatest of respect for Nicol Stephen, I think that there was a slight misunderstanding in his original question, which has flowed through into his supplementary question. The triage system, which was introduced in July 2009, has been an enormous success—what he claims for it is absolutely true. However, ward 6 is not a triage ward. The triage system is not being reduced. It is the success of the triage system that has led to patients having a shorter length of stay and being discharged more quickly. It is those successes that have led to a fall in the bed demand in the intermediate care ward—ward 6. Nicol Stephen is correct in saying that the triage system has been a success but he is wrong in suggesting that the closure of ward 6 is in any way putting that system at risk. The changes around ward 6 are a result of the successes of the triage system.

Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that this is, in fact, a good-news story in which social work colleagues, the discharge co-ordinator and health service staff have worked together to reduce the

bed blocking that was prevalent under the previous Government? Will she confirm that the staff who currently work on the ward in question will all be redeployed within Woodend hospital?

Nicola Sturgeon: Maureen Watt is absolutely correct in saying that all the staff who currently work in ward 6 will be fully redeployed elsewhere in the hospital. Also, the beds in ward 6 that are still required are being transferred to another ward. Maureen Watt is 100 per cent correct in saying that it is a good-news story. It is exactly what we want to see happening—patients having the correct triage, not having to spend longer than they should in intermediate care beds and being discharged quickly to the appropriate care. The changes that have taken place in triage have, in part, helped that to happen. It is an example of a health board looking to see how services can be delivered more efficiently—which is very important in the current economic climate—but in a way that also improves patients' outcomes. It is exactly the kind of service redesign that we want.

Emergency Care

15. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that best use is made of emergency care resources and that accident and emergency departments are able to function effectively. (S3O-11395)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Over the past few years, NHS Scotland has made good progress in building a more integrated system of unscheduled care services, including services provided by emergency and accident departments, with the objective of delivering the right care in the right place at the right time. Through the pursuit of our ambitions in the quality strategy, we will continue to develop and improve all our unscheduled and planned care services and, in partnership with national health service boards, NHS 24, primary care and the Scottish Ambulance Service, the Scottish Government will build a genuinely integrated system of care for patients that responds to what people need and is safe, effective, sustainable and good value for money.

Iain Smith: The cabinet secretary will of course be aware of difficulties in Fife at Victoria hospital's A and E unit as a result of staff shortages and that in 2008-09 more than half of those treated in emergency departments had only minor injuries or illnesses. What is the Government doing to increase public awareness of the alternatives to emergency departments and blue-light ambulance services to ensure that genuine emergencies receive the attention that they deserve, where they deserve to receive it?

Nicola Sturgeon: Iain Smith is absolutely right to highlight the importance of making people aware of the correct part of the NHS to go to in certain circumstances. That is the NHS's responsibility. For example, NHS Grampian's recent know who to turn to pilot project, which some of his colleagues might be aware of, seeks to tell people the right place to go in various circumstances. As he says, that plays an important part in reducing demand on A and E departments.

With regard to the specific issue that he raised about Fife, I know of the contingency arrangements that are in place for A and E services and that on some occasions they have had to be activated. However, NHS Fife is working hard to minimise the need to use such arrangements in future.

National Health Service (Effects of European Working Time Directive)

16. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment it has made of how the implementation of the working time directive on junior doctors' hours is affecting the national health service. (S3O-11392)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): NHS Scotland boards undertake their own on-going assessment of the effects of the implementation of the working time regulations and are supported in that by a Scottish Government working time regulations adviser who offers advice and help in designing compliant and safe medical rotas. Compliance with the regulations across NHS Scotland is currently running at around 99 per cent.

Mike Pringle: In light of the recent United Kingdom-wide survey of 980 NHS surgeons and surgical trainees that revealed that 80 per cent believe that care has worsened since the European working time directive came into effect last August, will the Scottish Government commit to carrying out an urgent review of the directive's impact on the care provided by the Scottish NHS?

Nicola Sturgeon: We monitor all these things closely. As I said in my initial answer, the Scottish Government has a working time regulations adviser who provides help and advice to boards on designing rotas that not only comply with the regulations but are safe and deliver safe patient care.

I know well the survey that the member refers to. It is right that the country has a system that ensures that doctors do not work too many hours or work to the point that they are tired and are perhaps unable to deliver a safe level of patient care. As a result, I support the working time

regulations and, as Mike Pringle knows, even if I did not—which I do—the fact is that the issue is reserved. We do not have the ability simply to opt out.

Capital Resource Allocation (NHS Grampian and NHS Tayside)

17. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive, following its advice on capital allocations to national health service boards, what safeguards it has put in place to ensure that an equitable share of resources will be available to NHS Grampian and NHS Tayside. (S3O-11390)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The recommendations of the capital strategy group recognise the continued need for an equitable distribution of resources through a formula-based distribution of capital resources. Given the United Kingdom Government's projections for reduced capital budgets, arrangements are being put in place to ensure that funding for larger capital projects is prioritised through a transparent process involving NHS Scotland representation.

Alison McInnes: The proposed removal of almost all delegated capital spending powers from health boards is an assault on decision making and the resulting bidding for resources from a central capital funding pot, which will pit health boards against one another, is unlikely to serve the north-east well. Will the cabinet secretary assure the chamber that she will consult on the criteria to be used to determine the project priorities? What steps will she take to ensure transparency? Finally, what will be the on-going role of the capital investment group?

The Presiding Officer: Respond as quickly as you possibly can, please, cabinet secretary.

Nicola Sturgeon: I think that I have answered the latter parts of Alison McInnes's question already.

I will say that no final decisions on capital allocations will be made until we know about the comprehensive spending review, but we must responsibly make arrangements for dealing with capital budgets that are much reduced. Given that Alison McInnes is a member of a party that in the UK Government is presiding over these swingeing cuts in capital investment, it is a bit rich to hear her complain.

Low-carbon Economy

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-7047, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, on a low-carbon economy for Scotland. Very little time is available in the debate, so I ask members to be strict in their timing.

14:56

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): I am delighted to have the opportunity to recognise the progress that is being made by the sector and to state my belief that Scotland's renewable energy potential will attract the involvement of other nations, and will generate the industrial, academic and public sector collaboration that is needed to make Scotland the green energy capital of Europe.

It is a good day to do that, given that today we have reset the target for renewables to 80 per cent of consumption by 2020, which is up from the previous target of 50 per cent. That is confirmation that we have a huge multifaceted comparative advantage in the global shift to low carbon.

The investment and job opportunities that are presented by low carbon in Scotland represent the best economic opportunity in recent years. Employment in the low-carbon sector is expected to grow fast: Scottish low-carbon jobs could grow from 70,000 now to 130,000 by 2020, which would represent approximately 5 per cent of the Scottish workforce.

The global low-carbon economy was worth £3 trillion in 2007-08 and is forecast to grow to £4.3 trillion by 2015. That is three times the size of the global aerospace sector. Scotland can expect a disproportionate share, given that we have as much as a quarter of Europe's offshore wind and tidal energy potential and an estimated 10 per cent of its capacity for wave power. Those natural resources are significant enough to enable Scotland to become the continent's green energy powerhouse.

That was reinforced in a valuation of the United Kingdom's offshore renewable energy resource that was published in May 2010 and which estimated that Scotland has 206GW of practical offshore wind, wave and tidal resource. That is almost 40 per cent of the total United Kingdom resource. Harnessing just a third of our offshore renewable energy potential could meet Scotland's electricity needs seven times over by 2050. The net value of that amount of energy, in terms of electricity sales, would be £14 billion by 2050.

Consequently, there are opportunities both for growing indigenous Scottish companies and for

attracting others from overseas to locate in Scotland. We already have successful international partnerships. For example, in March 2009 the Danish company Skykon acquired the Vestas wind-tower manufacturing plant in Campbeltown. The company will invest in building towers for offshore wind and expects to add more than 200 additional jobs to the existing 100 people who work for it there.

Scotland also has particular strengths in environmental and clean technologies, for instance in building technologies, environmental monitoring and sustainable transport. With 2,500 Scottish companies active in this market, it is estimated that it will grow from £8.5 billion in 2007-08 to around £12 billion by 2015-16.

So, how and with whom do we work to secure our position in the new green economy? The Scottish Parliament has already played a key role through the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, which sets world-leading targets of at least 42 per cent cuts in emissions by 2020 and 80 per cent cuts by 2050.

The legislation also had strong support from business and civic society. As members know, the act provides a framework for business and the public to help Scotland move to a low-carbon future. The responses to our recent consultation—“Towards a Low Carbon Economy for Scotland”—from a wide range of Scottish industry and business confirm that we can expect substantial benefits to accrue from the greening of our economy. Our aim is to be a model of international best practice on climate change.

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): An energy efficiency action plan should have been produced under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. Where is that action plan?

Jim Mather: The energy efficiency action plan will be published later in the autumn—this autumn. [*Laughter.*] That plan will constitute part of best practice. The exercise has been thorough, and it will allow us to reinforce the economic case with UK, German and French climate ministers. Persuading the European Union to move unilaterally to a target of 30 per cent emissions cuts by 2020 would speed the delivery of the benefits of a low-carbon economy and collaboration. Therefore, it is no surprise that my colleague Mr Stevenson has come to this debate straight from a briefing for the consular corps in Scotland, in which it was set out how low carbon is boosting economic performance in Scotland and how we can do even more in the future, especially with higher levels of European collaboration. I am delighted to see many diplomatic representatives with us in the Parliament today.

There are other aspects of collaboration. For example, the scale of Scotland's renewables resource requires us to further develop an offshore transmission network grid. The North Sea grid calls for a collaborative approach among countries, regions and member states to develop interconnections into a strategic and co-ordinated grid network. To that end, discussions between Norway and Scotland on possible interconnector projects were very much part of the First Minister's recent visit to Norway.

I am delighted that the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets has listened to the Parliament's calls for changes to the locational charging approach. As members know, that currently results in renewable energy generators in the geographical areas with the best renewable energy resources paying the highest charges for use of the Great Britain grid system. Ofgem's timely review of charges is welcome.

The low-carbon economy that is developing in Scotland will be good for business; companies are already capturing the benefits. Burntisland Fabrications Ltd, which is an established offshore fabrications company based in Fife, is now one of Europe's leading suppliers of support structures for offshore wind turbines, with 370 jobs in Fife and 60 jobs on Lewis. The centre of engineering excellence for renewable energy in Glasgow will create around 250 high-value jobs over the next three years and safeguard 70 more in the city. In addition, Scotland is already an active exporter of low-carbon technologies. They were worth £845 million last year, and they went mainly to China, Spain, Malaysia, India and Romania.

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): In naming places that have the potential to supply the industry to which the minister refers, would he like to say anything about the Cromarty Firth?

Jim Mather: It is clear that the Cromarty Firth will play an important part in the national renewables infrastructure plan, as it already does. Discussing that plan and ensuring that we have the right options has taken up a considerable amount of my time, but that is nothing compared with the time that Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Highland Council are spending on it, all of which is welcome.

It is clear when we talk about the national renewables infrastructure plan and such things that further investment is needed in the low-carbon economy. The fossil fuel levy surplus, which currently stands at £189 million, must be available to us as an important source of investment for Scotland's growing renewables industry. Consequently, we welcome the new coalition Government's commitment to review the situation as a long overdue step in the right direction.

Meanwhile, we will press on with private sector partners to develop new financing models for low-carbon developments. An example of that work is our partnership work with Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce and Scottish Enterprise on the low-carbon investment project, which aims to attract international investment in low-carbon opportunities throughout Scotland. We are bringing together key players at a major international conference in Edinburgh next week, which will provide a unique forum for the Government, people involved in international finance and utilities, and developers to engage and debate the sharing of risks and rewards of major capital projects in the low-carbon sector. Intellectual capital will be brought to the project by the key conference sponsors, which include Quayle Munro, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Lloyds Banking Group and Clydesdale Bank. I am sure that that will be the start of an open-ended debate that will aid the delivery of investment solutions and maximise Scotland's potential as a leading low-carbon economy.

Just last week, the Spanish power giant and Scottish Power owner Iberdrola announced that it will invest £3 billion in low-carbon technologies in Scotland over the next two years. Therefore, Scotland has the mechanisms in place not just to make the transition to a low-carbon economy a reality for Scotland, but to support that transition across Europe and beyond.

The energy technology partnership, an alliance of our universities, is building a strong education and research base around low-carbon innovation, which will drive the transition to a low-carbon economy even further. For instance, the University of Glasgow has been funded by the European Community for work with Austria, Switzerland and Italy on leading-edge renewables technologies, and Scottish Power Renewables recently announced a £5 million sponsorship alliance that links Imperial College London and the University of Edinburgh in carbon capture and storage research.

We have invested £10 million in the saltire prize for marine energy, which is one of the largest-ever innovation prizes and was supported yesterday by another leasing round from the Crown Estate. That is further focusing the world's leading organisations and talent on the commercial deployment of wave and tidal energy in Scotland.

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): Does the minister accept that there is no credible evidence that any business is likely to bend its investment decisions as a result of the saltire prize and that therefore its value is more as a public relations gimmick than as something that will deliver the results that the Government claims?

Jim Mather: What an intervention; very pessimistic. No, I do not accept that.

We have, moving into the arena, the European Marine Energy Centre Ltd and the Scottish European Green Energy Centre, which has already attracted more than €100 million. Many other key sectors are involved in the wholesale decarbonisation of businesses throughout Scotland, whether that is the food and drink sector, including the notable efforts by the Scotch Whisky Association, or what is happening in the built environment. Last week, I was at Heriot-Watt University to see what is being done to retrofit existing houses. We can see that, coming down the line through measures such as insulation and smart meters, there will be many more jobs and many households will be taken out of fuel poverty.

The evidence is that the current agenda is driving things forward and allowing Scotland to develop a national consensus and a determination to play a full role in developing the technologies, skills and expertise that are needed to build a really material low-carbon economy here. By building on international collaboration and existing relationships, we will position Scotland as the preferred and priority international destination for low-carbon investment.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges that Scotland is developing a national consensus and determination to play a full role in developing the technologies, skills and expertise to build a low carbon economy; welcomes the job opportunities associated with the further development of low carbon technologies, and notes that the net effect of these and other initiatives has been to position Scotland as a preferred international destination for low carbon investment.

15:07

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I will highlight the part of our amendment that sets out the key areas in which we believe action is needed. The debate has to be about two things: first, how we make the most of Scotland's fantastic opportunities to produce low-carbon and environmentally friendly heat and power; and secondly, and just as important, how we use that heat and power more wisely.

The process of developing a consensus did not start in 2007. By the time the Scottish National Party came to power, we had moved from generating slightly more than 10 per cent of our electricity from renewables up to 30 per cent in 2007. That is a huge achievement. For the past three years, most of the emphasis and a huge amount of discussion has been on the thousands upon thousands of new green jobs that are waiting just round the corner. We have set ambitious carbon reduction targets for 2020 and beyond.

However, it still does not feel as though we have all the basics in place to deliver Scotland's full potential. We should not pretend that we have consensus on absolutely everything when we clearly do not. We need to tease out the issues among ourselves and with people outwith the Parliament. That is a constructive point—we do not all agree on everything, so let us not pretend that we do.

Jim Mather: Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: No. Let me get into my speech.

I am sure that, across the chamber, we all want to argue for investment to ensure that we have the skills and infrastructure in place to make the most of the fantastic renewables opportunity. The fact that we do not always agree on everything should not cut across that, particularly in the context of next week's Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce conference, which is a fantastic opportunity to attract new investment and to showcase the renewables opportunities in Scotland. We should send a message from the Parliament that we all agree on that point. In advance of that conference, we want to make it absolutely clear that, should there be a Labour-led Scottish Parliament next year, we would be absolutely determined to continue that process and to take it further, particularly in our marine environment.

Our banking and finance sector is crucial to the development of a low-carbon economy. The funding cannot come from the public sector alone. It makes sense for banks, particularly those that are based in Scotland but, I hope, also for banks from abroad, to consider the investment opportunities here. We are not short of such opportunities; we are short of the funding now to ensure that all the opportunities are realised.

The proposed green investment bank, which I think we all support, would sit very well in Edinburgh.

Government needs to set the targets and the standards, but the challenge is to deliver on the practical changes that are required. Yesterday's announcement by Ofgem is very good news. We have long argued that if we are fully to develop our renewables potential, we need to remove financial constraints and provide a level playing field. By necessity, our marine renewables will always be the furthest from market. The challenge is to ensure that, in changing the rules, we do not disadvantage people on low incomes and shift things too far in the opposite direction. A balance will have to be struck.

Yesterday's Crown Estate announcement was also extremely welcome. More can be done to get investors involved; the key challenge is to make that happen.

What distinguishes the Labour Party—this is why we must not have a false consensus—is that our priority is to ensure that social justice sits alongside environmental justice, which is hugely relevant in looking at how we can achieve a low-carbon Scotland. We believe that fuel poverty has to be firmly on the agenda. That is why our amendment talks about the importance of housing and buildings generally. We definitely need to move faster in that area.

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 set out new policies for improving our building stock, which is a huge source of our emissions. However, the recession has seen a collapse in the rate of new building—just look at the statistics. The challenge is to ensure that we come out of the Salmond slump building new houses, not just in the public sector, but right across the private sector, too.

We do not believe that the Scottish Government is doing enough on new technologies or to ensure that energy efficiency is being driven forward properly. We have debated that before. We do not regard microgeneration and community heat as eco-bling. They are fundamental to a generation of new housing stock and the retrofitting of existing housing stock if we are to have long-term security of supply, houses that are affordable to live in and buildings that are affordable to heat.

The construction industry is absolutely clear in its briefing paper for this debate that it wants to see the gap between ambition and reality closed. We believe that there is too much drift from the Scottish Government. It is not enough just to say that we need investment; it must be made. Procurement presents a fantastic opportunity to drive a low-carbon agenda. We do not think that enough is being done at the moment.

The Scottish Building Federation highlighted the potential for 20,000 new jobs in the construction industry but asked how the skills gap will be addressed. I hope that in his winding-up speech, the minister will give us examples of modern apprenticeships and new college investment to deliver on that.

I am delighted to hear—as, I am sure, is everyone in the chamber—that the energy efficiency strategy will be published this autumn. Let us hope that it will, indeed, be published this autumn, and not next autumn. The fact that it is not out yet is holding back investment and business, because we need a clear message to be sent to every sector of the Scottish economy that energy efficiency is a top priority. Also crucial are the development of energy-efficient heat and the new range of decentralised and localised energy strategies, which must be produced if we are to tackle the issues of wasted energy and affordability.

Much more needs to be done. This week, ministers made an announcement about the duties on public bodies under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. MSPs across the chamber voted for a strong climate change duty, so we are deeply disappointed by what we have ended up being offered. We agree with the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition that this is a big missed opportunity. We think that the SNP Government has watered down the ambition. Why is there no mandatory reporting? There cannot just be warm words; they will not deliver the transition to a low-carbon economy. The public sector is vital to that process, so why is there nothing on the positive role of trade unions, which can play a massive role in the workplace?

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No. I need to get on—I think that I have nine minutes.

We know that some of the public sector does not have a good reputation or record on procurement, design of services, training and staff travel. That has to be addressed.

Since 2007, the SNP has said that it would not wait until the act was in place before we would see action, but that is unfortunately what has happened. Take the example of low-carbon transport: not enough has been done to support walking and cycling infrastructure and buses are still not fit for purpose in huge areas of Scotland.

Stewart Stevenson: Does the member accept that cycling investment this year is 50 per cent higher than it was last year?

Sarah Boyack: That explains the problem. Last year is not a good place to start in making comparisons. The minister needs to look at what was done in the first two sessions of this Parliament and to listen to what the cycling lobby is saying, because it is deeply unhappy about the lack of commitment from the SNP Government.

We cannot ignore the fact that this Government has run out of steam on climate change. The new carbon reduction targets that it is putting forward fail to meet its party's manifesto commitment. There is a lot of talk about the 2020 target, but the challenge is not 2020 but what happens this year, next year and the year after that.

I am very disappointed that, in its amendment, the Scottish Green Party is seeking to delete the strong points that we have put forward in our amendment. So, although I agree with much of the sentiment in its amendment, I am also greatly disappointed by it.

We are not prepared to sign up to the Con-Dem proposals on the green deal. I flag up in particular

our concerns on renewable heat, which members across the chamber will share. I hope that the Liberal Democrats are lobbying on that as we speak. I give the Labour Party's total support for the establishment of a green investment bank. We think that Scotland would be a good place to locate it.

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

Sarah Boyack: No. I will not.

Christopher Harvie: What is your line on nuclear energy?

Sarah Boyack: I turn to the Tory amendment. I would be most interested to hear what the Lib Dems and SNP have to say on the issue of nuclear energy—indeed I turn that back on the heckler of a second ago. Labour has always been clear in saying that the SNP is wrong to rule out nuclear as part of the energy mix for the future. We understand that managing waste will always be a key issue, but it is entirely sensible to keep our existing plant open as long as it is safe to do so.

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

Sarah Boyack: I note Chris Huhne's comment this week on the standoff between nuclear and renewables, in which he said that there should be no subsidy for new nuclear power. Labour's priority is for renewables. That is where we have the best potential for development and where all our political support and funding should be targeted. If we are to have a chance of achieving a low-carbon society, it needs to sit alongside energy efficiency across society and our economy.

I move amendment S3M-7047.2, to leave out from first "developing" to end and insert:

"; continuing to develop a national consensus and determination to play a full role in developing the technologies, skills and expertise to build a low-carbon economy; welcomes the job opportunities associated with the further development of low-carbon technologies and acknowledges the need for skills development; notes that the net effect of these and other initiatives has been to position Scotland as a preferred international destination for low-carbon investment, and believes that the Scottish Government should use its powers to the full in support of the development of low-carbon technologies in energy, transport and housing and in the promotion of existing technologies, such as combined heat and power and microgeneration, in order to underpin Scotland's recovery from economic recession."

15:16

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): We live in an age when the fantastical and imaginary worlds of Jules Verne and H G Wells

are becoming not only future possibilities but today's realities. Almost within the lifetime of this Government, we have seen the tentative embrace of renewables technology in pursuit of the low-carbon economy become a realistic policy priority.

Let us not be churlish. Despite the fact that the Government has been neither shy nor reticent, it has recognised Scotland's uniquely placed opportunity and has proceeded with vigour and determination. It has had the advantage of being in office as the opportunities arise and it cannot be said that the Government itself discovered the technologies—an impression that we might be invited to gain from some of its more ardent cheerleaders—but so far, so good. Scotland stands ready to be at the centre of this emerging opportunity. I congratulate the minister on the way in which he set out both the huge scale of the opportunity in financial terms and the many ways in which our natural topography, geography and prevailing climate—in all senses—can be harnessed to replicate the economic success that our good fortune with oil delivered previously.

Those opportunities and the potential that arises for Scotland are immense. Even so, we must resist the temptation to suspend belief and embrace every new concept whole-heartedly and without intelligent assessment. Politicians must balance opportunity and risk. The world financial crisis evolved in part because the disciplines that could have helped to prevent it were abandoned. So, too, with our strategy for a low carbon economy: we must be intelligently selective and seek to avoid tears and regrets later.

Have we become too target obsessed? In our rush of enthusiasm, we now have not only targets but legally binding ones, at that. The minister is bursting with pride at the latest of these, as he confirmed in his speech, but do we regard targets as some sort of panacea? Do new targets equal job done? Are they the Scottish environmental equivalent of mission accomplished? It already seems obvious that we have embraced ambitious legally binding targets without either a compelling narrative as to how they will be achieved or an appropriate recognition of the limits of our unilateral ability so to do. Indeed, if we obsess over the targets and expend political capital arguing over them—as I fear we are doing—we will detract from the bigger picture, on which we must surely ask: how do we reduce the pollution that is generated in Scotland, whether carbon or whatever? Having targets, even legally binding ones, may have raised three cheers from all those who lobbied us as the legislation progressed through the Parliament, and it may have earned us plaudits from international experts and bodies, but it does not mean that the targets will be met.

At the moment, reductions in carbon emissions in Scotland are being driven by a recession-depressed economy. As the economy recovers, there will be a carbon impact. I am not sure that any of us would accept risking that recovery because of the need to achieve annual carbon targets—well, perhaps one or two would. It is therefore vital that we match all the opportunities that the Government has identified in its motion, including matching them to its transport strategies, which must amount to more than simply telling people that they have to do without their motor vehicles. It is not enough simply to send round squads of the well-intentioned to advise folk on the location of their local bus stop. We need to make travel more efficient and offer rewards. I refer to schemes to encourage widespread car sharing, whether through car clubs or other means, and ideas that I have advanced previously on allowing multiple occupancy vehicles to use bus and taxi lanes and introducing hard-shoulder running on appropriate motorways.

Going forward, our embrace of the new should not be at the expense of practical action. Just last week, we debated Ayrshire Power's proposal to build a wholly new carbon capture and storage coal-powered station at Hunterston—a proposal that lacks public support. Although we appreciate the potential that carbon capture and storage offers and acknowledge the unique topographical and geographical advantage of the North Sea for storage, this is an area in which the rush for the new must be tempered in the face of qualified assertions regarding the practicalities that are involved in making it a success. Such concerns emanate from the industry itself.

The motion illustrates the potential advances in technology that have brought this opportunity on us in something of a rush. If all of it works and Scotland can realise the vision that is presented to us, the potential enormity of which all of us can begin to imagine, that will be terrific. However, the Wood Mackenzie Ltd report for the Scottish Government in 2009 sets out the bald truth that, with the scheduled closure of Hunterston B and Torness, Scotland will lose a significant volume of low-carbon power, to say nothing of energy security. That is where the Government breaks ranks with many people in the industry.

The amendment in my name seeks to address the issue. Today our nuclear capability is responsible for up to 30 per cent of our energy. It is safe, reliable and low carbon. In my view, it is regrettable that some have chosen to conflate the issues of nuclear power and nuclear weapons and to inject a false argument of morality into our—

Jim Mather: Does the member recognise that in 2006 our nuclear power capability was anything but reliable?

Jackson Carlaw: It has proved to be a reliable source of sustained power delivery to Scotland over many years and has a role to play in the future.

We recognise the expertise that Scotland has in the area. The Government should be brave enough to acknowledge that although its motion welcomes the job opportunities that are associated with the new technologies, its repudiation of our nuclear capability, as well as being unwise, quite unnecessarily puts at risk tens of thousands of Scottish jobs. I accept that the whole debate about the rights and wrongs of having nuclear weapons as part of our defence capability is legitimate and of enormous significance, and that it can have a moral dimension. However, what is moral about hoping that the rest of the United Kingdom—or Europe, for that matter—will compensate for our folly if we abandon a nuclear power capability? What is moral about potentially leaving many future generations and elderly people in Scotland without sufficient power?

My amendment does not require the development of an ultimate replacement. In practice, it is probable that EDF Energy's capacity to progress the four new nuclear power stations elsewhere in the United Kingdom cannot accommodate a further new station at this time. There is no immediate need to commission a new nuclear station—that can wait. Of much more immediate concern is an extension of the life of our existing capability.

I confirm that we will support the amendments in the names of Liam McArthur and Sarah Boyack, although I was more impressed with the wording than with the moving of her amendment. However, we will vote against the entirely predictable and charming, if characteristically batty, amendment in the name of Patrick Harvie.

The difference between us is that, for the Government, its motion is the final word, the complete vision and the only way forward. The Government's plan is romantic, is not without vision and is not lacking ambition, but it is in a rush not just to embrace risk but to rely on it. That is an abdication of common sense, duty and our moral responsibility. Scottish Conservatives do not present our amendment as an alternative strategy but as one that is wholly complementary. I urge the chamber to endorse it today.

I move amendment S3M-7047.1, to insert at end:

“; further notes the conclusion of the report, *Scotland's Generation Advantage*, produced for the Scottish Government, that the scheduled closure of Hunterston B and Torness means that Scotland will lose a significant volume of low-carbon power, and therefore considers that the extension or ultimate replacement of Scotland's nuclear

facilities will be crucial in maintaining a safe, secure and low-carbon energy supply going forward.”

15:23

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): Earlier the minister accused me of pessimism. I will start by dispelling that notion. If the debate can lay credible claim to having prompted the flurry of announcements yesterday and today, it has already served a useful purpose.

Especially pleasing, as the minister and others have acknowledged, was Ofgem's announcement yesterday that it will undertake a “comprehensive and open” review of the current network charging regime. That is long overdue, although I fully accept—as Lewis Macdonald will point out—that it will not be an easy or straightforward task. Compromises will be necessary, and there are elements of the current system that we would not wish to lose as part of that process, not least to ensure that we maintain our focus on tackling fuel poverty.

However, a system that is specifically designed to incentivise the siting of generation plants close to centres of demand is no longer in keeping with the policy objectives that successive Governments north and south of the border have set. The current locational signals also fail to recognise that much of the natural resource that we need to harness if we are to achieve our emissions reduction, renewables generation and wider climate change targets is to be found in remoter parts of the country and around our coasts, including in my constituency.

Ofgem's announcement also gives further credence to today's claim by Scottish Renewables that Scotland should be revising upwards its 2020 target for renewable electricity generation. I welcome Jim Mather's commitment to extend the target to 80 per cent, although that perhaps kills off Ayrshire Power's plans at Hunterston. The language that Ofgem used in its announcement suggests that it is alive to the new realities. I note that Scottish Renewables credited my colleague Chris Huhne with having taken the lead by providing Ofgem with

“the high-level outcomes that the regime needs to promote.”

Stewart Stevenson: Does the member have an update on whether Chris Huhne will help us to get access to our fossil fuel money?

Liam McArthur: I have no update, other than to say that we expect an announcement on the matter on 20 October. I am sure that the minister will join me in welcoming the announcement when it is made.

It cannot make sense for a gas and coal plant in the south to be subsidised while renewable generators that operate in Orkney and elsewhere in the north sometimes face prohibitive costs to connect to the grid. The potential costs have derailed projects in my constituency in recent years and it appears that they threaten a development in the Western Isles. I assume that that case cannot await the outcome of Ofgem's review, and I hope that urgent action can and will be taken.

Of course, connection to the grid presupposes the existence of the infrastructure in the first place. Like other members, I welcome the new connect and manage regime, which I hope will remove another potential barrier to the development of renewables. As Scottish Renewables made clear in its briefing, the new regime should

"provide greater certainty for generators about the rules for access to the grid over the long term."

That is extremely important.

The cost of putting in place the new infrastructure that we need will likely be eye-watering: some £50 billion on top of the £200 billion that Ofgem has identified as the cost of securing low-carbon energy supplies in the UK. As industry representatives and others who attended a dinner in Glasgow last night made clear, the funding is available, but competition for the investment is fierce and getting ever fiercer as countries world wide wrestle with the challenges with which we are wrestling. Public finances are likely to be under severe pressure in the coming years, so it is all the more essential that our regulatory environment delivers our public policy objectives in a way that can attract the investment that we need.

Public investment will continue to be essential, so I am delighted that the UK Government has agreed to look again at the release of the fossil fuel levy. I also welcome the UK Government's plans to create a green investment bank, to bring forward private investment in clean energy and green technologies. That has the potential to unlock project finance, by lowering risk to potential investors and addressing market failures and barriers to investment. Sarah Boyack and other members will have views on how such a bank should most effectively intervene and where it should be located, but I think that the proposal enjoys widespread support.

There has been a similarly positive response to UK plans for a green deal, as a means of accelerating the roll-out of vital energy efficiency measures and creating up to 250,000 jobs. Companies will pay up-front to insulate homes and recover their spending from the resulting energy savings. The approach presents an opportunity to

make headway on the issue during the next two decades.

In the years ahead we must do far more to emphasise the potential for job creation across all aspects of the low-carbon economy, whether we are talking about renewables, energy efficiency, waste management, transport, housing or other areas. As Sarah Boyack said, the opportunities are highly significant. The creation of a carbon army, as Dave Watson of Unison continues to call it, will require a focus on supporting skills development. The demand for jobs will be there; we must ensure that the skills are also there if we are to maximise the wealth-creating opportunities of the new economy.

The delivery of green jobs is one of the benefits of the renewable heat initiative, which will help to reduce our dependence on imported fuels, deliver emissions reductions and tackle fuel poverty. I have been making that case to the UK Government, as I expect many members have been doing, and I hope that there will be a positive announcement in that regard on 20 October.

I echo Jackson Carlaw's cautionary remarks about carbon capture and storage, but I will not repeat comments that I made in the members' business debate that Ross Finnie brought earlier this month on Ayrshire Power's plans for Hunterston. However, suggestions that Scottish Power's CCS pilot at Longannet is under threat appear to have been overplayed, perhaps mischievously.

The creation of a low-carbon economy is a question not of if or whether but of how and when. As WWF Scotland said:

"A transition towards a low carbon economy must become a central pillar of Scotland's overall economic strategy."

If we back ambitious objectives with concerted and radical action, the rewards are potentially significant. Failure to take such action will mean that we are faced with the same costs while being short-changed on the jobs and wealth-creation opportunities.

I am pleased to move amendment S3M-7047.3, to insert at end:

“; welcomes the announcement by Ofgem of a review of the charging arrangements for gas and electricity transmission networks and hopes that this will pave the way to removing barriers to the development of Scotland's renewable energy industry, and believes that the UK Government's plans for a Green Investment Bank to fund low-carbon transport and energy schemes and a Green Deal to overhaul the energy efficiency of homes and small businesses will benefit Scotland's efforts to build a low-carbon economy.”

15:30

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Before I begin speaking from my prepared notes, I want to welcome what I think was a note of honesty in Sarah Boyack's language about consensus. I have been concerned for some time that we should not descend into self-congratulation simply because we all voted for a piece of legislation when there are clearly fundamental differences among us on some of the important questions of delivery. I think we need to burst the bubble somewhat on our self-congratulatory consensus.

I want to reflect on the long-term development of the agenda. It is not something from the past few years or the past couple of Governments. Some people are beginning to think that climate change and renewable energy are new things, but it is more than 150 years since the basic science was identified, and for most of the time since then there have been people who have called for an urgent political response to the scientific message.

For a long time, those of us calling for that urgent political response were regarded as being on the fringes of politics—perhaps Mr Carlaw would like to think that we are still there—but the agenda is now global. It is at the forefront of the agenda of every Government and major company, and the scientific consensus is far more robust than the political consensus that we have in this chamber. It has taken generations of work, research and activism to get here, but the climate change agenda is now a global priority.

The danger is that, from this point, the agenda turns into just another commercial venture. Scotland has missed out on some of the economic opportunities that the earlier generation of renewable power could have offered us. When I came into Parliament in 2003, the talk of a green jobs strategy—that was the language being used—struggled, and it is still struggling, towards a recognition that the agenda is not just a strategy for X or Y number of green jobs as part of the economy but a jobs strategy for the entire economy that is green.

Even today, the minister Jim Mather talked about how people in low-carbon jobs could represent 5 per cent of the Scottish workforce. That is the wrong approach to a low-carbon economy. That is saying not that we will have a low-carbon economy but that low-carbon industries will be a small part of the economy. That is not an approach that I can welcome.

Liam McArthur: Does Patrick Harvie accept that, in trying to engage a wider community beyond the already converted, we need at least to address people in a language that they understand and are likely to respond to?

Patrick Harvie: Absolutely. I am not saying that the intention was wrong or that it was not an honest attempt to address the issues, but the effect of that approach has been to sideline the issue. It is not just a matter of the minister's comments about 5 per cent of the workforce; in a debate on the low-carbon economy, almost every political party is leading with its climate or environment speaker and not with its economic speaker. It is easy for me—I am both—and the other parties do not have that advantage, but it is telling that they are choosing to lead not with their economic spokespeople but with their climate or environment spokespeople.

Stewart Stevenson: Does the member accept that it was the enterprise minister who opened the debate?

Patrick Harvie: The motion is in the name of the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change—and let me talk about transport just for a moment.

A low-carbon economy needs to involve more than just thinking about how we generate electricity. The current Government's economic priorities are clearly emphasised in projects such as the Forth road bridge, the M74 extension—which I am honestly sick of hearing the First Minister crow about—and the Aberdeen western peripheral route. Those transport investments cannot be seen as part of a low-carbon economy. When I challenge the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth on that, he points out that public transport investment is happening too. That is not what we need to see. We cannot have both because, at the end of the day, more of both means more emissions.

Other contradictions mentioned in my amendment include the report that aviation subsidies are coming back on to the agenda—I would very much welcome the minister ruling that out in his closing speech—and the proposal for new coal-fired power-generating capacity at Hunterston. I understand that ministers cannot comment specifically on that now, but their national planning framework opened the door to new coal-fired power stations and they need to take some responsibility for that.

Good expansion of renewables has occurred and much more is to come, but the danger is that we turn that into a bidding war. We need to agree on committing to a wholly renewable future, which includes demand reduction to help to close the gap. That is why I certainly do not agree with Jackson Carlaw's points. He cast nuclear power as energy security, but sharing our energy resources with other countries is where our genuine energy security will come from.

Mr Carlaw likes to regard green politics as “batty” and I have no problem with that—I would worry if he agreed with my speeches, sometimes.

Jackson Carlaw *rose*—

Patrick Harvie: I do not have time to give way.

Thankfully, Jackson Carlaw is now the one who is putting himself on the fringes of politics, not only with his views on climate science but with the idea that sustainability means continuing what we have done in the past, when we know that we are using up resources that will not be available for the future.

I do not have time to address other points, but I am sure that I will cover them in my closing speech.

I move amendment S3M-7047.4, to leave out from “acknowledges” to end and insert:

“regrets that the cross-party support for the long-term targets in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 has not been followed by consensus on the urgent and radical policy changes that are needed to bring about a low-carbon economy; believes that the Scottish Government should reconsider its support for increased road capacity, growing the aviation industry and building new coal-fired power stations, given the detrimental impact on Scotland’s climate change emissions; regrets the lost economic opportunities from the Scottish Government’s failure to heed calls for a rapid increase in investment in energy efficiency; calls on the Scottish Government to introduce more substantial support for the marine renewables industry, and believes that a sustainable economic vision should not leave Scotland dependent on the whims of the international money markets, which have failed the country repeatedly in the past, but instead should focus on building resilient low-carbon local economies.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I remind members that speeches are of six minutes. I have already had to lose a back bench.

15:36

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am thankful that I have not been lost—indeed, I think that I have found the answers for much of the development potential in the country. We talk about an economy digging its way out of recession. We know that manufacturing jobs are much stronger than service jobs and that the potential for our country’s economic salvation relies greatly on new developments that—however long they have been known about—are coming to fruition in this decade.

We are seeing a low-carbon economy with production targets that were undreamed of five years ago. Our opportunities from the physical nature of Scotland and its place in Europe allow us to see the potential to focus capital and ideas on inward investment by people who are keen to help us to achieve our goals.

Achieving that whole story requires a Government with all the powers that it can muster. We are arguing about getting the fossil fuel levy and about siting a green investment bank here. Those are but small examples of the powers that a Government with all the powers to borrow and to direct the economy would have. The way in which the Norwegians have invested the proceeds from their fossil fuels in the development of future fuels shows what Scotland could do to underpin the renewables surge—the revolution that is taking place as we speak.

People are interested on a European scale. The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee has heard that energy companies from Germany such as E.ON have leases in the Pentland Firth and many other interests. We have seen Iberdrola’s £3 billion potential over the next three years. Huge developments have occurred at a time when the country is said to be only stuttering towards progress.

Scottish Renewables points out that

“over the last three years Scotland’s renewable energy sector has declared a new scale of ambition ...

- Agreements for 10.6GW of offshore wind development
- Commitments to 1.2GW of wave and tidal power in the Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters
- 1.2 GW of additional potential hydro capacity
- Proposals for more than 0.5 GW of biomass heat and power”.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): It is clear that all that Mr Gibson describes is welcome, but does he accept that most of it concerns projections, which are a long way short of becoming even planning applications? We all know that the process of obtaining consent poses the real challenge.

Rob Gibson: On the scale of delivery, my glass is at least a quarter full, whereas Lewis Macdonald’s glass is about seven eighths empty. People are working on those projects right now in this country to take us forward to the green energy future that we want.

When we talk about the development of such projects, the skills that are mentioned show that the private sector must commit to considerable investment, too. If the companies that will deliver much of what is wanted are to do so, the Government must send strong and consistent messages about the irreversible drive towards a low-carbon economy. That means that we must not be diverted into some of the old forms of power that the Tory amendment talks about. My biggest fear is that the capital, skills and energy that are going to an all-Scotland approach will be diverted into a replacement for Hunterston nuclear power station if the Tories have anything to do

with it. Members must look at the Tory amendment and ask themselves whether they support it at all. If they do, they will divert attention, action, money and skills away from the renewables revolution that I am talking about.

The 80 per cent target that we can achieve could be achieved more easily if we reduced the amount of carbon in fuel systems or, indeed, if we sequestered carbon. In each speech that I make I point out that, in peatland restoration, there is huge potential for reducing—

Gavin Brown: Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: No, not at the moment. I am sorry, but I am near the end of my speech.

In peatland restoration, we can achieve huge reductions of an estimated 2.7 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per year in each year ahead. It needs only about £10 million investment to do that. The sums of money are quite small, but finding them, in the current state of cuts, is one of our difficulties with delivering that reduction. However, I hope that, as targets for land management are produced as we come into the Cancún talks, we will recognise that it is easier to achieve an 80 per cent reduction if we reduce energy demand and sequester carbon.

On the construction jobs and skills that we need, we should think about the Scottish housing expo in Inverness, which was a great success. Are the house building standards among the major house builders at the level seen at the expo? Can the Parliament jack up the potential to ensure that none of those house builders is below that level? The construction industry has not caught on to that even half enough yet.

There are too many things to talk about at the moment, but using the full powers of a Parliament would be one of the ways in which we could achieve our ends. We do not have those full powers at the moment and we must not dilute those that we have by diverting attention to nuclear power.

15:42

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): Our future is a low-carbon economy. We need it to mitigate climate change; more than that, we cannot continue to plunder finite resources, which are increasingly difficult to extract. Fossil fuels present ever-greater dangers to our fragile environment. Our carbon greed is simply not sustainable.

Our low-carbon future is not in question. The question is how—and how fast—we get there, and whether we seize the initiative and make the most of the opportunities or are dragged there as prisoners of forces that are beyond our control.

Words are not enough. We need lots of action and we need it now. Sadly, we have been slow to adopt the proactive policies and programmes that we need to keep us at the forefront of progress towards a low-carbon economy. Since the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 was passed, there has been a history of missed opportunities.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Cathy Peattie: Not at the moment.

We need action to wean ourselves off fossil fuels. Electric vehicles would be a realistic option for many people if we set up a network of charging points, starting in our cities, but our plans to date lack ambition.

We need action to reduce our energy consumption. The built environment is responsible for about half of total carbon emissions and, as the majority of today's buildings will still exist in 2050, they will need to be upgraded. We need to retain and develop construction skills for a low-carbon economy. We need to use energy far more efficiently, through better insulation and more efficient appliances and heating, but energy efficiency programmes are being cut, underfunded or delayed. We also need to do more to support renewable heat schemes, which offer enormous potential for action to meet climate change targets.

As consumers, we can reduce demand by buying more environmentally friendly produce and reducing waste, but pioneering waste reduction programmes, such as the communities reducing excess waste project, are axed without even being evaluated.

Not enough is being done. We need integrated, affordable public transport, but moves to regulate buses are not supported. We need to shift freight off roads and on to rail and sea, but although the Scottish Government recognises the need for such developments, it does not prioritise them.

More could be done to promote green jobs. We need to ensure that education, training and retraining are available to help equip people for the expansion of employment in renewables and, of course, the other sectors that are essential to the growth of the low-carbon economy. We need to anticipate the future needs of the economy, and we must act now to ensure success in the future.

Green jobs go beyond renewables and the low-carbon industry. We need to make other jobs and existing enterprises more green. We must look not only at production processes and modes of transport, but at the localisation of production and distribution. People like buying local produce. More could be done to encourage people to purchase fruit and vegetables that are in season. In addition, we need to ensure that local goods are

not transported to the local shop via a depot that is hundreds of miles away.

Central Government, local government and businesses need to be more proactive. They should look at the scope that exists for action, not only in their own organisations but through interaction with others. Public bodies have a duty to consider what they can do to contribute to climate change action when they look at the consequences and potential of their policies and activities. They should look at the organisations that they deal with and make low-carbon action and training provision part of the procurement process.

Making jobs greener can have an impact on where and how we work. Modern communications give us scope for far more flexibility in many people's working hours and location. They mean that people can work from home, they enable hot desking in offices and, when travel is necessary, they can help people to avoid rush hours and congestion. That can be a win-win situation, in which employee and employer benefit and carbon emissions are reduced.

Another thing that is essential is a public engagement strategy. We must build the level of awareness, understanding and involvement that is needed to move us rapidly and successfully towards a low-carbon future.

I do not pretend that bringing about such a major change in our economy will be easy, but it will not happen unless we decide on and prioritise action to make it happen. Nor will it be easy to achieve a fundamental shift in attitudes and lifestyles, but the Scottish Government needs to set an example, grasp the thistle and get on with it.

15:47

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): I suppose that it would have been inevitable if today's debate had developed along the normal party-political lines, but I have been fairly surprised that it has not been too partisan up to now, even if some party-political points have been made. I certainly hope that whatever comes out of the debate and in whichever direction we go in the future, the expectations of all the parties and of the population are met so that Scotland fully benefits from the additional low-carbon economy opportunity that exists.

We have already heard about some of the work that is under way, such as the numerous action plans, the Saltire prize and the zero waste strategy, but there are other things that can play a part in helping our environment and our economy. Today's announcement about raising the target for the generation of electricity from renewables to 80

per cent is welcome, although I am conscious that Patrick Harvie was not too positive about the Government's comments on what it was doing—he thought that it was not being ambitious enough.

There are two areas in which I am convinced that action will assist Scotland. For me, they are two big-ticket items—I know that my colleague Rob Gibson said that one of them was not a big-ticket item, but I am afraid that I will have to disagree with him on that. The first is the fossil fuel levy and the second is the transmission charging regime.

A few months ago, the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee published its report on delivering on Scotland's energy future. As has been discussed in previous debates, the committee was divided on the nuclear issue—that was not a surprise—but its members were together on the fossil fuel levy and transmission charges.

It is important to remind members of exactly what was in the report. Paragraph 128, on the fossil fuel levy, stated:

“The Committee calls on the Scottish Government and the UK Government to work constructively together to see if a way can be found that will release the funds held by Ofgem in its fossil fuel levy account in a manner which will not impact on the Scottish Consolidated Fund.”

Paragraph 121, on transmission charges, stated:

“The Committee is disturbed at the evidence received in relation to the current and planned charging and access regimes to the transmission networks”,

and went on to say:

“The Committee supports the calls from the Scottish Government and the various energy utilities in Scotland for Ofgem and others to substantially rethink their planned charges.”

Since our report was published there has been a change of Government in London, and I am sure that my Labour colleagues on the committee are probably even more comfortable with the report now than they were then. However, my Conservative and Lib Dem colleagues might be having second thoughts about what we put in it.

Liam McArthur: My recollection is that the UK Government has picked up and responded very positively to those two recommendations since the committee's report—which I agree was excellent—was published.

Stuart McMillan: There is still an element of delay, as I am sure the member will agree, so we will see what happens in the future.

We are where we are, and I hope that the fossil fuel levy issue can be sorted out sooner rather than later. Much has been made of the UK Government's respect agenda and its attitude

towards the Scottish Government, and this Parliament should reiterate its wish to have that large sum of money—which, as the minister said, is in the region of £189 million—brought back to Scotland to be invested in renewable energy projects. I note that my SNP colleague Kenneth Gibson has lodged a motion today—S3M-7055—on the fossil fuel levy, and I encourage every member in the chamber to sign up to it.

The committee's second recommendation centres on transmission charges. Ofgem announced yesterday that it has launched a review of gas and electricity charges, and the SNP welcomes that as an opportunity to end the discriminatory transmission charging system that results in Scottish electricity generators paying the highest grid charges in the UK.

The SNP has for years been pressing Ofgem to move away from the current charging model. We strongly dispute the assertion that it has served the energy industry well, as there have been serious concerns about its impact on renewable generation. However, I am pleased that Ofgem finally accepts that the present regime is not suitable for the encouragement of low-carbon renewable generation, given that generators have little option with regard to where they can site such developments.

I am conscious of time, so I will touch only briefly on the area of energy efficiency, which I discussed with a few members in the Parliament last night. There are two areas that we must work on: the energy efficiency of commercial and business premises, and the energy efficiency of domestic properties. I will deal with the issue of commercial properties, as time is limited.

I feel that there is a massive opportunity for retrofitting the aircraft hangar-type supermarkets that are sprouting up across the whole of Scotland and, with regard to building regulations, I hope that local authorities can consider placing stricter conditions on applications to build them.

15:54

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): I am pleased to take part in today's debate, and I remain of the strong opinion that my region of the Highlands and Islands, with its unrivalled wind, wave, hydro and tidal resources, can lead the way for Scotland as we seek to develop a low-carbon economy.

As we have heard today, Scotland has 25 per cent of Europe's offshore power potential and 25 per cent of Europe's tidal power potential. It is estimated that 21.5GW of commercial capacity is available from the waters around Scotland, and there is particular potential around the northern isles and the Pentland Firth. The Crown Estate

has received a total of 42 applications from 20 bidders for wave and tidal energy leases that will deliver at least 700MW of power by 2020. It is also doing good work in enabling the expansion of offshore wind energy, and by investing in research and in carbon capture and storage.

I emphasise that the Scottish Conservatives genuinely believe that there need be no conflict between a low-carbon economy and a growing economy. Indeed, the development of low-carbon technology has the potential to drive the economy, especially in my resource-rich region. A decarbonised Scotland can be a world leader in green technology, engineering, innovation and, therefore, growth.

In the Highlands and Islands, we already have good examples of how we are leading the way in such innovation. The world's largest tidal power turbine—the AK1000 by Atlantis—was unveiled earlier this summer at Orkney's excellent European Marine Energy Centre. The turbine is capable of generating power for more than 1,000 homes, so we wish it every success. That is the result of 10 years of hard work and has the potential to realise some of the aspirations for tidal power that we have talked about for so many years. In addition, in the fast-flowing Kyle Rhea narrows off Skye, Pulse Energy is undertaking a one-year study of a tidal device that sits on the sea bed and is not visible on the surface of the sea. That has huge potential.

In Shetland, the promoting Unst renewable energy—PURE—project is gaining global recognition for its groundbreaking work in hydrogen technology. The PURE team designed Britain's first licensed hydrogen fuel cell car and is now seeking to commercialise its work so that it can further develop its hydrogen-based projects. Twelve miles east of Helmsdale, in waters more than 40m deep, Talisman Energy's Beatrice wind farm demonstrator project includes two of the world's largest wind turbines as part of a pilot study that will end next year. In Stornoway, good work is also taking place at Lews Castle College, which is part of the UHI Millennium Institute. Earlier this year, I was pleased to be able to tour those facilities, where I met many of the talented individuals involved.

In addition, planning consent has just been granted for the largest hydroelectric project in Scotland for five years, at Kildermorie near Ardross in Ross-shire. That project will power more than 4,000 homes. I remain very supportive of the role that small-scale hydro schemes can play.

The Scottish Conservatives' approach to energy that Jackson Carlaw set out is something that all members with common sense should agree with. Our future energy needs must be met from a

broad and balanced range of sources, including wave, tidal and solar power, offshore wind and appropriately sited onshore wind developments, biogas and clean-coal technology. Nuclear power must also be part of that mix. That is being said not just by Conservatives but by leading experts, academics and business leaders. Only this week, the chairman of Centrica, Roger Carr, said that nuclear power is a “practical necessity”, without which the country will face an “incredible challenge” to meet its power needs.

SNP members are, I regret to say, simply in denial if they think otherwise. At the Industrial and Power Association dinner last night, I listened to Lord George Foulkes confess his conversion to nuclear power. Having been a minister and a member of the energy review advisory group, he said—

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

Jamie McGrigor: In a moment. Let me just finish what I was about to say about Lord Foulkes. The minister would not want not to hear that.

Lord Foulkes said that he had gone from being an anti-nuclear protester to being convinced that nuclear energy was the only way that we could keep a decent energy mix in this country. He argued very strongly for nuclear power.

I will take the minister’s intervention.

Stewart Stevenson: My intervention is on purely a technical point. I understand that last night’s dinner was under Chatham house rules, so it would be improper to attribute views to any named individual. It is not often that I defend George Foulkes, but I think that I am right on that point.

Jamie McGrigor: The minister does not need to defend Lord Foulkes, as I approached him earlier and got his permission to quote what he said.

Yesterday, I had a very useful meeting with ConstructionSkills, which aims to ensure that Scotland’s construction industry can respond effectively to the low-carbon agenda with suitably trained individuals and that the supply side can deliver the skills that are required. That sector skills council expressed serious concerns about the cuts in funding to construction courses that could seriously affect the available infrastructure to deliver on that. ConstructionSkills is also looking at developing specialist qualifications to provide the specific civil engineering skills in the marine environment. That is to be commended.

The way in which we transmit our energy must also change and advance, which I am pleased to say is a priority for the coalition Government at Westminster. Mainly post-war technology transmits electricity across dumb networks, which

cannot intelligently manage the load on them to reflect the capacity available. It is akin to the analogue system, with little scope for interactivity between producer and consumer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The member’s time is just about up.

Jamie McGrigor: I am just finishing up. Do I have a moment?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No.

Jamie McGrigor: Ah. Well, finally, Presiding Officer, I want to make the point—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, the member has made his point very well.

16:00

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): I begin with an apology for my lateness. I got caught up in the leaders’ photo call, which is what the media describe as a rare display of unity. There has been a fair degree of unity in the chamber this afternoon. However, in echoing Patrick Harvie’s remarks, I think that unity can also bring risks if it leads us to not reflect on some of the more difficult issues that we face.

I want to dwell on the hopes of the climate change campaigners who fought for the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, through which we collectively committed to an 80 per cent reduction in emissions, and it would make sense to debate where we are against that statutory commitment. If someone had wanted to find that out, they would not have done so from the letter that was sent this week to Patrick Harvie, the convener of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee. They would not have found out in time to lodge an amendment for today’s debate. They would have had to go on to a website late last night—there was no press release and no fanfare—to discover that our target for CO₂ reductions is 0.5 per cent for next year and 0.3 per cent for the year after that.

Stewart Stevenson: Does the member recognise that we have made the target 2 million tonnes more challenging by creating a target of more than 3 per cent for 2010?

Ms Alexander: I do, but I contrast our statutory responsibility and our willingness to debate that with the high-profile first ministerial airtime that was today given to the welcome announcement that we are raising our renewable electricity target to 80 per cent. Not putting the 0.5 per cent and 0.3 per cent targets for the next two years into the motion has led to a less focused debate than the one that we needed and should have had. The truth is that none of us is in a position to grandstand about aiming for a 0.5 per cent target

for CO₂ reductions—it is much better to make high-profile announcements about other matters. The climate change campaigners want more from us.

If some people think that that is a pedant's point, I will explain how which targets we highlight and when gives me so much concern. In the very detailed letter to Patrick Harvie about what will happen next, we discover that we will not have the plan for how we will deliver that 80 per cent reduction in emissions until budget day—the delivery plan will be published on the same day as the budget. I invite Parliament to reflect on the wisdom of the Government explaining how it will deliver on the flagship piece of legislation for the entire Parliament on the same day that, by its own admission, we will be facing some of the worst cuts since the second world war. Climate change delivery plans should not be unveiled on budget day. It will inevitably lead people to believe—rightly—that the Government is reluctant to make its case in public when it comes to the hard choices rather than the easy ones.

I have here a copy of the independent budget review, which suggests that the Government's figure for the cost of delivery on the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 is £8 billion or more. The IBR at least compelled a public estimate of the costs that are involved, but no costs of any kind are given in today's motion.

I invite the minister, in responding to the debate, to reflect on the wisdom of holding back how we will deliver on the flagship piece of legislation for the entire Parliament until the day on which we deal with the worst cuts that the Parliament has ever faced and the worst cuts that the country has faced in, perhaps, half a century. I fully accept that Mr Stevenson cannot change that decision today; I simply invite him to take the matter back to colleagues to reflect on it and decide whether estimates of the scale of £8 billion should be shared and placed in the public domain on a different timetable to the budget.

I will end with something much closer to home. In a week's time, on 1 October, the new building standards will come into effect. Normally, the construction sector has six months' advance notice of the new rules, which are known as the accredited construction details. That is obviously so that the industry can be ready to incorporate them into designs. However, I understand that, with less than seven days to go, Mr Stevenson has still not published those accredited construction details. I therefore invite the minister, in summing up, to explain why the new-build standards have not yet been published, although there is less than a week to go, and why the energy software was so late.

Stewart Stevenson: They were published months ago.

Ms Alexander: If the minister can confirm that there has been no delay whatever in the publication of the accredited construction details, that will be helpful to the industry, which has made representations on the issue.

16:06

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Since 1800, when the Charlotte Dundas travelled by steam along the Forth and Clyde canal, we have lived in Patrick Geddes's technopolis, generating power by burning carbon. Longannet power station burns 4.5 million tonnes of coal a year and produces 9.6 million tonnes of CO₂. That has led to climate change, with all its consequences. We are experiencing 70 per cent more wet days in summer now than we did in 1900—a fact that was brought forcibly home to us this morning. To move to a low-carbon policy, against the deadline of peak oil, we must focus on four key areas: technology, labour, markets and what could be called political ecology.

Jim Mather has dealt with wind and water power, but there is capacity for 1.5 billion tonnes of CO₂—largely from the thermal power stations of northern Europe—to be buried in the central North Sea and pumped into the sea bed to squeeze out more gas and oil. However, 50 per cent of our energy goes on space heating. Some members may have seen "Grand Designs" on Channel 4 last night, which showed the UK's first totally passive house. It got its certificate from the newly created Scottish Passive House Centre in Rosyth, Fife, which I believe Stewart Stevenson will open shortly. A passive house consumes 30 gallons of fuel per 80m² annually; the average new-build in the UK consumes about 10 times that amount—double the amount that is consumed by a new-build in Europe and barely reaching a C in the EU's scale of thermal efficiency.

We are good at research. Countries such as Germany look to us because we have a huge marine area, whereas Germany has only the Wattenmeer, to the west of Jutland—which, members may know from "The Riddle of the Sands" is dry land for much of the time—and no tides at all on the Baltic side. Such countries look to us for research, but we must look to ourselves to bridge the gap between the laboratory and the product.

That brings me to labour. In "Towards a Low Carbon Economy for Scotland: Discussion Paper", which was published in March, the Scottish Government says that it expects a further 26,000 jobs to be created in low-carbon technologies by 2020. That is excellent, but they will have to be

highly trained engineers and tradesfolk. In Motherwell, where I was brought up, the number of specialist engineer trainers at the college, serving Ravenscraig, has gone from about 170 in the 1970s to practically single figures today. Baden-Württemberg, of which I speak with some experience, produces 10,000 engineers every year; we, with half the population, produce a fifth of that number of engineers. Why? Because a Baden-Württemberg company spends €70,000 on a four-year course of industrial training, whereas we produce call-centre operatives at £6,000 a year. That is called an advance in the knowledge economy.

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Does that not illustrate the need for the third version of the skills strategy to be published urgently?

Christopher Harvie: It is certainly the case that we need to look at what is going on in Europe and, in particular, our partners in these industries. Voith, for example, is very keen to establish here because of the quality of our research in this area.

We can bridge the gap with Open University-style tuition—indeed, we are in advance in those areas of technology—and overcome Thatcher's economic use of the oil boom. In a book that I wrote 17 years ago called "Fool's Gold"—unfortunately, another book with the same title has been published since then, which shows that we have not learned very much in the interim—I quote Sir Alastair Morton, the former head of the British National Oil Corporation and a Labour appointee, but certainly no socialist, who, when asked what Mrs Thatcher had done with North Sea oil, memorably responded:

"She blew it on the dole".

We can do this only with European partners, who, it has to be said, are much more reliable than a London coalition whose dramas already make "Fear and Loathing in the Labour Party" look like the proverbial vicarage tea party.

What of markets, then? They are predominantly in Europe, not in the backward-looking nuclear-oriented UK. The ministers mention tide, current and the great swells of the Atlantic but all that has to be backed up with efficient infrastructure, not a railway system that seems to break down every weekend; a Zeebrugge ferry route that, alas, is closing down in December; or a road-based freight system that—God knows how—has to face peak oil in possibly less than 10 years.

Voith, Europe's largest turbine producer, is fascinated by the fact that many Scottish lochs and hydrostations can be used as pump storage schemes; in other words, they could be turned into a sort of huge battery that would regularise wind and wave power. We have—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the member has to conclude on that point.

16:12

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I am very pleased to speak in the debate, not least because I have just come back from the Liberal Democrat conference in Liverpool, where I had an opportunity to discuss many of these issues with Liberal Democrat ministers in Cabinet positions and elsewhere who will be able to implement across the UK the types of green policies that for many years now we have been trying to implement in Scotland. That development is greatly to be welcomed.

I am somewhat surprised that the debate has not focused more on renewable heat and energy efficiency. I know that Sarah Boyack raised the issue, but I am surprised that Patrick Harvie's amendment makes no mention of renewable heat. It is a strange omission.

The fact is that renewable heat is crucial. Although heat accounts for 50 per cent of our energy consumption, almost none of our energy debates has ever focused on the issue. The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee certainly highlighted it in its energy inquiry, the report of which was published last year. We are still not doing enough to drive the agenda forward and I hope that when he sums up the minister can inform the chamber of even more progress on the development of the renewable heat action plan and tell us what more is being done to develop combined heat and power plants.

Jim Mather: What is the member's position on the UK Government's decision on the renewable heat incentive?

Iain Smith: I was happy to discuss that issue with Chris Huhne, who I can assure the minister is keen on ensuring that renewable heat is a key part of the Government's energy action plan for the future. I am sure that positive announcements will follow in due course from the comprehensive spending review.

On energy efficiency, one of the committee's key recommendations in its energy inquiry report was:

"The Committee reaffirms its call on the Scottish Government for a rapid publication of its detailed energy efficiency action plan. Delay beyond 2009 is not acceptable."

In its immediate response, the Government said it would publish its

"draft Energy Efficiency Action Plan ... in the early autumn [2009]."

A later response informed us that the consultation on the action plan would close in January 2010,

responses would be published in March 2010 and the final action plan would be published in spring 2010.

We are now being told that the action plan will be published not in spring 2010, which is long past, but this autumn. The Government had told us that the action plan would be published last autumn, but there we go. What is the current excuse? In its most recent response to the committee, the Government said that the action plan has not yet been published because,

“In view of the recent establishment of a short-life Working Group to consider over the summer the appropriate levels for annual emissions targets, it has been decided that it would not be appropriate to publish the Energy Efficiency Action Plan until the emissions targets have been established and a new Order has been laid before Parliament.”

How on earth are the levels for the emission targets the reason behind the energy efficiency action plan? Surely the energy efficiency action plan should be about doing everything that we can to improve energy efficiency in Scotland; it should be driving emissions targets rather than being driven by them. Surely we should not wait to see whether the emissions targets mean that we can do as little as possible to meet them; we should be trying to do everything that we can to improve energy efficiency. The action plan should have been published not months but years ago and we should be driving forward the agenda on energy. If we are going to have a low-carbon economy, it is vital that we sort out energy efficiency.

Stuart McMillan raised the issue of building regulations. In passing the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, we made strong recommendations on energy performance certificates for non-domestic buildings. That is in the Government's hands: it can take action now to require stronger action in commercial buildings, in respect of both new build and the retrofitting of existing buildings. It is not for local authorities but for the Government, through building regulations and energy performance certificate rules, to drive that agenda forward. I hope that it will continue to do so.

Carbon capture and storage has also been mentioned. It is important that we continue to keep the pressure up in relation to support for the CCS project at Longannet. Again, I think that there will be a positive response from the UK Government if we can keep that case going, but we have to ensure that that happens.

I echo the concerns that have been raised about the Hunterston project. The Hunterston project is in the national planning framework as a project that will be carbon capture-ready, although it does not even require the plant to be able to capture carbon; it is talking about a coal-fired power

station, which will, by definition, release more carbon into the atmosphere. I do not see how it fits in with either the low-carbon strategy or the 80 per cent target for renewable energy.

The Saltire prize has been mentioned. It is a very interesting prize, as it will not even be delivered in the next session of Parliament; it has now drifted on to 2017. I think that it is one of those prizes that will go further and further away and will never be seen. It is not driving the development of wave and tidal power in our seas; it is an ego trip, which is doing nothing to help. The Government should admit that the prize will never be delivered and that it will never be given to anybody. Let us get on with spending the money on the investment that we need in our wave and tidal schemes.

Presiding Officer, there is a great deal more that I could talk about, but I know from the clock that you would tell me not to, so I will sit down.

16:18

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Lab)): I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate and to support Labour's amendment. I offer my apologies to the minister for missing his opening remarks; I am always sorry to miss a speech by Mr Mather. It now looks like he is walking out on mine, but never mind.

There have been notable success stories in the low-carbon economy; indeed, only this week it was announced that some renewable energy apprenticeships could be made available in Scotland if wind farm plans are approved. The Adam Smith College and Carbon Free Developments Ltd confirmed the deal—a UK first—that will establish the renewable energy apprenticeship scheme. It is expected that there will be at least 150 placements with renewable energy-related firms operating in Fife—around six per year over the 25 years that the wind farms will operate. Add to that the commitment of Carnegie College and the tie-up with renewables giant Siemens and a trend is developing. Rather than competing, colleges and companies are working together to further Fife's ambition to become Scotland's leading hub for renewables training while dealing with the skills gap and providing existing and potential employers with a local talent pool.

This might be the first time in the history of the UK renewables industry that community benefits have been delivered in the form of long-term apprenticeship training, and the scheme might be the first to use a commercial project to enhance a specific region's ability to attract investment. However, it will not be the last such scheme. Skills and jobs must be part of the procurement process

for all areas. There might well be a small number of jobs for Fife, but they are surely a step in the right direction. Next week, Edinburgh will host an international low-carbon conference, which will, I hope, help innovative projects, technologies and companies to access finance and funding.

Massive potential economic benefits could arise from identifying low-carbon projects in and around Scotland, the clustering of projects to a scale that is attractive to investors, assisting projects to develop clear and robust business plans for greater investment success, and supporting the growth of indigenous companies to help them to form part of the supply chain and commercialise towards global markets. However, without skills, all that effort could be wasted. Mr Salmond will no doubt stand up next week and say that Scotland is uniquely positioned to exploit the opportunities that are presented by the global commitment to renewable energy and low-carbon technology; indeed, he and his Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism, Mr Mather, have said that many times already. No one disagrees that we have some of the best natural resources in the world for harnessing green energy from our wave, water and wind potential, and we have a history of technology innovation and engineering expertise that is second to none. However, we need to make Scotland attractive for people by offering the skills, research and development and qualified staff they might require. Christopher Harvie would no doubt agree with me on that.

There are opportunities and challenges in the renewables arena, and we need to deal with both. Scotland has set one of Europe's most ambitious carbon reduction targets, and, according to the SNP, £140 billion of investment is planned on projects and developments that will realise its carbon reduction programme. It is welcome news that companies such as Iberdrola want to invest here. Why not? We might have around a quarter of Europe's tidal and offshore wind capacity and 10 per cent of its potential in wave power, as well as significant opportunities in hydro power, onshore wind power and biomass but, as I have argued before, a skills strategy must go hand in hand with a development strategy. That might be something that we could learn from the Germans.

Is there not an immediate need for sustained investment in the construction industry in the short term? Is it not the case that a loss of capacity will have a particularly damaging effect on low-carbon industries in view of the significant requirements that those industries will have for the construction of new infrastructure? A person does not need to be a brilliant economist to imagine that inflated construction costs could hamper the competitiveness of Scotland's low-carbon economy, with its potentially significant future construction requirements. If we add to that a loss

of skills, those things could make it more difficult to meet the requirements of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

There is some good news. The latest labour market intelligence report from ConstructionSkills projects an increase in Scotland's construction industry workforce of around 20,000 between now and 2013. Many of those new jobs are expected to come from the drive to reduce carbon emissions. The ConstructionSkills report states:

"For Scotland, employment will be driven by work in two sectors, housing and infrastructure ... at the moment it is difficult to judge how these will shape up in the legacy of the banking crisis. However meeting greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets will mean implementation of low carbon building standards along with a programme of improving energy efficiency of existing buildings."

We need to look for different ways of working. SELECT, which is Scotland's trade association for the electrical, electronics and communications systems industry, is taking a significant stake in the future with the establishment of the Scottish environmental technologies training centre just outside Edinburgh. Upskilling can be as important as new jobs. The training environment that is facilitated by the heating business Vaillant and Skills Development Scotland will bring electricians, heating engineers and plumbers up to date with the latest developments in energy-saving technology.

The SNP Government makes big claims about the number of jobs that could be created through low-carbon technologies. I seriously hope that it is right, but we need to see more effort from it to turn optimism into reality.

There is a SWOT—strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats—analysis of Scotland's current position in "Towards a Low Carbon Economy for Scotland: Discussion Paper". The paper says:

"Scotland is a relatively small country: we have the ability to make things happen quickly."

That is listed among our strengths.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must conclude.

David Whitton: I looked at the threats and, luckily, did not find the fact that Mr Mather is our energy minister listed.

However, there is still hope for us.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must conclude now. Thank you.

We now move to the winding-up speeches.

16:24

Patrick Harvie: Sometimes in the chamber, I come across a wee bit more confrontational than I

mean to. Although I sometimes have a lot of fun while I am doing that, it is not always helpful. In the debate on this agenda, there are individuals from across the political spectrum whose ideas I can agree with. The only problem is that those ideas are too often mixed up with a lot of the stuff that I disagree with. Again, that applies right across the spectrum.

I will start with some things that I agree with. Rob Gibson clearly set out the SNP's anti-nuclear stance. He talked about the tremendous opportunity cost. We all recognise the potential benefits of renewables if we can get the investment, but the capital investment that is required is huge, and should be the priority. Even if nuclear energy did not have all the other associated problems—those problems still exist—it would be at the bottom of a long list of priorities for investment.

Liam McArthur mentioned a few policies that I support. The UK Government's idea of a green investment bank is good. It is small, but it is a good idea—but allied with the dramatic attacks on public spending that will come from the UK Government, I am not sure who will be in a position to, as his amendment says,

“build a low-carbon economy”,

or to build very much else at all.

I turn to Iain Smith. Now I might get a wee bit more confrontational again—sorry. He seemed to want my amendment to be even longer and to include more things. Maybe it should have done but, when I first wrote it, it would have filled half the page, so something had to give. I hope I made it clear in my earlier speech that the point that I am driving at is that a low-carbon economy topic, debate, strategy or plan must be about the whole economy and not just a list of energy policies.

Iain Smith said that he is positive that, in the comprehensive spending review, we will get the decision that we want on the fossil fuel levy. I hope so, because there will not be much else to look forward to in the comprehensive spending review. I am not sure whether Iain Smith and Liam McArthur currently identify themselves as being on the pro-capitalist or anti-capitalist wing of their party but, either way, what is coming down the line from the UK Government is an extremely right-wing agenda of which we should be very cautious.

Throughout the debate we have heard comments such as that about the need

“to maximise the wealth-creating opportunities”

from renewables, as though that should be the overriding objective in energy policy. I cannot agree. My objective is not simply to grow an exciting new industry to help boost gross domestic product; my objective, which should be our shared

objective in energy policy, is to develop a sustainable energy system—and that means living within our means.

One of the familiar energy clichés is about keeping the lights on. Can we keep the lights on just with renewables? Do we need nuclear to keep the lights on? Part of the problem is that we keep far too many of them on for far too much of the time, even when we are not using them. Jim Tolson, who is down at the front, is right to point to the lights in the chamber—I beg your pardon, it is Jim Hume.

Liam McArthur: Are the lights not on up there?

Patrick Harvie: The lights are on and fortunately, today, someone is home.

No Government, at UK or Scotland level, has ever been serious about demand reduction. Investment in reducing our energy demand lags way behind the wildly expensive high-carbon and polluting developments that just happen to offer the tantalising prospect of some GDP growth and so get the investment. Building standards make progress in baby steps towards the kind of homes and buildings that have been put up on the continent for years—decades even—for fear of upsetting the volume house builders, it seems. Opportunities are lost through minimal and badly run insulation programmes.

We must get beyond our current approach to counting our emissions. Next year, the Government is required to start reporting on consumption-based targets. The parallel of that in energy terms would be to look at fossil fuel extraction. Can a country that rapidly expands opencast coal extraction be considered low carbon? Is that part of a low-carbon economy? Regardless of where the coal is burned, I would say no.

Can a country that allows deep-water drilling to exploit new oilfields—again to boost GDP—be called low carbon? I do not think so. There are proposals for drilling at depths of more than 4,000ft, which is almost as deep as the Deepwater Horizon rig drilled, which caused a leak of millions of barrels into the Gulf of Mexico in recent months. Instead of apparently staying fairly quiet on that subject, the Scottish Government should be examining the economic risks to Scotland of a disaster of that kind if deep-water drilling goes ahead off Shetland or the consequences of a moratorium on deep-water drilling.

We have opportunities on finance, but there is far more that the UK Government can do even now, rather than just chase foreign investment. We are currently using export credit guarantees to support fossil fuel projects around the world. We are allowing a publicly owned bank to invest our

money in fossil fuel projects, too. Those things can be stopped right now.

16:31

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): I welcome the opportunity to sum up in this useful debate.

There is no doubt that the threat of climate change is real and requires immediate action. One has only to look at the severity of our most recent winter to see the impact that extreme weather can have on our businesses and society.

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 was a welcome initial step of which we should rightly feel proud, because it shows our intent to contribute to the international fight against climate change. To that end, I welcome the improved annual emissions targets that the Government published yesterday, following consistent pressure from the Liberal Democrats, although there was some resistance from other parties. It is imperative that we have an established framework for achieving our 2020 targets to ensure that continuous progress is made.

Although it is only proper to view climate change as the threat that it is, the path to achieving a low-carbon economy need not be painful. We should be mindful of the opportunities and possibilities that it presents for reshaping our economy and the enormous potential for job creation.

WWF Scotland has stated that a third of emissions in Scotland result from home energy use, which is a significant contribution to our annual emissions total—a point that Iain Smith made well. An effective way to tackle such emissions on our way to decarbonising is by encouraging householders to modernise their homes to make them more energy efficient.

Liam McArthur mentioned the Lib Dem coalition Government's green deal, which is to be applauded. It is ambitious in seeking to have millions of householders take up the offer of up-front finance to insulate their homes, the savings made from energy bills being used to pay for the improvements. Not only would that help tackle the problem of home energy-use emissions; it would establish a sector that the coalition Government expects to provide 246,000 jobs by 2030.

Of course, if Scotland is to work towards a low-carbon economy, it is essential that we have a population with the skills, training and education required to drive it. Both Cathy Peattie and David Whitton mentioned skills. That is where outstanding organisations such as the Crichton Carbon Centre in Dumfries have a real part to play. That organisation exists to provide teaching in carbon management and to conduct academic

research. In partnership with the University of Glasgow, it has developed the first masters degree in carbon management in the UK. It states on its website:

“Our expert team is working to tackle the challenge of climate change by encouraging and supporting behaviour changes at individual, business and community levels.”

I am sure that members across the chamber will welcome such forward thinking from an organisation that is still in its infancy. However, we should not rely on charities and other organisations to do the work of the Government.

The Scottish Government's discussion paper on moving towards a low-carbon economy states:

“Key to the success of a low carbon economy will be equipping learners with the additional skills that they need in the usage and application of environmental solution and technologies.”

I agree. A step in the right direction would be—my colleague Tavish Scott highlighted this to the First Minister a fortnight ago—to ensure the future of the wind turbine technician course at Carnegie College in Dunfermline, which David Whitton mentioned. One might suspect that such a qualification would prove competitive over the next few years in our march towards decarbonising our economy. It would be a terrible shame if such a course and the skills that it teaches and develops were lost to Wales or Yorkshire.

Sarah Boyack and Cathy Peattie mentioned local procurement, which I have also pushed for some time, particularly local food procurement. The benefits of such a move would also help in our efforts to tackle climate change. According to Friends of the Earth, 25 per cent of Scotland's greenhouse gases result from food production. I note the recent Scottish Government consultation document “Public Bodies Climate Change Duties” and welcome its draft guidance on how public bodies can play their part by sourcing food locally.

Many local authorities are making commendable efforts to source their food locally, but others have a long way to go. The successful example of the Fife diet shows that we can source food virtually on our doorsteps and, in so doing, make a significant contribution to cutting emissions. What harm can there be in boosting and sustaining an industry that plays such an important role in our economy?

By educating and training our population, encouraging better procurement practices in our public bodies and insulating our homes in a massive programme to boost jobs, as Iain Smith mentioned, we not only tackle climate change and move Scotland to a low-carbon economy but assist job creation and sustain the industries that are important to our country.

We have had an interesting debate. Jackson Carlaw mentioned schemes for reducing car usage, albeit that the suggestion conflicts somewhat with his past life. I am glad that Sarah Boyack welcomes the Liberal Democrat announcement on the green investment bank. Stuart McMillan was slightly out of touch in criticising the lack of work between UK and Scottish ministers. Indeed, Fiona Hyslop mentioned the great work that Stewart Stevenson and Chris Huhne have been doing on that very subject.

16:37

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): We have had a wide-ranging and useful debate this afternoon, with some good contributions from all parts of the chamber.

As a Conservative member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, I feel duty bound to respond to Stuart McMillan's remarks on transmission charging and the fossil fuel levy. As we heard from a number of members including Liam McArthur, Ofgem announced yesterday a comprehensive and open review into transmission charging. That is a hugely positive step. I think that all sides of the chamber called for and wanted such a review. Although there was not complete consensus in our debate of just a couple of months ago on the outcome, there was broad consensus that the current system is not fit for purpose. The reason for that is simple: when the system was designed, cutting carbon emissions was not central to the public policy platform. Policy at that time was all about price and security of supply, in the context of which building power stations close to centres of population made sense. Given the policy of cutting carbon emissions, the previous policy no longer makes sense. The comprehensive review is therefore absolutely right. My view is that we have a good Government in the coalition Government. I also have every faith in David Cameron as Prime Minister, but even I did not expect that—even with his skills—the entire system would be changed within four months of his taking office. The matter is hugely complex and the fact that we already have an announcement is to be welcomed.

Jim Mather: Does the member concede that the work that the Government did in support of the UK Government in bringing National Grid, Ofgem, the generators, academia, renewables interests and others around the table may well have played a constructive part in this, too?

Gavin Brown: I view it not as a concession but as a matter of fact. Every member of the committee acknowledged the work that had been done.

I differ slightly from the minister on his view that there ought to be no locational element whatever in transmission charging; I take the view that the situation is a bit more complex than that. I do not agree 100 per cent with the minister, but the current system is not fit for purpose and the consultation is definitely to be welcomed.

When the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism spoke, I raised with him the issue of energy efficiency, on which many speakers have touched. Reducing demand and making our houses, buildings, schools and so on more energy efficient is a much less painful way of cutting our carbon emissions, but the energy efficiency action plan—or inaction plan, as it now appears to be called—is disappointing. The plan has been years in the making. When the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee considered the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill back in January last year, it took the view, based on evidence from a number of groups, that there was no need to take six months from the legislation coming into force to produce the plan—the work had been done and was ready to go, and the plan could be published and acted on immediately. Even at that time, we felt that we were moving a bit too slowly, as we did not have the plan.

We have heard that the plan was on the books and ready to be published in May this year, but at the last minute—for whatever reason—the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism took the decision not to publish it. Now we hear that it will be published in the autumn; the minister felt obliged to add the phrase “this year”, just to make matters clear. I ask him in all seriousness, if the plan was ready to go in May 2010, as the Government says, can it not be published today or tomorrow? We accept that changes may be made to it as matters progress, but what is preventing the Government from publishing it now, with the caveat that it may be subject to change? I ask the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change to tell us in his summing up why that cannot be done.

Electricity generation, which produces about a third of our carbon emissions, has been discussed. My colleague Jackson Carlaw gave a good speech on the subject of nuclear power. He asked how much carbon would be saved in total by getting rid of nuclear power generation at Hunterston and Torness and replacing it solely with renewable energy. I would love to hear the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism answer that question, because I believe that the amount would not be great. I urge the Government to listen to its Council of Economic Advisers and to the independent consultant report that was produced, which stated:

"With Hunterston B and Torness removed, Scotland will lose a significant volume of low-carbon power."

The minister should judge the reliability of a technology over the 30 or 40-year lifespan of a power station, not just on the year 2006, which he is fond of citing. That will give him a fair analysis of how productive the technology is.

16:43

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Today's debate has confirmed that there is wide agreement about objectives, but less agreement about the means of achieving them. There are real questions about how to make the actions deliver on the words.

Targets are essential in meeting the challenge of climate change—that is why Labour pressed so hard for us to set demanding targets for emissions reductions and why we will continue to argue that Government needs to provide leadership in drawing the route map of how to meet them.

Renewable energy is a case in point. As we have heard, Scottish ministers take every opportunity to highlight their enthusiasm for new energy technologies. However, in practice, they have not taken every opportunity to endorse projects on the ground. After nearly four years, in spite of the warm words, it remains the case that nearly 40 per cent of the potential electricity generation from new onshore wind developments that have gone to ministers for decision since 2007 have not progressed because ministers have chosen not to give consent. It is not enough to say that we have huge renewables potential while avoiding the hard questions about how we will realise that. Not every renewables project that comes forward must gain consent, but it is important that the balance is right. If 40 per cent of our overall renewables potential were to be rejected in planning, our aspirations for a low-carbon economy would not be achieved.

Offshore wind should be the next big thing in renewable power. There are major opportunities for Scotland in the demonstration and deployment of offshore wind generation, in the transfer of skills, expertise and technologies from offshore oil and gas to offshore renewables, in fabrication and in the supply chain. Those opportunities must not be lost. If SNP ministers have found it hard to endorse projects of scale onshore in Lewis, Aberdeenshire and Perthshire, how much harder will they find some of the challenges in relation to the marine environment?

Rob Gibson: If the Labour Party had been in power at the time, would it have given the go-ahead to the Lewis wind farm proposal, given the Natura 2000 designation and given that Europe

would immediately have taken the Government to court?

Lewis Macdonald: I strongly suspect that we would not have ruled out consideration of the social and economic benefits of the proposal before they had been properly considered, on the basis of the Natura designation, as the minister decided to do. I do not want to debate every application. I simply want to say that the Government must show willingness to deliver consents in practice, to go along with its warm words.

It is essential that we take opportunities to join up our existing offshore energy sectors with the new ones that are developing. The marine environment is a tough place to grow the low-carbon economy, and the further we go from shore the tougher it will be. Labour's amendment highlights the importance of skills. There is an opportunity to use existing training bodies, such as the oil and gas academy—OPITO—and the expertise of the offshore division of the Health and Safety Executive, to ensure that people who go to work in offshore wind or marine energy industries are protected in the way that offshore oil workers have been protected since the tragedy on Piper Alpha.

The grid is the other issue that most urgently needs to be addressed. Renewables Scotland highlighted the matter this morning when it published research that identifies potential generation and potential barriers to success. As Sarah Boyack said, we welcome Ofgem's announcement that it intends to review the transmission charging regime in the context of enabling additional grid and meeting climate change targets. However, we recognise that the way in which consumers pay for grid upgrading through the current charging regime is not the one-way street that the regime's critics sometimes suggest it is. Specific elements of the current regime protect Scottish consumers and spread the cost of supply across the whole of Great Britain's customer base. For example, there is the hydro benefit replacement scheme, which has been in place for six years. Such elements of advantage to Scottish consumers must not be lost.

Ofgem's project transmit will be wide ranging and will consider transmission and charging regimes as a whole, which is particularly welcome. I urge ministers to approach the review as advocates and champions of consumers as well as producers of electricity.

We must acknowledge that if there are to be real cuts in carbon emissions from transport, we might need more development of electricity to provide the power for the electric cars that we want. As Cathy Peattie said, a new national grid of charging points to supply power to consumers will

be essential for carbon reduction and in relation to the economic and employment opportunities that the approach can provide.

In planning our future energy mix, ministers must not lose touch with the realities of our current power mix and how we can get from here to where we want to be. That is not just about ever-increasing amounts of renewable energy, welcome though that will be. Governments must also seek a diverse and balanced portfolio of energy sources. That is currently missing from the Scottish Government's plans.

We all recognise the potential of carbon capture and storage, but we need to acknowledge that the technology has not yet been proved at scale in the commercial context. If it is proved, we certainly want Scotland to be in a position to take the lead. However, we must acknowledge that at this stage in the development of CCS technology it is a mistake to rule out nuclear power, even if the prospect of new nuclear developments in Scotland are currently remote, as Jackson Carlaw said. Iberdrola's plans for major investment in low-carbon energy in Scotland depend on Longannet succeeding in the UK competition for CCS. That is not a given; much will depend on the success of the first demonstration project at scale.

Investment is at the heart of many issues that have been raised in the debate. There is broad agreement that investment in ports and infrastructure will require public funding. We heard that the UK Government will review the fossil fuel levy. It would be useful to hear from Scottish ministers how they will proceed if the review does not produce the additional funding for which they hope. Will ports investment be a priority, with or without the additional funding?

Investment will be essential if we are to capture the surplus heat that is produced in power generation, whether it is from existing or new power technologies. I, too, look forward to the Scottish Government's energy efficiency action plan, and I will watch for the arrival of autumn, when the plan will apparently appear. Perhaps autumn will indeed start tomorrow, when the first leaf falls. In a written answer to me this week, Mr Mather told me that the plan would include material on district heating, highlighting the opportunities that exist. I hope that he will take the opportunity to build on the example of combined heat and power in Aberdeen—an example that has been followed by central Government in Westminster but not here in the past three years.

On buildings and energy efficiency, I seek clarification on one specific point. New building standards come into effect on 1 October. Have the accredited construction details—ACDs—for energy been published yet, as the minister

appeared to suggest, and if so will he tell us when they were published?

Achieving a low-carbon economy is a work in progress, and the pace of progress is uneven. This debate has highlighted some of the things that still need to be done. I believe that the Scottish Government needs to do more, and more quickly, if all the ambitious targets are to be met, and we all need to recognise that hard choices will need to be made along the road.

16:51

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I thank all members who have contributed to the debate.

We have demonstrated today that Scotland's vast potential in renewable energy puts us in position to be the green energy capital of Europe, and it gives us a huge comparative advantage in the global shift to low carbon. Scotland is positioning itself as the preferred international destination for low-carbon investment, giving our business base a competitive advantage, making Scotland a destination of choice for overseas business, and benefiting the wider Scottish economy and our communities.

Let me say at the outset that the Government will be able to support the Liberal and Labour amendments. They address matters that we also wish to address.

I turn now to the contributions in the debate. In an intervention on my colleague Mr Mather, Liam McArthur somewhat derided the saltire prize. The initiative engages some 400 million people across the world through a partnership with the National Geographic Society that has also seen international companies expressing significant interest in Scotland. Anything of that character raises the profile of the issue because there is an enhancement effect that transcends the simple presentation of a £10 million prize. I do not share Liam McArthur's gloom; I am a perennial optimist.

Sarah Boyack said that we do not agree on everything. That is true; the fact that we continue to have tension between different ideas and points of view is fundamental to democracy. It is about challenge and developing new, good ideas. However, the interesting thing has been the degree of agreement throughout the debate. I am almost tempted to say that, in a sense, renewable energy is now a new orthodoxy because that is the way that the debate has gone.

The green investment bank is an important initiative, whatever the scale of the finance that will be available to it, because it is a different approach to finance. With its great experience in

the banking sector, Scotland has a great deal to offer. If we in the Scottish Parliament get control over the fossil fuel levy funds, that will make a huge difference.

Unless I missed something, there was absolute unanimity in the welcome for the review of the network charging regime, albeit that a number of proper points were made about what must be in the review and how we must respond to it.

I am delighted that the public duty is now out. Mandatory reporting might be in tension with the spirit of partnership that we have with local government and many other bodies.

I think that I picked up from Lewis Macdonald that the Labour Party will vote for the extension or replacement of nuclear power capability, which I suspect will come as a great disappointment to many supporters and MSPs of that party.

Jackson Carlaw said that targets are less important than action. That is of course true, but targets inform action. Setting challenging targets on renewable electricity generation has been a significant driver for the success that has been delivered. The raising of the targets, which my colleague the First Minister announced at 12 o'clock, reflects the role that targets can have.

Jackson Carlaw talked about more efficient use of cars, car sharing and bus lanes. All those measures are worth considering. He also referred to Wood Mackenzie's report. It is worth saying that that report pointed to Scotland's comparative advantage lying in renewables and carbon capture and not in nuclear power, for which the intellectual property lies elsewhere, as the name EDF—Electricité de France—gives away. The nuclear power jobs are probably more of the order of 2,000 than the 10,000 that Jackson Carlaw suggested.

Liam McArthur was right to highlight the competition for money. We will need significant investment from the private and public sectors to deliver on our renewables potential. However, Scotland is a compelling proposition. Next week's conference will be key in drawing people who understand finance to Edinburgh, to engage with the comity of Edinburgh.

In his closing speech, Patrick Harvie drew attention to the fact that he is a consensual politician from time to time, and I respect that. He said that there is consensus in climate change science but not in the politics, which is probably a fair comment.

We must not miss out on the opportunity for green jobs this time round. To be frank, we must look across the North Sea at how Norway has used the previous generation of energy opportunities to build a fund that is leveraging

investment into renewables. Would that we had a similar opportunity.

Lewis Macdonald made an intervention on planning. It is worth making the point that we have approved 43 consents—more than twice the number the previous Administration approved. This Administration is delivering on consents.

Rob Gibson returned to the issue of peatland, which will be an important part of the debate at Cancún, where we hope that peatland will be included in the calculations on climate change. As he said, for an investment of £10 million, we can save 2.7 million tonnes of CO₂, so restoring our peatland to the carbon sink that it should be has huge potential.

I will paraphrase Cathy Peattie—she said, “Not whether, but how and when.” There is no disagreement on that—that is important. I share her aspiration to continue to take freight off our roads and on to rail, our canals, our seas and our lochs. Initiatives under the Government's watch that have taken hundreds of lorries a week off the A9 up to Inverness are an example of what can be done. When I opened Raasay pier, I visited JST Services, which is extracting timber off Raasay by sea. We are supporting, and wish to continue to support, such initiatives.

Flexible working at home is an excellent idea, but its impact is complex. Heating many houses involves a lot more heating than does heating a single communal facility, but we save on transport. However, we should certainly continue to consider the idea.

Jamie McGrigor said that no conflict exists between a renewables economy and a growing economy. That is one reason why the economy will succeed. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order. There is an awful lot of noise around the chamber. Minister, you should start to wind up, please.

Stewart Stevenson: Wendy Alexander wants us to ignore budgets, but the delivery plan must be drawn up in the context of budgets and it will be done on that basis.

Scotland can demonstrate the economic benefits of acting on climate change and we are spreading that message widely. As Jim Mather said earlier, I was at a briefing for the consular corps in Scotland—I was delighted that a number of those people were able to be with us for the start of the debate—at which we set out how our low-carbon approach is boosting economic performance in Scotland and how we can do even more.

Acting on climate change will offer considerable economic opportunities. Scotland will become the

international destination of choice for low-carbon investment. I am happy to support the motion that was moved by my colleague.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motion S3M-7051, on substitution on committees.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that Tricia Marwick be appointed to replace Bill Wilson as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Equal Opportunities Committee.—
[Bruce Crawford.]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are 10 questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S3M-7045.2, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7045, in the name of Richard Baker, on the future of forensics services in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 48, Against 74, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-7045.1, in the name of John Lamont, which also seeks to amend motion S3M-7045, in the name of Richard Baker, on the future of forensics services in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)

Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

Abstentions

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 76, Against 1, Abstentions 45.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-7045.3, in the name of Robert Brown, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7045, in the name of Richard Baker, on the future of forensics services in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)

McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 76, Against 46, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-7045, in the name of Richard Baker, on the future of forensics services in Scotland, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)

Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Abstentions

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)

Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 0, Abstentions 48.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of a national forensic service which is able to serve the needs of the whole country; acknowledges the key role of forensic services and speedy access to evidence for the detection of those responsible for crimes and the prevention of further offences; notes the consultation by the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) on a number of options for the future of forensic services in Scotland; believes that the recommendation for the future structure of the service which has now been made by the SPSA Board to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice should be made public immediately; further believes that Option 3, which would result in the closure of the laboratories in Aberdeen and Edinburgh, and that Option 4, which would see their services very significantly reduced, would be detrimental to very many communities in Scotland; accordingly believes that Option 2 should be the basis on which services are developed; acknowledges the concerns raised about the loss of specialist jobs; further notes the concerns of local communities and the police about the proposed changes; believes that decisions on the future of the national forensic service should be driven by the quality of the services needed and provided; regrets the history of inadequate consultation and consideration by the SPSA over the structure of the service; deplores the way in which the SPSA regarded the closure of regional services as a foregone conclusion, and considers that the controversy surrounding the issue serves as a warning as to the dangers of dogmatic centralisation

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-7047.2, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7047, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, on a low-carbon economy for Scotland, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-7047.1, in the name of Jackson Carlaw, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7047, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Annesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)

Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 57, Against 63, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-7047.3, in the name of Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7047, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

We are agreed. The next question is—
[Interruption.]

Do make it obvious, please. I will rerun the vote.

The question is, that amendment S3M-7047.3, in the name of Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7047, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)

Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 75, Against 0, Abstentions 46.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-7047.4, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7047, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No!

The Presiding Officer: We are not agreed. Well done! There will be a division.

For

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 2, Against 120, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-7047, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, on a low-carbon economy for Scotland, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament acknowledges that Scotland is continuing to develop a national consensus and determination to play a full role in developing the technologies, skills and expertise to build a low-carbon economy; welcomes the job opportunities associated with the further development of low-carbon technologies and acknowledges the need for skills development; notes that the net effect of these and other initiatives has been to

position Scotland as a preferred international destination for low-carbon investment; believes that the Scottish Government should use its powers to the full in support of the development of low-carbon technologies in energy, transport and housing and in the promotion of existing technologies, such as combined heat and power and microgeneration, in order to underpin Scotland's recovery from economic recession; welcomes the announcement by Ofgem of a review of the charging arrangements for gas and electricity transmission networks and hopes that this will pave the way to removing barriers to the development of Scotland's renewable energy industry, and believes that the UK Government's plans for a Green Investment Bank to fund low-carbon transport and energy schemes and a Green Deal to overhaul the energy efficiency of homes and small businesses will benefit Scotland's efforts to build a low-carbon economy.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-7051, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on substitution on committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that Tricia Marwick be appointed to replace Bill Wilson as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Equal Opportunities Committee.

Leuchie House

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-6753, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on keep Leuchie house. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament regrets the decision to close Leuchie House; notes that Leuchie House is the only respite home operating in Scotland and northern England for people with multiple sclerosis (MS) and is one of only four across the United Kingdom; believes that the level of care given at Leuchie House is exceptional; notes that the facility that it offers MS patients to holiday with their carer and their children is unique; notes that it has continually achieved the maximum evaluation of excellent in every area of inspection by the Care Commission; recognises that Leuchie House is much valued by service users; believes that the closure of such a specialised facility will cause a strain on families not just in the Lothian area, but across Scotland as well as impacting on other services, such as the NHS, as they struggle to cope with the needs of MS patients, and is of the view that the facility should be retained.

17:09

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): In two days' time, the Multiple Sclerosis Society meets in London for its annual general meeting. As one would expect at an AGM, there are a number of motions on the agenda, but two in particular deal with the society's decision to close all its respite provision, including Leuchie house. It is not for me to make any recommendations to the society, but I will offer it some advice. It should listen to the people who use Leuchie house, listen to its ordinary members and keep Leuchie house open.

I am genuinely concerned about the basis for the decision and the damage that the MS Society is causing to its reputation. Members may recall the society's loss of J K Rowling as a patron. Now, it has decided to close Leuchie house, which is the only specialist MS facility in Scotland, together with three other respite facilities in England. I also understand that the society is the subject of three substantive complaints to the Charity Commission. That is not a happy record.

I am grateful to the Presiding Officer for chairing the debate; I know that he has constituents who wish Leuchie house to be retained. I also know that my colleagues Iain Gray and Fiona O'Donnell, the elected representatives for East Lothian, have fought hard alongside people with MS, their families and staff to keep Leuchie house.

Scotland has the highest incidence of MS in the world, which is why Leuchie is so important. Members will be aware that it provides residential short breaks and day respite care—500 breaks in a year—for 350 people who suffer from MS and,

uniquely, for their carers and families too. It specialises in providing care for high-dependency MS sufferers who have hugely complex care needs. It does all that extremely well, and achieves consistently high inspection grades from the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care. More important, this quote gives a flavour of what the people who use Leuchie house think about it:

"It's absolutely amazing because I don't feel disabled".

That is high testimony indeed.

Leuchie reduces isolation, and families enjoy learning from, sharing and supporting one another. Many of the people with MS require very specialised care: many require percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy—PEG—feeding, tracking hoists, catheters and ileostomies, and have communication and cognition issues.

What alternatives exist for people who will no longer have Leuchie as an option for their short break? The MS Society tells us that it will accredit, signpost, campaign and influence—it just will not provide. That is very aspirational, but is it real, or is it an empty gesture? Who will provide the same specialist service that Leuchie delivers? Aside from one specialist bed on the west coast and two in the north-east, it will be hospital or non-specialist provision in care of the elderly homes. That means no family and no friends—it will be isolated care, which frankly is inadequate and unacceptable.

What about the needs and wants of the people who are affected? I understand that it was some four months after the decision was made before any thought was given to risk assessments or contacting people to signpost them to alternative provision. Have any of those people been provided with advocates or had alternatives secured for them? I can tell members that with perhaps only 10 weeks to go, a substantial number may not yet even have been fully assessed. That lack of planning is in itself of considerable concern, but when we consider that these are vulnerable people with complex needs, it is appalling.

The decision to close Leuchie has been taken on the basis of a flawed survey. If members need to be convinced of that, I point to the 11,000 signatures on a petition from Scotland alone. I ask members to listen not only to me, but to the people who value Leuchie; I will quote what they said about the MS Society's decision. One said, "It's devastating," while another said that it is

"Leaving the most vulnerable people on their own".

One even said:

"It's like closing the intensive care ward and replacing it with a helpline."

What about the carers themselves? Only yesterday, a survey that was carried out by the Princess Royal Trust for Carers highlighted the problems with poverty and depression that our carers experience. The Government has made valuable commitments to carers, but what about the carers who deal with the MS sufferers who use Leuchie house? What provision will there be for them? Perhaps the decision is not about choice, as the MS Society would have us believe, but about money. I understand that the chief executive of the MS Society has said that Leuchie house was an "appalling waste of money". Let us stop and examine the facts for a moment. The annual subsidy for Leuchie house from the MS Society is £600,000, not the £1 million that the society has claimed. I confess to not being an expert mathematician, but as a percentage of the overall budget of £30 million, that amounts to 2 per cent. That is value for money by anybody's standards.

Incidentally, Leuchie is leased from Sir Hew Hamilton-Dalrymple, who does not charge a single penny in rent but instead expects the society to maintain the land and the building. What I did not know before is that the lease still has three years to run. The society will still be liable for the maintenance and upkeep of the building and land, so let us have it full, not empty.

I could not put it any better than a carer who wrote to the society:

"it is the unique combination of excellent respite care and holiday atmosphere which makes Leuchie the only choice for people in our position ... we have no viable alternative ... if this closure goes ahead my husband and I will never be able to go away again ... At home my husband spends 355 days each year in our room where he sleeps, eats and lives. I am his sole carer for 21 out of 24 hours. For 12 days at Leuchie he enjoys life in a different setting and caring, congenial company with all his needs addressed. Here at Leuchie for these 11 nights I can go to bed knowing that I will not have to get up in the night and I'm able to eat at the same time as my husband."

I will finish by saying what I believe is required. First, I urge the MS Society to keep Leuchie house open. It has the building and the staff and, overwhelmingly, people want to retain the specialist provision. At the very least, it should give Leuchie until November 2011 in line with the end date for the other three respite centres. Secondly, I ask the Scottish Government to intervene, to echo the call to keep Leuchie open and to write as a matter of urgency to the MS Society in time for its AGM.

If we do nothing, Leuchie will close in 10 weeks' time. For the sake of people with MS and their families, we must do everything in our power to prevent that from happening.

17:18

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): I begin by congratulating Jackie Baillie on securing this members' business debate. I imagine that most members in the chamber this evening will know someone who has been touched by the cruel illness of MS and will be well aware of the impact that it has on the lives of those who are personally affected, and their loved ones of course. There are about 10,500 people with MS in Scotland, which is the highest prevalence of the illness anywhere in the world. Now we face the potential loss of the only respite centre of its kind in Scotland—and in fact in the northern United Kingdom.

I have been privileged to visit Leuchie house on two occasions as an elected representative in East Lothian, and I was able to speak to staff and service users. On one of those occasions I was with my colleague and Lib Dem health spokesman Ross Finnie. Having seen the dedication of the staff as well as the immense benefit that service users derive from their stay in Leuchie house, I know how concerned visitors to the centre are about the MS Society's plans and how cherished Leuchie has become. However, the loss of the centre is currently an ominous prospect.

I have a great deal of respect for the work that the MS Society Scotland has done over the years, but I am afraid that in this instance the society can do more to ease the severity of the situation. Although the three England-based respite centres have until November 2011 to be transferred to another provider, Leuchie house will close in a little over 10 weeks if another provider cannot be found.

The disparity in the grace periods is attributed to "the different circumstances surrounding Leuchie house in Scotland",

which I suspect might refer to the fact that Leuchie is the only centre that is not owned outright by the society, even though there is only a peppercorn rent. Sir Hew himself said that it was a penny, so Jackie Baillie and I will have to agree to disagree on a penny. I imagine that that will be of little comfort to the 85 staff who are employed at Leuchie house. I have been told that it is nothing to do with costs, but of course in the real world funds do matter, and I stagger at the thought of the cost of returning Leuchie house to its previous décor if it is forced to close.

In June, I wrote to appeal to the MS Society to reverse its decision to withdraw support from Leuchie, but it became clear that the society was not for turning on the matter. I have also asked trustees to extend a lifeline to Leuchie by granting an extension that would allow staff and other interested parties to explore the options fully. The society has a duty of care to users of the centre,

and in the interests of fairness I would like an extension to be granted to bring Leuchie into line with the English centres.

I also wrote to the Deputy First Minister in June to ask the Government to investigate ways in which it could support Leuchie to ensure that there is no gap in provision. I accept that the situation is a result of operational decisions by the MS Society, but I wonder how big a burden has been removed from the national health service simply through Leuchie house being available to people who have MS. I therefore ask the minister to exercise some influence over the matter.

The majority of respondents to the MS Society's surveys and focus groups might have intimated a desire to move to holiday venues where care is provided, but most holiday venues are unable to cater for people with high-dependency MS. I also wonder how many people who have complex physical needs were able to respond to those surveys.

The staff need time to set up their own mechanism for the management of Leuchie, and I intend to impress that upon the MS Society when I, Ross Finnie, Councillor Jacquie Bell and representatives from the save Leuchie campaign meet the society.

The care commission's inspection of Leuchie house in August 2009 awarded it the highest grade possible for the commission's four quality themes. Leuchie house was inspected just a few weeks ago, and again it maintained its outstanding record of excellence.

I offer my congratulations to Mairi O'Keefe and her staff for their achievements during a difficult time. It would be remiss of me if I did not mention Sir Hew Hamilton-Dalrymple and thank him for his generosity, which stretches back to the 1970s. Thanks to his kindness in leasing Leuchie for just a penny a year, thousands of people who suffer from MS have been able to experience the benefits of the centre in North Berwick. Service users, staff, local councillors, local MPs, the local community and members throughout the chamber want Leuchie house to remain open. It is simply too valuable to be lost, a fact on which I am sure that most of us agree. We must be given time.

The Presiding Officer: I should have said that speeches should be of four minutes' duration.

17:22

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I am glad to have the opportunity to say a few words in the debate, and I congratulate Jackie Baillie on securing it. I also know how much work Iain Gray, the local member, has done, as has Fiona O'Donnell, the newly

elected MP for the area; I was pleased to sign her early day motion on the issue.

My contribution is very much a personal one. I confess that I did not know about Leuchie house until I was invited to go along on a visit in the company of Iain Gray and some other MPs. Before I got there, I did not quite know what to expect, but by the time I left—after spending an evening with the people who were there for a respite break, sharing a meal with them, getting a tour around the specialist facilities and hearing stories from people from all over Scotland about how important the centre is—I felt that I had been through a humbling experience. I left feeling that we have something of a gem in that service, and that we ought to be telling people about it.

I was not aware that, a few months on, Leuchie house would be facing potential closure. When I heard about that, I was shocked and then angry, because I could recall very clearly what the people whom I spent that evening with had said to me. The most important thing for them is that Leuchie house is a place where the family can go. There were couples there who would simply not have had the opportunity of having a holiday or respite break together in any other setting.

The idea that the service could somehow be replaced by people receiving respite care in another facility, whether a nursing home or elsewhere, was not something that those people welcomed. As far as possible, despite their complex needs and all the transport difficulties in getting there, they wanted to be somewhere where people understood the medical support that they needed and where that was available on site in case there were any problems. Most of all, they wanted things to be as normal as possible within that context.

When I toured Leuchie house, I was aware that it is an old building—we are very grateful to the owners for making it available. I could see the difficulties that there would be in ensuring that that setting enabled the provision of good-quality care simply because of the nature of the building. The fact that the care commission has given it an excellent rating is even more incredible given the circumstances in which the staff work, and that must be valued.

I do not know the internal politics of the MS Society and, in some ways, I do not think that that is my business. However, to the people who are making the decisions I say that Leuchie house means the world to the folk who use that facility. Many of those people know full well that their condition is likely to deteriorate in the not-too-distant future, and they are making the most of the lives that they have now. For many people, it is straightforward: they feel that, if Leuchie house was not there, they and their families would not be

able to cope with some of the difficult times ahead that they face.

My plea—echoing Jackie Baillie—is for the matter to be looked at again and for another way to be found. If it is about the money, surely there is some way of finding the £600,000 to make up the shortfall. Leuchie house cannot possibly be allowed to close in 10 weeks with nothing else being offered to the people who have benefited from it. I hope that the people who are here tonight will hear that plea and do something about it.

17:27

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):

Jackie Baillie has done us a service by bringing the debate to Parliament tonight. She set out the case for retention in a compelling fashion, and I do not intend to rehearse the ground that she laid out so well.

We have seen a sustained and effective grassroots-led campaign to save Leuchie house. As Jim Hume said, most of us in Scotland know someone who has been affected by MS—it is rare for someone not to have experience of it among their family or friends. Nevertheless, I wonder whether those of us who are not touched directly by it or who are not in a direct caring role can really appreciate the value of the service that Leuchie house provides. I suspect that it is almost impossible for those of us who do not have the same obligations as those who rely on Leuchie house to understand the value of that service to them and their families. It is unfortunate if we reduce it to a cash value because the much more important point is that this is about the quality of people's lives.

It is also a national issue. I have been surprised—perhaps I should not have been—by the range of areas from which I have received representations about it. I have received representations from throughout the region that I cover, from Galloway to East Lothian. Cathy Jamieson made a pertinent point about people's awareness of the facility. I wonder how aware people across the country have been of the availability of the service and whether one of the problems has been a lack of awareness leading to a lack of use. My colleague Mary Scanlon told me earlier about a similar facility that had been available in Grantown-on-Spey, in the Highlands. When that service closed, people who had used the service were told that they would be able to use Leuchie house. Where is the alternative now? The alternative that the MS Society has offered is not seen as being adequate by most people who use the service.

The big question is, what can be done? Initially, it must be a decision for the MS Society. I

sincerely hope that it listens to the debate and, more important, the campaign, those who have contributed to it and the people who use the service. If it does not, we must ask whether there is a role for the Government in this. Whether or not the Government wants it, there will be consequences for the Government if Leuchie house closes. More important, there will be consequences for the people who use the service that go way beyond the financial aspects.

The situation raises a fundamental point about the accountability of certain service providers who, although not part of Government, provide services that might otherwise be provided by Government. Surely organisations such as the MS Society are under a bigger obligation to take a more holistic view of their services and their obligations to society as a whole. It is much easier to destroy a valued service such as Leuchie house than it is to rebuild it. Once it is lost, it is gone for ever and I wonder whether the society has really understood the consequences of its proposal. It is clear that those who use and depend on Leuchie house do not think so. Surely the society should reconsider its decision and, if it will not, surely the Government needs to consider what it has to do to ensure that the people who rely on the service do not find themselves in an utterly helpless and hopeless position.

17:30

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I congratulate the save Leuchie campaigners, who have fought a marvellous campaign. They have refused to give up and I wish them all luck for Saturday, which is a key date in their efforts.

I well remember the first time I visited Leuchie house as the newly elected MSP for East Lothian. Although it was June or July, I was greeted at the door by Santa Claus. I had come at the end of one of the family fortnight holidays in which Leuchie house specialises and, to mark the occasion, the people there were having what I was told was an Australian Christmas—in other words, Christmas in the middle of summer. I think that that illustrates the sense of fun and happiness that one gets with those holidays, which will be recognised by visitors and, in particular, anyone who has participated in the dinners that end them.

That also points us to Leuchie house's uniqueness. The facility provides respite or a holiday not just for those who suffer from MS but for their carers, usually husbands or wives, and indeed whole families. It is the only facility that allows its users to have a holiday without being separated from their loved ones and their loved ones to have a holiday with them in the knowledge that their care needs will be looked after.

Since that first time, I have been back to Leuchie lots of times and have never heard anyone who has used the service say a bad word about it. I cannot say the same about any other health service, care service or public service that I have encountered. Many users have explained how Leuchie house is a lifeline and an absolute necessity in their being able to continue to live with their loved ones at home. Indeed, the point was never more poignantly made than it was when I visited just after the MS Society took the decision to close the facility.

Of course we are not just talking about people who come to Leuchie house from afar. Fifteen families in East Lothian also use the day service and for some of the MS sufferers concerned, the service's removal means the difference between their being able to continue to live at home with their family or not.

I understand that many MS sufferers might like more choice or more flexible short-break options. However, I do not understand why the route to that involves taking away choice from those who already have what they want. Those who face this situation are clear that they will be offered the choice of a nursing home or hospital, and that is simply not acceptable.

I do not understand why the MS Society has made what I think is a wrong decision. The society should have been so proud of Leuchie house that it could not have considered its closure. I can tell the chamber that East Lothian is proud of Leuchie and does not want it to be closed down.

I have been disappointed by the response not only from the society but from the Scottish Government. When I raised the matter with the minister, I was told, first, that it was a matter for the society and, secondly, that respite for MS sufferers is a matter for their local authorities. Both those things are true, but cannot the Government see that, to those service users, it is washing its hands of the service—not once, but twice? I know that the minister supports better services for people with MS and that she understands the Scottish dimension to the disease. I do not understand why she will not help to find a way to keep Leuchie house open.

I close by mentioning the staff—some 83 of my constituents—whose jobs will go. If they were here—some of them may well be—they would say that their jobs were not the important thing here. However, I know that some of them have found alternative employment but have turned it down to stay at Leuchie for the final 10 weeks, because they could not bear to walk away. Given that degree of dedication to the service—a service so loved and valued by its users—surely we should stand alongside the staff, the campaigners, the

carers and, above all, the service users in their efforts to keep Leuchie house open. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Sorry, I know that it seems harsh, but I must ask that people in the public gallery do not applaud.

17:36

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): I congratulate Jackie Baillie on bringing the debate to the chamber. I have visited Leuchie house on a number of occasions and, like everyone else in the chamber, I know that MS sufferers from throughout Scotland make use of its services.

It seems to me that there are a number of interrelated issues. The first is the obvious and self-evident position of the excellence of the service that is provided—I will not rehearse the many excellent points that have been made by other members. The second is the MS Society's decision that it will, perhaps not now but for Scotland in December and for those in England in November next year, no longer provide that service, and the question is whether that is a right policy decision.

A separate but obviously closely interrelated issue is how best to keep Leuchie house open. There is no dispute about the excellence of the service or about the ratings that it is given by the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care. More critically, there is no dispute about the response from those who use Leuchie house, but there is real debate about the MS Society, its decision and the basis of that decision. I will certainly not rehearse the excellent exposition of that that Jackie Baillie gave us.

However, that still leaves at least two possibilities as to how we keep Leuchie house open, which of course brings into play the MS Society's claim that it is interested in that process, although I have been unable to find any evidence at all of the MS Society doing anything other than issuing disingenuous statements to that effect. Like many in the chamber, I have written to the MS Society but I am still awaiting a response from the trustees to a communication dated June.

The question is this: if the MS Society is genuine about wanting Leuchie house to stay open, why does it put the staff in the position in which—as Iain Gray graphically described—they have to seek alternative employment? The critical mass of those excellent carers is to be dissipated but, somehow, the MS Society would wish to claim that it is actually really interested in keeping Leuchie house open. Open as what?

Cathy Jamieson mentioned the state of the building but, of course, the institution is not the building; it is the people who run it, and the

nursing staff who run it have had their jobs put on the line. That is not a message from a society that is genuinely interested in keeping an operation open, and that is greatly to be deplored.

Even if, at the end the day, the Leuchie house campaigners are unable to persuade the MS Society, I cannot believe that it is entirely without prospect that some other organisation might wish to fill that void. The MS Society is therefore again being obstructive by placing conditions, dates and times for closure that make that process well-nigh impossible.

I find those two issues deplorable. I am not sure that I want to get into a debate with the MS Society on its particular policy, although I could no doubt do so if I had infinite time. As I said earlier, I, like Jackie Baillie, think that that policy is fatally flawed, but I am much more concerned about the society's absolute failure to facilitate conditions and circumstances under which members, the Government and other charitable organisations could have a sane, sensible and rational discussion about an alternative provision for keeping Leuchie house open. The society is to be condemned for that. I hope that it takes a different decision at its meeting. Even if it does not reverse its decision, Leuchie house should at least be given the opportunity to seek genuine alternative arrangements that will, in the best interests of its patients, keep it open.

17:41

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I value the opportunity to participate in this debate. I will take slightly different lines from those that other members have taken. Members have covered much of the topic effectively, and it is clear that the central theme is whether the MS Society is behaving in a reasonable and rational way.

There can be no doubt whatever about the massive contribution that carers make in Scotland. That has been said endlessly in the chamber, but it can never be said enough. The necessity for respite care is also fully understood. Indeed, the Government has said that it will provide an extra 10,000 weeks of respite care a year. That may or may not be being fully delivered, but it is certainly the Government's intention.

The main issue for me is whether the decision in question fulfils the criteria for consultative processes that we have established in the Parliament. In the first session, I was grateful for the opportunity to undertake the Stobhill inquiry. That inquiry was undertaken because the consultation by the national health service in Scotland was very poor, and it was evident that the communities around Stobhill thought that they

had not been consulted appropriately. It was clear that the processes were inadequate. Since then, the processes have been changed radically, and there is now consultation. Things are still not perfect, and I think that we will hear about further problems in the future, but the Scottish health council analyses and advises on the efficacy of consultations. I wonder whether we should invite the Scottish health council to look at the processes for voluntary sector societies such as the MS Society.

I say that because I think that the survey that was done was flawed. A report by Professor Bell, I think, suggested that that was the case. There are 26,000 MS sufferers, of whom only 514 responded to the survey. The statistical analysis may be valid and focus groups might be of some help, although focus groups are usually used to determine the questions before a survey is set up rather than afterwards, but I simply do not think that the survey is valid. If there is any question about its validity, that is answered by the fact that 11,000 petitioners have suggested that the decision is wrong.

The results of the survey are analysed in its appendices. Appendix 6.3, on the perception of quality, shows that a staggering 95 per cent of those with MS and a similar percentage of their carers feel that the care that is given in the society's centres is good or very good. The results for less specialised residential or nursing homes were 65 per cent and 67 per cent, which are much lower figures. The home therefore provides an almost unparalleled level of care, in the view of the respondents.

My concern is that we will lose provision that is highly valued by individuals. Therefore, there is an absolute need for the Government to consider how it can intervene.

We are going into a period of austerity. It will be fundamental in tackling and managing that to have a true partnership between the public sector and voluntary sector providers. The public sector provides the overwhelming majority of the finance for the establishment that we are discussing, but it is partnership that is required. Therefore, there must be discussions with the MS Society as to how that partnership should proceed. It should proceed on the basis of good evidence, not the evidence that has been presented.

17:45

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): There have been some valuable contributions to the debate. Jackie Baillie's motion deals with specific concerns about the future of Leuchie house, but it also raises general issues about respite services for people

with long-term conditions such as multiple sclerosis.

The motion rightly praises the quality of services that are provided at Leuchie house. I know from the correspondence that I have received how highly valued it is by those who use it. I am also aware of the dedication of the staff there. I hope that an alternative provider can be found, even at this late stage. Ross Finnie outlined in a very well-thought-out speech the importance of that potential solution.

I can well understand the concerns of service users and carers, and of the staff of Leuchie house, about the proposed changes. Any type of change will always be difficult, but the decision is ultimately one for the MS Society. I hope that its decision-making process will take proper account of the views of service users and carers. I am aware that there are concerns about the process and that they will be raised at the society's forthcoming AGM, as its members are entitled to do.

The background to the issue is the MS Society's review of its respite services, in which a range of options were considered. We know what the review's key findings were. I would not like the debate to be about whether we are taking sides for or against the MS Society; it should be about people with MS getting access to the respite and other services that are best for them and for their families and carers.

The Government wants to work in partnership with the third sector, because the third sector is recognised as leading the way in service innovations, as Richard Simpson pointed out. The focus now is on flexibility of services and on finding ways, where possible, of delivering services to people in their homes or communities, to help people participate in society to the fullest extent possible.

Dr Simpson: If there really is a partnership, what discussions has the minister had, or will she have, with the MS Society?

Shona Robison: I have had a discussion with the MS Society about its proposals. I will come on to the role of the Government.

We need to ensure that services and support become even more flexible in future. We are championing self-directed support, because it gives people choice and control over the support that they receive. We know that people's lives can be transformed beyond recognition through personalised care or support because they get help that matches their circumstances and goals. Central to that approach is integrating within that overall package of care short breaks for a person with MS or their carers and families. For example, in the Borders, the council has provided a package

of care for a woman with progressive MS. She uses her direct payments to allow her children to engage in the activities that they enjoy. She can use her flexible-breaks funding to visit her family elsewhere in the country. Her general health and wellbeing have improved markedly because she gets that support. Our consultation on self-directed support has shown strong backing for action at national and local level to bring about a culture in which choice and control are the norm.

Providers of services in the statutory and voluntary sectors are having to make hard choices. Tough decisions are being made at local level about how best to provide and fund short breaks in the light of resource and other pressures. The MS Society has acknowledged that, if Leuchie house closes, that will in the short term reduce the respite choices that are available to current services users. That is concerning. It is therefore important that the society ensures that alternative provision is arranged to meet service users' on-going care needs.

I understand that the society has plans to contact all those who have stayed at Leuchie in the past two years to determine those needs and how the society can support them. We certainly expect that to happen. That process should involve social work departments, to create care plans for short breaks, and it should be about assisting those people and their carers to access more personalised services.

As I said, this is a matter for the MS Society to decide. It is of course ultimately accountable to its members for the decisions it makes. This is not a matter in which the Government can intervene. Jackie Baillie said that she would not make a recommendation to the MS Society. I am sure that she would not expect any rule other than the rule that she applied to herself to apply to the Scottish Government.

Jackie Baillie: I did, however, offer the society advice. Given the debate that has taken place, I invite the minister to send the society the views of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government and to offer advice.

Shona Robison: I will come on to that. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order. I am sorry, but I cannot allow that type of interruption.

Shona Robison: The advice that I would give the MS Society is to listen to its service users and carers. I will come on to the issue of writing to the society in a moment.

It was unfortunate that Iain Gray chose to take the opportunity to attack the Scottish Government for not intervening. There has never been any occasion, under this Administration or previous

ones, when ministers have intervened to change a decision made by an independent voluntary sector organisation. In 2003, when CrossReach was closing care homes in a number of communities in Scotland, ministers rightly did not intervene because that was an independent decision by the voluntary sector. It would be wrong for any MSP to give service users the impression that the Government can wave a magic wand and change a situation when an independent voluntary organisation is making a decision.

Jim Hume: I am slightly saddened to hear what the minister has said. Is she aware that one of the leading Scottish National Party councillors in East Lothian has stated that the Government should not bury its head in the sand over this issue?

Shona Robison: I do not think that anyone is burying their head in the sand. I do not have the power to tell an independent voluntary organisation to do something different with its services. It would be wrong to raise service users' expectations that the situation is different; it has never been any different for previous ministers in previous Governments.

The issues that have been raised in this debate are important. Jackie Baillie asked me whether I would write to the MS Society. I am prepared to do so to ensure that it is aware of the strength of feeling and of the issues that have been raised in the debate. I will certainly write to the MS Society.

I hope that Leuchie house does not close. If it does, there could be a knock-on effect on health and social care services. I will certainly commit to monitoring the situation. I would expect the MS Society to provide us with regular reports on progress to ensure that the care needs of current users of Leuchie house are being met. I would be happy to share that information with Parliament.

I will ensure that, in advance of its AGM at the weekend, the MS Society gets the very clear views of parliamentarians that have been expressed this evening.

Meeting closed at 17:53.

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