



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 10 March 2011

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 10 March 2011

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

Local Services

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Good morning. The first item of business is a Scottish Liberal Democrat Party debate on local services.

09:15

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I am glad to open the last Liberal Democrat debate of the session, on local services, and I will do so by nailing our colours firmly to the mast. Liberal Democrats believe in a bottom-up attack, in empowering and motivating local people and in local communities having as much power as possible over the circumstances of their own lives. That is the very fibre of our approach. We are suspicious of and cautious about concentrations of power, whether in the hands of the state or of private interests.

Of course, this Parliament has a democratic mandate, but we recognise and welcome the local democratic mandates given to local councils throughout our country. At best, they operate in close partnership with robustly independent voluntary and third sector organisations, which bring expertise, focus, flexibility and the human dynamic to the table.

The Liberal Democrat approach seems to be increasingly at odds with the centralising agenda offered by most of the other political parties in the Parliament. In effect, the Scottish National Party Government has taken away local financial discretion through its approach to local government funding. In fairness, there is a wider argument to be had about the implications of the council tax freeze but, in this context, the SNP Government has taken for national Government powers previously operated by local government.

The SNP has also attempted—without too much success, it has to be said—to micromanage other matters such as class sizes and to reduce local authorities to being delivery agents for central Government.

Across a wide range of services, the forthcoming election is fast shaping up to be a competition between SNP foolishness and Labour bravado to see who can rush the fastest down a centralising road—for the fire and rescue service, for social work or care services and, above all, for

our police forces—regardless of the evidence, the lack of figures or local opposition.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Can Mr Brown tell us where the Lib Dem approach to decentralisation was when the Lib Dems, in government, scrapped the area tourist boards and brought all tourism services together in one national agency, VisitScotland?

Robert Brown: It is fair to say that the proper approach to tourism provision has been a difficult and controversial issue for a number of years—there are no two ways about that. However, if Murdo Fraser looks at the Liberal Democrat approach in its manifesto for this election, he will see something that will be, I hope, meat and drink to his apparent approach to the issue.

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): Will Mr Brown give way?

Robert Brown: If the minister does not mind, I will make a little progress.

Liberal Democrats argue today that the Gadarene rush to centralise everything that moves is flawed and will have damaging consequences for local services. There is no vision for how services will be accountable to the public and the move is likely to cost millions at a time of heavy financial pressure.

As Tavish Scott told the annual conference of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities yesterday, next year, under Labour or the SNP, it will need a much smaller venue. I add that it will also need a much shorter agenda.

Let us look more closely at the police proposals.

Fergus Ewing: Robert Brown says that the SNP Government micromanages, but does he recall that it was the Labour-Liberal Administration that said that £6 million must be used by local authorities to procure junior antisocial behaviour orders? Twelve such orders were procured at a cost of £0.5 million each. Was that not micromanagement and does he now regret it?

Robert Brown: Yes it was and yes I do, but the policy did not come from our side of the coalition.

On the police proposals, we are told that three options are on the table: the status quo, with eight forces; a model with three or four forces; or a single police force. We know from Kenny MacAskill that the status quo is not, in fact, an option. He said as much during the members' business debate last Thursday, so we now know that under the SNP there are only two options rather than three. However, the cabinet secretary's tone and language make it clear that there is really only one option: he supports one police force and a situation in which the new police supremo and the justice secretary will be in and out of each

other's offices. There will be a narrow and exclusive police voice, instead of the healthy range of voices from across Scotland that we currently have.

But wait—there is an election coming. SNP members in the Highlands and Islands and the north-east, such as Dave Thompson and Brian Adam, are made uneasy by the suspicion that taking away local control of our police forces might not play too well for them. Therefore, for the moment, they are licensed to talk about the three or four police force option as if it were a reality. I wager here and now that in the event that the SNP is returned in May, no more will be heard of the three or four force option.

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Robert Brown: I am happy to give way to Dave Thompson, so that he can explain his position on the matter.

Dave Thompson: I thank the member. Does he accept that a consultation is going on? Has he read the consultation paper? Does he expect to contribute to the consultation?

Robert Brown: I think that Alison McInnes dealt satisfactorily with the matter in last Thursday's debate, when she said:

"the proposals for a national police force have no basis in facts or evidence. The minister seems to have started with what he wants to achieve—more political control of the police and more Government centralisation—and is working backwards to try to justify it."—[*Official Report*, 3 March 2011; c 33960-1.]

There is no such ambiguity for the Labour Party—or the Conservatives, for that matter. Central control over the police is manna from heaven as far as Richard Baker is concerned. No longer does the Labour Party support nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy, but when it comes to the police and local care services, Labour members are, by instinct and conviction, card-carrying members on centralisation and the top-down approach.

The SNP Government's move to a single police force has been condemned by police chiefs across the nation. David Strang, the chief constable of Lothian and Borders Police, called the Scottish Government figures on the costs involved in a single police force, which were contained in the interim report of the sustainable policing project team, "irresponsibly misleading" and

"not supported by the evidence".

The figures had to be withdrawn from the consultation document because of widespread criticism from police leaders throughout Scotland.

I know, because Richard Baker told me, that at this very moment a new person, whom I think

Richard Baker has met, is producing new figures, but I say to the Scottish Government that the process no longer has credibility. It is time for the police centralisation document, "A Consultation on the Future of Policing in Scotland", to be withdrawn and for an independent review to be commissioned, to establish the real costs of moving to a centralised model. That was the demand of a delegate at the Unison conference earlier this week, who represents police civilian staff, who are often overlooked in the current arguments. Those people are right to demand the withdrawal of the consultation, because the cabinet secretary's plans will affect the lives of people who are doing real jobs and carrying out vital functions in communities.

I accept the views that are expressed in the amendments about policing having changed during the past 35 years and about structures being less important than services. Liberal Democrats are entirely open to sensible, evidence-based discussion on sharing back-office functions, when that can create savings, on flattening management structures, when that makes sense, and even on structural reorganisation, when there is a compelling public case for it.

However, I reject utterly the view that the current wave of centralisation is driven by financial cuts. It is driven by dogma. The current Scottish budget of £32 billion is rather more, even in real terms, than the £14 billion that we had in 1999. Indeed, it is more than the growing resource that we had in every year until about 2005. On a more specific point, police restructuring will not deliver net savings for at least four or five years, as far as I can see, by which time we will be out of the current comprehensive spending review period and—I hope—into a period of more promising finances.

Restructuring should be driven by our view of what the service should look like and should do, and it should provide a long-term, sustainable arrangement; it should not be directed by short-term pressures. Restructuring is likely to cost an arm and a leg, as we have seen in most public sector reorganisations. It will lead to higher salaries at the top, more bureaucrats running the super-duper new organisation, a spanking new headquarters, huge redundancy payments and an organisation that stops focusing on policing for at least a couple of years until everything settles down.

How much more time can I take, Presiding Officer?

Members: Two seconds.

The Presiding Officer: You can have five more minutes, Mr Brown.

Robert Brown: Thank you.

The consultation claims that there would be savings of between £81 million and £197 million. However, the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland said:

“the figure of £197m, as a potential saving from rationalisation, is not sustainable”,

and can be achieved only

“through the loss of thousands of officers and support staff”.

That is obvious. Colin Mair, from the Scottish Government’s improvement service, said that the original figures were an “abuse of evidence” and

“caveated almost to the point of parody”.

Page 17 of the interim report made it clear that between £30 million and £90 million of the suggested savings would come from “local policing”.

Whether or not there will be savings from a new structure, everyone agrees that there will be costs in achieving it, and of a level that caused the abandonment of a scheme to merge Cumbria Constabulary and Lancashire Constabulary. It was the case that no work had been done to support the costs of change here; perhaps the cabinet secretary will enlighten us as to whether that remains the position.

For what it is worth, for years after the 1995 local government reorganisation, no one was able to agree whether the costs were between £120 million and £191 million, as the Government said, or between £325 million and £620 million, as COSLA suggested. I suspect that they were significantly higher than either of those ranges.

Ultimately, though, the argument is not about costs, however significant; it is about local communities and where power lies in a democracy.

I will mention briefly social work and care. We know that the Labour Party supports a national care service. We also know that it is an idea sketched out on the back of the proverbial fag packet—Labour members get a bit shirty when they are asked for the details or costs, or for evidence in support of it.

Then, there is the SNP plan for a lead commissioning model for elderly care. It is not that having a seamless link between social work and the national health service is a bad aspiration; it is just that—

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Will Robert Brown take an intervention?

Robert Brown: Yes, all right.

George Foulkes: Robert Brown is talking about the elderly. Does he support the policy announced

by Tavish Scott to cut concessionary fares for the elderly?

Robert Brown: Sorry, I did not catch that. Cuts to what?

George Foulkes: At the recent party conference, Robert Brown’s party leader said that the Liberal Democrats planned to cut concessionary fares for the elderly.

Robert Brown: That was not said at all. George Foulkes should follow what is said more carefully.

Let us return to the SNP. At no point in the past four years, despite the resources of Government, was the SNP’s plan ever discussed with COSLA, which, not surprisingly, described it as “incompetent”.

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Will the member give way on that point?

Robert Brown: No—I should continue towards finality, as members will be glad to hear.

The plan leaves 38,500 social workers in limbo, with the prospect of transfer at some point to the NHS.

Whether for the police, the fire and rescue service, social work or care, the proposed model appears to be driven by assertion, with no evidence, few figures, no local sign-up and no rational basis for change. It is a recipe for confusion, policy standstill, bureaucracy and cost. Whole chunks of the agenda around the police, the fire and rescue service and elderly care services have, in effect, been placed outside the purview of the Christie commission, which was specifically established to consider the future of the public sector.

Liberal Democrats have a different vision for Scotland, based on local people, in local communities, with a power of general competence, who are expected to make decisions about their own areas, informed by local knowledge of what is best there and in which local government has the powers, the levers and the authority to drive innovation and improvement in local services. Scottish Liberal Democrats are the only party standing up for local services.

I move,

That the Parliament is concerned by the apparently endless desire on the part of centralising national politicians to attempt to take over control of local services, witnessed by proposals on police, fire and social work; opposes the flawed proposals for a single police force, under which, for example, local control of policing will be removed from the Northern and Grampian police force areas; does not support centralisation by government assertion, where no robust costs of change are produced; believes that a single one-size-fits-all approach to social work will waste money by destroying those successful local initiatives that are

already in place, and believes that the people of Scotland will be better served by a new approach from government that trusts local people to make good decisions for their areas and equips local government with the powers, levers and authority to drive innovation and improvement in local services.

09:28

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): I begin by reminding members that we are currently consulting on police and fire reform, and that both consultations are founded on an approach that protects local services in the face of unprecedented budget cuts and that gives local authorities and local communities a greater say on local priorities and services. The Liberal Democrats may wish to contribute to the consultation by press release, or indeed by megaphone diplomacy—that is a matter for them. Meanwhile, we will get on with consulting the key stakeholders.

My colleague Fergus Ewing has been up meeting representatives of island councils. Just yesterday, we met the chief executive of Highland Council. I think that it is open to me to say that he will be contributing to the consultation, representing the majority view in the council. It would be fair to say that he accepts that the status quo is not tenable, and that it appears that Highland Council disagrees with the Liberal Democrat position that we do not need to change in the face of the unprecedented cuts. The chief executive will suggest, I think, that the majority view is for a regional model comprising four forces.

Equally, I will be meeting not just the chief constable of Grampian Police but elected members and the chief executives of Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council on Monday. I will be interested to hear their views and, in particular where they stand on the suggestion from Highland Council that Moray should be removed from Grampian Police and put into Northern Constabulary. I am happy to listen to the position and arguments for a regional model but, as I have said, there are questions that have to be overcome.

A decision will be informed by the consultations and the work that Deputy Chief Constable Neil Richardson and Her Majesty's fire service inspector Steven Torrie are taking forward, which will provide a professional and evidence-based view on the most effective and efficient way in which to deliver police and fire services in Scotland.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): In previous debates, not least the debate in the chamber last week, the cabinet secretary has made it clear that his preference is

for a single force for Scotland. Is he now rolling back from that position?

Kenny MacAskill: I have not said that my preference is for a single force. I have said that the argument for that clearly has greater weight at the moment than the regional force model has. That was my position in the statement and it is the position that I made clear to the chief executive of Highland Council. I am happy to listen to and to take on board the council's suggestions, and if the Liberal Democrats in Highland wish to argue for a regional model, that is fine. They will need to explain, though, what the boundaries would be. They will need to explain to some forces, such as those in Dumfries and Galloway and Fife, which have unitary boards, how their accountability will be improved by moving to a joint board. There are questions to be answered.

The Government's position is that the status quo is untenable, and I will come on to that in due course. Two positions are clearly possible: a regional model; and a single force. The arguments for one are stronger at the present moment, but there are still major doubts to overcome, and that is why we have a consultation.

Robert Brown: Will the cabinet secretary explain to the Parliament why the consultation follows evidence gathering by the officers he mentioned rather than precedes it, which one would imagine would usually be the position?

Kenny MacAskill: Well, the matters are on-going. Additional evidence was produced by Karyn McCluskey and, indeed, by Deputy Chief Constable Steve Allen of Lothian and Borders Police. Some might not have liked what they came back with, but evidence was produced by them and put in. We recognise that there has to be significant drilling down, which is continuing at the moment. That information will be made available; it was made available to the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and it will be provided further in due course. There is an acceptance that the open consultation is continuing, that matters require to be clarified and that we have to overcome the doubts.

If there is to be a regional model, those who support that approach must square the circle. Would Moray be in Northern Constabulary, Grampian Police or both? What would the boundaries be? How would we ensure better accountability for Fife and Dumfries and Galloway? How would a board monitor various matters? Where would the Scottish Police Services Authority stand in relation to a regional model of four? Equally, there are questions about a single force that have to be answered—that is a valid point.

There is a broad consensus, among all apart from the Liberal Democrats, that reform is essential to ensure that structures that were created more than 35 years ago—before unitary councils and community planning partnerships, before the Scottish Parliament, and before some of today's policing and fire problems even existed—are fit for the 21st century and for the financial challenges ahead.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): The cabinet secretary talked about community planning. Does he agree that the police and, indeed, the fire service are key members of the family of community planning and that unplugging them from that and from the Christie commission will lead to a disintegration of such planning?

Kenny MacAskill: Not at all. After all, once the consultation has been considered and is concluded, it will be passed to the Christie commission. There is clear acceptance that, whatever boundaries are made and whether we go for a regional model or a single force, in any event things will be predicated on what is a local authority and, if that is varied by the Christie commission, will have to be adapted, so I do not see the two as conflicting at all.

It is also essential to give all communities, urban and rural, access to specialist police and fire resources and to give Scotland the capacity and capability that it needs to deal with crime and incidents that show no respect for barriers or boundaries between forces and services. Chief Constable House has publicly said that Strathclyde Police would be unable to cope with a major counter-terrorism incident without assistance from other forces. Scotland needs the national capability to prevent and respond to real threats, and there are real threats. In the early tenure of this Administration, we faced the Glasgow airport bombing and, even as we speak, a terrorist is being detained—although I cannot go into that, as it is sub judice. That shows the position that we face in this country, which must be dealt with.

Reform is essential to provide clear delivery of and national accountability for national issues, and to strengthen local accountability and engagement by bringing decisions and accountability for services closer to communities. Most of all, it is essential to protect local services for the long term.

Communities do not want Fife Fire and Rescue to transfer firefighters to other brigades, or police forces such as Northern Constabulary and Grampian Police to go on closing police stations and freezing recruitment year after year. We do not want unnecessary duplication across eight police forces and eight fire services, with eight separate police headquarters and eight separate

fire HQs and all the substantial overheads that those entail.

The officers from Strathclyde Police whom I met in Arran a few weeks ago were not working to some city agenda or waiting for orders from a distant HQ. They were working with local communities to solve local problems. The man in charge was Sergeant MacKay.

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): The cabinet secretary mentioned people coming together. Is it not already the case that all over Scotland, officers—whether in our police or our fire services—are allowed to go into other areas when major incidents occur? To intimate otherwise is disrespectful.

Kenny MacAskill: There has always been mutual aid and that will continue to occur, because that is the nature of the services. They go and assist, whether on a cross-border basis or across forces. I have no intention of changing that or of throwing away hard-won gains such as the 10-year downward trend in fire deaths, the fact that crime is at a 32-year low and the provision of 1,000 additional police officers, including 145 in Grampian and 80 in Northern.

Let us remind ourselves of the criticisms that people made at the time of the reforms in 1975. Before the old Ayrshire Constabulary became part of Strathclyde Police, it had a chief constable, two assistant chief constables and five chief superintendents. Today, the same area has one chief superintendent and two superintendents; it also has 150 more officers.

Lest members think that that is a Strathclyde phenomenon, it is not just the case in Ayrshire. What is now Northern Constabulary used to be three separate forces, each with its own chief constable. Now, of course, there is only one chief constable, but there are 301 extra officers. In Grampian, where there were two separate forces, each with its own chief constable, there is now just one force with one chief constable, but there are 720 extra officers. The First Minister has made it clear that there will be bobbies before boundaries. We are quite clear that we will have a lot more police officers, even if that means far fewer at senior grades.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The consultation is due to be completed on Thursday 5 May and the Christie commission is due to report in June. Did I pick up the cabinet secretary correctly? Did he say that all the responses from the consultation will be collated, assessed and passed on to the Christie commission, which means that it will have approximately three weeks to make a decision before its report is finalised?

Kenny MacAskill: We have made it clear that, purdah notwithstanding, people will be able to contribute to the consultation. Clearly, the political process and the involvement of ministers end when purdah starts. The election will be held on 5 May. An Administration will have to be formed, and it will have to provide a view. The matter will be remitted to the Christie commission for its consideration. Frankly, the suggestion that the Administration that is elected—whether it is ourselves or others who form it—will make a decision immediately on 6 May is disingenuous. Views will be submitted to the Christie commission.

Reform is about sustaining and improving the gains that we have made. The alternative for our communities and for the professionals who serve them is already playing out south of the border, where significant reductions in pay and conditions are likely to be imposed rather than negotiated, and where it is estimated that there will be 28,000 job losses in police services and 1,500 in fire services. The Liberal Democrats should ask the Police Federation what it thinks about Tom Winsor's report. They would keep the HQs and the boys in braid, but they would be prepared to jettison the rank and file who protect our communities. We will not sacrifice them.

There will be fewer police officers and firefighters for local communities if we do not make significant changes to ensure that we can address the budgetary problems. We understand that people are concerned about local services and worried about change, but now is not the time for political scaremongering. Rather, it is a time for serious and constructive discussion and debate about the best way to provide policing, fire and other public services in Scotland.

Since 2007, this Government has given power back to local authorities. We have reduced ring-fenced funding from £2.7 billion down to £0.9 billion. We have put decision making firmly in the hands of local community planning partnerships and our consultations on police and fire services seek to further that approach. They are about addressing the financial challenge but, more importantly, they are about protecting and improving local services and giving local authorities and communities the opportunity for deeper and more meaningful engagement with police and fire services.

I move amendment S3M-8120.2, to leave out from "is concerned" to end and insert:

"notes that Scotland and policing have changed significantly since the existing structure of policing was introduced over 35 years ago; notes the Scottish Government's consultation papers on police and fire services reform and agrees that, given the significant financial challenges, such reform is necessary to protect and improve local services and to strengthen and improve

local accountability and engagement; agrees that reform can only happen if it gives local communities and local elected members a greater say on local priorities and services, and notes that the expectations and requirements of health and social care have similarly changed significantly since existing structures were introduced and that reform is needed to deliver integrated services that are sustainable and appropriate and that make best use of resources focussed on the needs of local populations."

09:40

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): I welcome this opportunity to debate the important issue of the reform of our public services. As Labour's justice spokesman, I take a particular interest in the current consultation on the future of our police and fire and rescue services. Other Labour members will cover in greater detail other aspects of the motion that is before us. We have departed from the motion's position, which fundamentally argues for the status quo. We have made clear our support for a single police force and a single fire and rescue service, and we have two reasons for that.

We believe that it will mean better delivery of those services. It is not the case that the proposals have been on the table for a matter of months; they have been being discussed for years. The Fire Brigades Union has, for a considerable time, questioned the need for eight services, eight sets of expensive equipment and eight different approaches to health and safety. We agree that a single approach taken across the country will be better for firefighters and for fire prevention and community safety.

Likewise, a single police force will better enable us to tackle crime on a national basis. Crime knows no boundaries, whether it be drug-dealing, organised crime gangs or terrorism. Tackling criminals by working on a national basis will pay dividends in the fight against crime.

Robert Brown: Does Richard Baker share my concern that, instead of having a consultation that is informed by figures and proper evidence, that kind of work is following the consultation? Is that a sensible way for a Government to proceed?

Richard Baker: As the cabinet secretary said—on this rare occasion, I agree with him—some evidence has been presented, revised and clarified. The fact is that the evidence is already there. We might disagree on the issue but it was being discussed for a long time before the consultation. For example, people such as Graeme Pearson, who has great respect on these issues, have been discussing it for several years.

We think that the proposal will result in better services, but we also believe that making the changes will realise savings. They will be offset at first by the costs of the change, but they will come

in future. I accept that the first figures and savings have been disputed, but I know that more robust figures are being researched as we speak. When they are produced, I expect that they will show real opportunities for savings. Let us not underestimate the importance of that. We have a challenge to protect key services for communities across Scotland in the face of the substantial cuts that are coming from the coalition Government at Westminster. Those cuts are too deep and too fast, but we have to deal with them.

We can debate what the savings will be but I, for one, do not accept any assertion that moving to a single police force will mean losing hundreds of police officers and having fewer police on our streets. That fear is far more likely to be realised if we do not move to a single force and realise savings that can be reinvested in the front line. We cannot hide from the fact that, as things stand, we are looking at substantial cuts in the budgets of all police boards and all fire and rescue authorities. My fear is that, in that context, preserving the status quo would mean making substantial cuts to police and police staff numbers, and more cuts to firefighter numbers. We do not want to see a similar situation occurring here to the one in England and Wales, where budget cuts mean that police chiefs are predicting that there will be cuts in police and police staff numbers that could be as high as 28,000.

Jeremy Purvis: As the member will know, the previous Government aborted a programme of amalgamating police forces in England and Wales because it was going to be highly expensive. Can he guarantee that any reduction of the police forces in Scotland to a single force will cost less?

Richard Baker: All the evidence that I have seen on moving towards a single force shows that while there will be implementation costs that will offset first-year savings, there will be very substantial savings in the future that will be about protecting the front line. The challenge for those who oppose the measure is to say what they would do to protect those key front-line services in the context of the deep cuts coming from elsewhere, which we must deal with.

The savings are all about protecting police numbers and ensuring that we do not take police off the beat to do jobs that should be done by police staff. Robert Brown was right to raise that issue: I say to him that this measure is about protecting those key police staff too, which will help to keep police on the beat.

This proposal is all about keeping police on the beat in our communities. I believe that people throughout Scotland are far more concerned about having visible policing on their streets than about which badge is on the uniform.

We agree that local accountability is important, but we contend that we can improve the structures of accountability for decisions on local priorities for policing and fire and rescue within a single service structure. In policing, the example is close to home: Northern Ireland has exactly that structure of local accountability, but within a single force. Indeed, we can look for strengthened local accountability, as too often the arrangements to hold police forces and fire and rescue authorities accountable through the boards are not as effective as they should be.

Too often, boards are not adequately resourced to do the job that they need to do in scrutinising the decisions that local forces make. I believe that we can have a better model for community involvement. I agree with Robert Brown's comments in that regard. We believe that such involvement can be strengthened, whether at local authority or community level. That will ensure that local people have a stronger voice in the decisions that are made on those key services that are so important to them.

The key issues in the debate are community safety and policing, and providing the best services for our communities. I simply do not believe that those interests are best served by organisational boundaries that are based on the old regional councils. They are served by ensuring that we have the right investment in police and firefighters where we need them: not in eight headquarters, but in the city communities and the towns and villages where we live.

Mike Rumbles: Is Richard Baker clear that he is telling the Parliament and the Scottish people that a chief constable in charge of operational measures who is based in Glasgow or Edinburgh knows best where to deploy his resources in the north-east, for instance, which is an area that Richard Baker represents?

Richard Baker: First, I do not accept the premise that it is inevitable that such a person should be based in Glasgow or Edinburgh. Secondly, the key to ensuring that we have the best structure for making the right decisions locally is to have strengthened local accountability and consultation. Whatever the management structure is—we know that it will be reduced and less costly—it will be informed by decisions that are made on the ground. That is the important thing.

I do not agree with the Liberal Democrats' position on the important issue of the future of our police and fire and rescue services, but we know where they—and the Tories—stand on it. We must consult on the detail of implementation, but it is vital that we should be clear with the electorate on where we stand on this important issue before we go into an election for what may be a five-year session of Parliament. That is why it is important

for the SNP to say where it stands on the issue before we take our respective policies to the people.

The question for those who oppose change must be what they will do to protect front-line services. Where will they find the funds to protect police on the beat and firefighters in our communities? We must always put before structural boundaries the need to have the police, the firefighters and the people in place locally to deliver those services on which we depend. For that, the status quo is not an option.

I move amendment S3M-8120.1, to leave out from "is concerned" to end and insert:

"believes that the case for reform and innovation in Scotland's public services is unanswerable and that meeting the needs of the public is more important than preserving structures; recognises that the need to protect frontline services in the face of UK Government cuts requires the status quo in public services to be reassessed; believes that moving to a single fire and rescue service, a single police service and the creation of a national care service offers the best opportunity for improving delivery of these services in Scotland, and believes that these new structures will allow the reinvestment of savings to maintain frontline staff while ensuring that there are improved mechanisms for local democratic accountability and delivery on local priorities."

09:49

John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I welcome the debate on local services that the Liberal Democrats have brought to the chamber this morning. I am also pleased to be participating in the national debate about the future of police services in Scotland. The thrust of the Liberal Democrat motion and the debate so far has been about the future of our police forces and the proposals to create a single national police force for Scotland.

The priority on the Conservative side of the chamber is to provide an effective, visible and local police service that is accountable to local people and communities throughout Scotland. Our ability as a nation to continue to support front-line policing has been made more difficult by the fact that the Labour Party in Government at Westminster made such a mess of the public finances. However, it remains our priority to maintain the current numbers of police and it will continue to be our priority in the next session of Parliament.

I am proud of our record in supporting the police in Scotland. We should not forget that Scotland has 1,000 extra police officers today because of the Scottish Conservatives. If we had left it to the SNP, there would have been only 500 extra; and if we had listened to Labour or the Liberal Democrats—who did not back an increase in police officer numbers—we would have been

where we were four years ago, with fewer police officers patrolling our streets and higher crime rates.

Jeremy Purvis: John Lamont always tries to be accurate, so I am sure that he will recall the commitment in the Scottish Liberal Democrat manifesto of 2007 for more than 1,000 extra community police officers to link directly into communities such as those in the Borders that John Lamont and I both represent. That was our priority.

John Lamont: Mr Purvis will recall that he failed to vote for the extra police officers that the Conservatives obtained from the SNP budget. Liberal Democrats failed to vote for those extra police officers; they failed to support those extra crime fighters and they failed to support our communities in their battle against crime.

Crime remains a real concern for many people in Scotland today. Too many people live in communities that are blighted by crime. The challenge for the next four years is to step up the fight against lawlessness, antisocial behaviour and violence so that our citizens can live free from crime and free from the fear of crime. The question that we must ask ourselves is this: how can we maintain the service that is provided by the police within the current financial parameters? When public finances are under such extreme pressure, it is appropriate that we look to cut duplication and unnecessary costs across Scotland's police forces to ensure that we keep police officers not behind desks, but on the beat in our communities.

Our making those savings will involve difficult decisions. With 87 per cent of the policing budget going on staffing costs, and with large savings having to be found, it is clear that there is little scope for minor efficiency savings or tinkering around the edges. The actual savings that will be available through restructuring of police forces is—as we all know—not yet clear, but they are significant and the lesson from similar public sector reorganisations over the years suggests that those savings can be realised.

The Liberal Democrats have argued that restructuring police forces will, in some way, lead to a decline in local police services, but I argue that the complete opposite is true. If we do not reform, and if we blindly defend historical structures with their unnecessary duplications and costs, we will be depriving our communities of the front-line policing that they need and expect.

Mike Rumbles: Is that the argument that John Lamont used when the Conservatives reorganised local government in Scotland? Does he acknowledge the huge cost to the taxpayer that reorganising local government involved?

John Lamont: Any reform will have associated costs. However, evidence shows clearly that in the short to medium term there are savings to be gained. The savings that will be gained by merging organisations will outweigh the costs of restructuring.

I completely reject the Liberal Democrat argument. By defending historical structures we are depriving our communities of front-line policing. We need to make savings in order to allow front-line policing to be preserved. I am sure that no member wants a weaker police service for their constituents, but that would be the effect of the Liberal Democrat proposal. We should not get hung up on historical structures and lose sight of our top priority, which is provision of an effective, local and visible police service. I will not get drawn into defending out-of-date police structures if they come at the expense of front-line officers fighting crime in our communities.

We should see the situation as a challenge, but we should also see it as an opportunity to reform and improve the way in which policing is delivered. Police officers do an excellent job, often under difficult circumstances, but the truth is that the current structure of policing in Scotland is too bureaucratic and costly.

We should also acknowledge the failures of the current systems of accountability, particularly in the more rural and remote parts of our country. For example, most members of the general public have no idea what police boards do, let alone who is on them. We need a system that involves local residents, so that communities have a direct relationship with the police who are serving them. That is key to our support for any reform. Local accountability must be enhanced and protected to ensure that local people know how to hold their local police to account.

One way of doing that would be through having local police commissioners who would be directly elected by and accountable to the communities that they serve. Of course, the chief constable should retain operational independence—after all, police officers are experienced in fighting crime—but the elected commissioners would hold the local police to account for their performance and, collectively, would provide strategic national direction. Accountability needs to be at the heart of any reform of the police service in Scotland and we would be very wary of any reform that did not improve it.

Robert Brown: I am intrigued by the police commissioner proposal, which has not really found support in the chamber. How would that operate alongside a single police force? I cannot quite understand the relationship that the Conservatives are proposing.

John Lamont: The exact detail of how the police commissioners would work needs to be discussed, but we foresee the establishment of between eight and 12 commissioners who would cover the whole of Scotland and would be elected to represent the areas that the police serve. Voters would have a direct link to their commissioners and would hold those people to account for the police's local performance. The commissioners would also set the national crime rate reductions and ensure that resources were allocated to the right areas. That is the only way of ensuring that local people can hold the police to account.

The current system of local police boards does not work. If we were to ask any of my constituents who is on their local police board, they would not know. In such circumstances, how can residents hold the local police to account? They simply do not know. A directly elected local police commissioner who has a direct link to voters as well to the police would give ordinary constituents a much clearer idea of how to hold the police to account. I have to say that I am intrigued by the position of the Scottish Liberal Democrats on the matter, given that Nick Clegg and our coalition partners at Westminster fully support the idea of directly elected police commissioners.

Labour and the SNP talk about the need to protect local accountability with a single police force, but they have yet to bring forward any proposals to deal with the matter. Local accountability must be the key to the creation of a national police force.

The Liberal Democrats talk about the need for local control, but have brought forward no proposals for reforming the existing failing system and are blindly defending the current structure at the expense of front-line police officers. For those reasons, we cannot support their motion.

The Presiding Officer: We come to the open debate. I ask for speeches of seven minutes, please.

09:57

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): There have been some comments about how one defines local accountability. I have to say that, after Mr Lamont's speech, I am none the wiser about the Conservatives' approach to directly elected police commissioners in Scotland: as he says, those ideas have still to be thought up.

A number of years ago, a central Government body—the Scottish Court Service—proposed the closure of the sheriff court in Peebles, in my constituency. According to that body, the cost of the court was disproportionately high because, thankfully, the crime rates in the community were

disproportionately low, so it concluded that the community did not merit retention of the sheriff court. However, the community, my predecessor Ian Jenkins and, crucially, the Minister for Justice Jim Wallace disagreed with the Court Service, as did Parliament, which felt that the community should still be able to have justice served and seen to be done.

The challenge, therefore, was to address the real issue of costs while retaining local accountability and local services. The solution was to retain the town's police station—something else that Mr Lamont might well call an old Victorian structure—but to move it and the sheriff court into an underoccupied council building, which was the old county buildings on Rosetta Road. However, to make the proposition even stronger, Borders Council's social work department moved social work into the same building and it was proposed that the community justice authority staff also be moved there. As a result, Peebles now has a co-located police station, sheriff court, social work service, child protection service and community justice authority. The CJA element is interesting, given that that is a regionalised approach to rehabilitating offenders; after all, the previous Labour approach had been to have a central agency to carry out such work. That was a solution to a problem that ensured continuing local services. It is to the eternal credit of Ian Jenkins and Jim Wallace that that facility is now efficient and effective and is still in the heart of the community.

When we hear the rather simplistic view from the Conservatives and the confused view from the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, there is no faith that the local approach will be carried on. If we use the corollary from the Conservative approach and the example happened again, it would be impossible to create the framework to have that local solution. For example, Hawick police station, which is part of the old structure within G division of Lothian and Borders Police, would simply be closed because there would be no local focus on ensuring that there are local solutions. That is why we mean it when we say that a centralisation approach puts at risk the delivery of local services. We are not simply saying it.

Dave Thompson: Does the member accept that police stations are being closed throughout the country under the current structure?

Jeremy Purvis: The point that I am trying to make is that there are alternative solutions in those areas if there are co-located police stations. I am sure that there are many of them in the Highlands. There are some in the Borders, but there needs to be more in the Borders.

If we are considering the cost pressures that exist, we have two options. There is the option of

considering co-located community services in community hubs that a local authority, a police body and other public sector bodies can work to, or we can simply strip out layers. Layers will be stripped out. That is not an assertion from us. We know that because the record already exists, and I see it happening in the Borders.

In the autumn of 2007, before the budget reductions and some of the pressures to which the cabinet secretary alluded—unfortunately, the cabinet secretary is no longer in the chamber—the Government changed the local enterprise network in the Borders. Mr Fraser was simply wrong to say that the previous Government removed local delivery of tourism services from our areas. That happened in the autumn of 2007. Beforehand, when the Scottish Tourist Board became VisitScotland, local area delivery was protected. The VisitScotland Selkirk office was the Borders operation that delivered Borders tourism services with discretionary budgets. The Conservative party supported the changes in the autumn of 2007. We brought the issue to the chamber to be debated and voted on. It was in 2007 that the tourism office in the Borders was merged with Dumfries and Galloway services, simply to offer the services that had been delivered by Scottish Enterprise Borders.

When the Borders had Scottish Enterprise Borders and a distinct local tourism office, the area had an economic development ability with discretionary spend and an active local board of non-executive members that focused on the distinct needs of the Borders economy. One of the fundamental arguments is about whether local areas have distinct needs that require distinct approaches and distinct methods of delivery. In the area that I represent in the Borders, all of those are covered.

George Foulkes: I am not clear whether Jeremy Purvis is arguing in favour of a separate police force for the Borders. Is that what he is proposing?

Jeremy Purvis: I am arguing to retain G division of Lothian and Borders Police because there has always been a focus on that area. The point that is being made—I am sure that George Foulkes is aware of it—is that G division of Lothian and Borders Police is coterminous with Scottish Borders Council and Borders NHS Board. It was coterminous with Scottish Enterprise and the tourism office. SEB has been stripped away and tourism has been stripped away by the Scottish Government.

Under the Labour Party's proposals, there would be no coterminous operation of the police, and we simply do not know what its health and care proposals are. As Iain Gray has said, it is looking at reducing the number of territorial health boards,

and Labour's social care policy is rather confused. It is my preference, as the local MSP, to retain coterminous public bodies that can gain savings and efficiencies by coming together in many areas and delivering services rather than having more centralised quangos.

Given the stark statistic that there are more police at an old firm game in Glasgow than there are in the entire Borders, what will the direction of policing and local priorities be if there is a central police agency for Scotland? One chief of police will answer to one justice minister, sitting alongside another, as happened in a summit this week. The Borders will be the poorer and local services will be under threat.

10:05

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The motion talks about police, fire and social work services, but we need a debate that gets beyond the propaganda and into the proposals. Too often, a motion poses many questions but offers no solutions. The motion today appears to be empty of answers that will deal with the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

In the Northern Constabulary area, there has been yet another Lib Dem petition, with photographs of members and candidates outside the Dingwall area police headquarters, claiming that the headquarters would close down if there was a centralised police force. On which facts is that based? Fears at propaganda level are being spread by candidates, who claim that the Liberals are the party of decentralisation and that everyone else is against it.

Mike Rumbles: Hear, hear. Well said, sir.

Rob Gibson: Indeed, but the fact is that the SNP has removed ring fencing and many other things. In the SNP's long history, we have been for taking power as close to the people as possible.

Why are we having this debate now, when cash cuts are being imposed from London—for whatever reason—and the solutions that we must find have to ensure that the cut fits the cloth?

Robert Brown: Will the member take an intervention?

Rob Gibson: I will not, at the moment. I want to deal with decentralisation.

Community planning is said to be an important issue, but when have we heard any suggestions about community decision making in the proposals from the Liberal Democrats? That would involve an expensive but necessary reform of local government structures. People can talk till the cows come home about what they think should be done locally, but people do not currently have the

powers to do those things. I would be happy to have that debate.

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

Rob Gibson: I will not, at the moment, thank you.

On social work, I have been asking about the relationship between the council and the health board on the pilot that is going on in the Highland Council area at the moment. We want to ensure that responsibility for social work services for adults and the elderly will be with Highland NHS Board. We want to ensure that there is transparency and that communities of all sizes are served by the proposals. I am the person who is arguing for those things. On Monday, at a national health service board meeting that was called to discuss that, no Liberal Democrat was present. Yet again, the Lib Dems talk about protecting communities, but they do not attend the meetings at which such issues are discussed. That happens a lot. Like other health boards, NHS Highland needs to be watched. I would like the health board to be more accountable, but we have to have the argument about how that can happen.

I want to talk about the police service's views. In a letter to me, the assistant secretary of the northern branch of the Scottish Police Federation said:

"Every effort must be made to ensure that whatever the resultant structures the people who have elected you to represent them are afforded representation which is in their best interests to ensure current service provision is maintained and protected."

My view is that the area commanders should be responsible, on a six-weekly basis, to local area committees of elected unitary authority councillors. The police board is one eighth of councillors, but all councillors should be involved. While that goes on, the area inspector can be attending a community council meeting in Wick and discussing vandalism, boy racers and issues related to closed circuit television. That would not stop. It is the kind of activity that goes on now—it will continue and is not threatened. However, if we were to listen to the Liberal Democrats, we would believe that that is precisely the kind of activity that the proposals for a modern police service would threaten. Not at all.

The debate is about how to deal with the modern police service. The police need to be able to deploy methods that are suitable for the type of crimes that specific areas face. Smaller police forces need to call in specialists for particular activities. Northern Constabulary has to pay for armed officers when the royal family are in our area. Part of the problem is that, in small communities, we need to find economies of scale.

We need a debate on the services that people want from the police in the future, but that debate is not part of the Liberal Democrats' propaganda exercise ahead of the election. They claim that they will protect communities and that everybody else is against that. The substance of my argument is that that is not true.

With budgets being slashed, we have to ask how the morale of the police will be affected by the United Kingdom measures to cut the employer's contribution to police pensions by making police pay more for their pensions. That undermining of morale is happening in police services throughout Britain as a result of measures by the Liberal Democrat-Conservative Government in London. Frankly, when we look at the details, we find a different set of arguments to which people want answers, but to which the motion provides absolutely no answers at all.

10:11

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate on local services, which has been introduced by the Liberal Democrats. All members will be well aware from their constituency surgeries of the importance of local services. A flood of constituents come through the doors to talk about issues such as housing, crime and education.

The debate is about how we interact with and improve local services. However, the logic of the Liberal Democrat motion, in opposing single police and fire services and saying that those would undermine local delivery, is absolutely incorrect in the current circumstances. I have to wonder at the commitment of the Liberal Democrat group to that cause and the motion, given that there are only five Liberal Democrats in the chamber, during a debate that their party has introduced. *[Interruption.]* Maybe Mr Hume should go round the MSP offices and round up some support for his cause.

In examining the case for single police and fire services, the starting point has to be the financial situation. It is absolutely clear that £1.3 billion of cuts are being driven from the coalition at Westminster in the coming year's budget and that, in the years to come, there will be further cuts of billions of pounds. That must be considered carefully. The Justice Committee has heard evidence that the way in which the cuts have been addressed in the Scottish budget will result in 1,200 police support workers losing their jobs. The effect of that will be that police officers will not be able to spend the same amount of time on the beat as they do now, because they will be brought back to police offices to carry out jobs that are undertaken by support staff.

Robert Brown: I accept that point, which is one that we have been making for some time. On the savings that James Kelly uses as the basis of his justification for supporting a single police force, can he say when those savings would kick in? We have not heard that from the Government yet. Would it be four or five years down the line, as seems to be the case from the information that we have had?

James Kelly: I will deal later in my speech with how the proposal will save money.

We face a situation in which the effectiveness of police on the beat is already being undermined by the budget situation in which we find ourselves. When we look at the proposed budget cuts in England and Wales, it is quite clear that, if we stand still, public safety will be undermined and the ability of the police to carry out their roles effectively under the current structures will be seriously under threat.

The same principles apply in the fire service. That is why the Fire Brigades Union Scotland has taken a proactive approach to the issue. It represents the rights of firefighters, but it is also close to the interests of public safety and believes that if we are going to have a model that not only protects firefighter and police numbers but delivers public safety, we need to move away from the current structure and consider an alternative.

It stands to reason that money can be saved by moving away from a structure that involves eight police authorities and eight fire boards. We do not need eight human resources divisions, eight information technology divisions and eight central services departments and all the buildings that house those sections.

We should also consider fleet management. If we had a central service that managed the procurement of police cars, fire engines and so on throughout Scotland, we could make substantial savings. There are examples of that south of the border, such as in the Metropolitan Police. Obviously, there will be short-term costs involved in setting up the new structures, but it stands to reason that moving from eight organisations to one organisation will enable savings to be made.

The Liberal Democrats' argument is that centralisation would result in poor delivery of services and a decline in local accountability. However, I see the move to a single service as being an opportunity to enhance and build on local accountability. For example, there is currently limited opportunity for the community in Cambuslang to liaise with Cambuslang fire station. However, under our new proposal, which seeks to give people a say at ward level, we could introduce a structure to give people the ability to

interact more proactively with the police and fire service at local level.

There is no doubt in my mind that there is a bit of hypocrisy in the Liberal Democrats' position. They are calling for the structures in Scotland to remain in place at a time when Danny Alexander is bringing forward proposals that will cut 28,000 jobs south of the border.

The Scottish National Party's position is confused. Last week, Dave Thompson told us that he supports a four-region structure and, yesterday, Bob Doris was on television telling us that we would not be able to know the position until the outcome of the consultation. The SNP is divided on this issue. There are disagreements within its group. That is why the cabinet secretary, who has previously been supportive of a single force, has rolled back from that position—he wants to cover up the cracks within the SNP group. The SNP is going into the election with a divided position.

It is absolutely clear to me that we are going to protect the delivery of local services. If there is a fire in Fernhill in my constituency, I want fire fighters there, not HR consultants. If there is a gang fight in Cambuslang, I want police officers there, not management consultants.

We need to look to new models to rebuild local accountability and deliver a structure that will provide improved public services.

10:19

Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): It is unsurprising that the Liberal Democrats have chosen to debate local services. They are clutching at straws—no, at one very thin straw—as they face up to a humiliating slump in their support because of their stance on student fees and the deep and damaging cuts that they are making as members of the Westminster coalition. They took a humiliating sixth place in a recent by-election.

Forgive me if I am wrong but, in all the budget discussions and parliamentary debates, I do not remember the Liberal Democrats asking for the justice budget to be protected. Did they? I do not remember that. The Liberal Democrats are cynically deceiving the public by claiming that the status quo is an option when it is not—*[Interruption.]* As usual, Mr Rumbles shouts from a sedentary position.

Mike Rumbles: Will Maureen Watt take an intervention?

Maureen Watt: Not yet—let me continue.

What is important to people is the number of police officers who patrol their communities, of whom there are 1,036 more under the SNP than there were at the end of the previous

Administration, of which the Liberal Democrats were a part.

Robert Brown: Will Maureen Watt respond to ACPOS's comment that the claimed potential saving of £197 million would be achievable only

"through the loss of thousands of officers and support staff"?

Maureen Watt: ACPOS's view is only one of many. At least the SNP has engaged with people. I understand that the Liberal Democrats have not been in touch with the FBU or the fire services to find out their feelings.

Police numbers correlate with a falling crime rate, which has reached its lowest level for 32 years. Against the background of a shrinking budget, the overriding priority is to maintain police numbers. Wild claims of massive reductions in police numbers from a single force are ludicrous and scaremongering. The Liberal Democrats at Westminster are taking 12,000 police officers off the streets in England, while the SNP is keeping police on the streets in Scotland. The wild claims of massive reductions do those who make them no credit at all. The chance of police numbers falling will be far greater if no structural reform is made as the Westminster cuts continue to bite.

The Liberal Democrats talk about local accountability, but true local accountability is at present patchy. Many chief constables hide behind the tag of operational matters instead of being open and accountable to their joint police boards. In times of financial stringency, should chief constables receive thousands of pounds in performance-related bonuses? Where was the local accountability recently when Grampian joint police board's convener—a Liberal Democrat—wanted to discuss the board's response to the consultation behind closed doors? The discussion was delayed and was not in public. When the cabinet secretary discusses the future with that board shortly, he will discuss board members' individual views and not the view of the board as a whole.

We can ask the people of Parkhead in Glasgow whether they feel that local accountability exists. Glasgow's east end is prone to a high rate of house fires and fire deaths, but Parkhead's local fire station was closed as a result of decisions that were taken by councillors from Ayrshire and Argyll and Bute. Is it sensible that retained fire personnel in Stornoway are told which streets to cover for fire prevention by people in Inverness rather than by personnel on the ground who know the streets and households that have more fire risk? Is it sensible that, if Tayside fire personnel are called to help at an incident outside their area, they need to return to Dundee to refill their breathing apparatus,

because fire boards have different BA sets? Fire services even use different sizes of fire hose.

As the Liberal Democrats in Westminster impose massive cuts on Scotland, it is only right that we should consider how to deliver services in the most efficient way possible. As James Kelly said, do 32 local authorities, eight police boards, eight fire boards and 14 health boards all need their own procurement, human resources, IT and other back-office departments? In the face of the cuts, funding that type of duplication is simply not sustainable.

Given the tenor of the debate so far, every party in the chamber bar the Liberal Democrats recognises the severity of the budget cuts and supports the Government in consulting on the shape of local service delivery, which will be influenced by the priorities of the ordinary people, one of which is safer streets.

Unsustainable bureaucracies have blossomed under current structures. The shape of bureaucracy in the police force is an equilateral triangle and in the fire service it is cylindrical. I understand that a recent shift in Dumfries and Galloway comprised five front-line firefighters and 43 back-office staff. Is that the right balance? I do not think so.

There is an opportunity to reduce duplication of effort, deliver services efficiently and increase local accountability and flexibility. Claiming that that is not the case, as the Liberal Democrats are doing, is completely disingenuous but utterly typical of the party's approach to politics.

10:26

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Although I do not often agree with Maureen Watt, I am happy to do so today. Her opening sentences were particularly insightful. This debate is more about the Lib Dems searching for a dividing line for the election, which is desperate stuff indeed.

As other members have shown, the Lib Dems' talk does not match up to their actions in government in Scotland or in the United Kingdom coalition with the Tories. I say to Robert Brown and Jeremy Purvis as gently as I can that, following a debate in the Parliament in which the national care service was mentioned, I e-mailed the Lib Dems to offer discussions and explain our approach, but I never heard back from them. If there is confusion on Jeremy Purvis's part, it is entirely his fault.

I have worked in local government and the voluntary sector. Indeed, for much of my working life, I have supported and valued community development approaches and community capacity building. I will take no lessons from the Liberals on

localism, particularly not when they are acting as handmaidens to the Tories, who are intent on wrecking the NHS—or is dismantling the NHS by giving doctors a commissioning budget an example of their new-found localism in action? If it is, we do not want any of it.

Mike Rumbles: The last time I looked, the NHS was a devolved responsibility in Scotland.

Jackie Baillie: Oh, but by your actions you will be known. How the Liberal Democrats operate in the rest of the UK is of clear interest to people in Scotland.

Let us look at what the Liberal Democrats are doing in our capital city, where real changes are taking place. There are cuts in social work budgets and services for the elderly and the closure of nurseries. Those are attacks on some of the most vulnerable people in our community. Frankly, if that is an example of localism in action under the Lib Dems, they can keep it.

Unfortunately, the Lib Dems have got it wrong again. I will leave it to other members to talk more eloquently than I can about the police and fire services; I will focus on social work services and Labour's proposal for a national care service. Three parties in the chamber—the Conservatives, SNP and Labour—believe that there is a greater need for integration between the NHS and social work. For others to argue that there is a centralising tendency in our approach lacks intellectual rigour. The argument fails to recognise the scale of the challenge that we face with increasing numbers of older people. The demographic change will be significant. I expect that the Minister for Public Health and Sport will trot out a plethora of statistics on the subject, but the figure that stands out for me is that there will be 75 per cent more 75-year-olds in about 20 to 25 years' time. There will be many more older people and an increased demand on services. Simply adopting the status quo is not an option.

Most if not all of us agree that working together is essential. The joint future strategy is now 11 years old. That policy was about encouraging local government and the NHS to work together to pool budgets and join up their services but, frankly, the results have been patchy. In some areas, there has been excellent joint working; in others, relationships can best be described as dysfunctional. The tragedy is that people still fall through the gaps.

I have a constituent who saw an occupational therapist in the acute sector, an OT in the primary care sector and an OT in the council. All of them are great OTs, but the constituent still had to wait six months to get the aid that they needed. It is not right that, in a country the size of Scotland, there is a huge postcode lottery in care. Can anyone

genuinely explain to me why a particular service costs a couple in West Dunbartonshire £35 a week, whereas in neighbouring Argyll and Bute—five minutes away—it costs £300? Is that the kind of localism that the Liberals want? The scale of cuts that social work services and community groups that sustain so many people in our local areas are currently feeling will have a negative impact on older people.

Ninety-three per cent of older people do not come into contact with formal care, which is great. They are sustained by friends, families, carers, their local library, their lunch club, their befriending project and their Age Concern branch. However, those are some of the very services that are being cut.

Robert Brown: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: No.

Doing nothing in the face of all those challenges is a recipe for disaster. Labour would create a national care service, sitting within the NHS—not a new agency, as the Liberals mistakenly believe, but a service based on local integrated teams, delivering in communities and managed by reformed community health partnerships. We would have new governance arrangements, putting elected members in charge and increasing accountability.

Robert Brown: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: No.

I point out to the Liberals that there are 20 more community health partnerships than there are local authorities, making them a much more local unit of accountability than is currently the case. I hope that that is welcome. We would provide local delivery, local management, new local accountability, a national framework setting minimum expectations and local budgets. We would deliver what older people tell us they want—fairness and consistency, and to know that care will be provided, should they ever need it.

I return to the 93 per cent who do not come into contact with care. Our new dialogue must be about prevention, which is key. We know that, unless we provide general community facilities and support, more older people will need to engage with the care system earlier. Unless we provide people with appropriate care packages in their homes, sustaining them in their communities, inevitably they will end up at the front door of their local hospital as admissions. We have talked in the chamber about shifting the balance of care, but that has not happened to the degree that is required. The money remains locked in the health sector and, on the ground, local authorities are finding it increasingly difficult to fund prevention work, never mind care packages.

Of course, there are two different cultures in health and social work. Both are respected and valued, and there is a key role for social work moving forward. However, both are united by their common purpose, which is to focus on the needs of older people and to deliver the best possible outcomes. With the exception of the Liberals, we recognise the need to bring the services closer together if we are to meet the challenges that lie ahead. From their motion and the contributions that they have made so far, it appears that the Liberals want us to stand still. If we do that, we will fail this and the next generation of older people in Scotland.

10:33

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): This is an interesting Lib Dem motion. For the second week in a row, they have chosen to debate this matter. Anyone would think that they cared about local services, but is that really the case?

Jim Hume: Steady on.

Dave Thompson: If Mr Hume will bear with me, I will explain why I said that.

The motion criticises

“the apparently endless desire on the part of centralising national politicians to attempt to take over control of local services”.

However, have the Lib Dems thought that through, or have they just not realised that the real centralisers are their very own Nick Clegg, Danny Alexander and the rest of the motley crew at Westminster? Is this just more of the hypocrisy that we are used to hearing from the Lib Dems? After all, they are hypocrites par excellence. At the moment, they are happily centralising the Ministry of Defence in the south-east of England, to the great detriment of Scotland. They are happily centralising the coastguard, with little thought about the north of Scotland. They are happily centralising the Stornoway and Lerwick tugs, by withdrawing funding and leaving it to the private sector.

However, perhaps I have misjudged the Lib Dems. Perhaps they realise the full impact of their motion and have written to their centralising leader, Nick Clegg, opposing the centralising decisions that he is taking. Then again, maybe pigs will fly.

The Lib Dem motion also says that they want a new approach from Government

“that trusts local people to make good decisions for their areas”.

Is that not just more of their hypocrisy? Where was their desire to trust the people of Scotland to make

good decisions when they watered down their own Calman proposals? Where was their desire to trust the people of Scotland to make good decisions when they vetoed a referendum on the future of Scotland?

Mike Rumbles: The member said that we vetoed the referendum bill on independence for Scotland. Can he remind us when the nationalist Government brought forward its referendum bill?

Dave Thompson: Mr Rumbles's leader, Tavish Scott, made it clear at a very early stage in this session of Parliament that the Lib Dems would not support giving the people of Scotland the chance to have their say on the future of Scotland, which is something that we would have thought the Lib Dems would have been all in favour of.

To add to their hypocrisy, as Rob Gibson has said, the Lib Dems are misleading people on these issues and on the position of other parties by distributing election leaflets on policing in the north that contain a number of untruths. For instance, the Lib Dems state in one leaflet, which I have before me, that

"The SNP and Labour are backing plans to create a single Scottish police force based in the Central Belt."

Mike Rumbles: They are.

Dave Thompson: The statement in that leaflet is patently untrue. As the cabinet secretary has explained—perhaps Mr Rumbles should listen for a change instead of shouting—there is a consultation on the go, which offers three options for the future. No decisions have been made. In fact, some people would call the statements in the Lib Dem leaflet lies, but I could not possibly do that.

Jim Hume: The member mentioned the consultation. Can he tell us which option he will go for? Will he go for the status quo or for four police boards, or will he put in a submission saying that there should be a single force?

Dave Thompson: I will come to that point later in my speech so, if Mr Hume sits back comfortably for a wee while, I will let him know.

In the same leaflet, the Lib Dems state that

"at least 200 frontline police officers would be taken from the streets of the Highlands and Islands."

Where do they get such nonsense from? To suggest that a single police force will be at the expense of 200 out of Northern Constabulary's 787 police officers is stretching credibility to its limits and is irresponsible electoral scaremongering.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member give way?

Dave Thompson: I need to make progress.

Jeremy Purvis: My point is on this issue.

Dave Thompson: I might give Mr Purvis a chance in a wee minute, but let me make some progress.

For the sake of clarity, the three options in the Government's consultation on the future of the police are: first, the status quo; secondly, three or four forces; and, thirdly, a single Scottish force.

The Government has rightly not taken a position on the matter. Of the three options, I do not believe that the current set-up, with eight chief constables and the associated management costs, is tenable, so some reduction is inevitable. Those who advocate the retention of the current model must tell us how they will pay for it and keep a record number of police on the beat.

However, Mr Hume should know that I do have concerns about a single force model, as there is a danger that we will in effect swap control from Inverness for control from Glasgow or Edinburgh, with a loss of decision-making power and senior posts from the north of Scotland. That is a real danger. There is also the issue of who polices the police. Currently, another force would be called in to do that and to deal with a complaint, so we need to know how such situations would be dealt with.

I am pleased that the cabinet secretary has acknowledged those dangers and the importance of local communities. Indeed, the consultation document makes it clear that restructuring provides the opportunity to devolve greater responsibility to the local level, with improvements in local engagement and accountability.

Robert Brown: Before Dave Thompson finishes, can he comment on ACPOS's statement that there would be a loss of thousands of officers and support staff and on how that fits with his proposition that there will be improved services and so on?

Dave Thompson: I have no doubt that such comments are genuinely believed, but it seems to me that they are a bit of an exaggeration. We need only consider the facts of the matter. In previous reorganisations, the opposite happened. Let us go by experience and not surmise.

My preference is for a four-force model, in which Northern Constabulary would be expanded to take in Moray and Argyll, which face issues that are similar to the issues that the current Northern Constabulary areas face. I have been pressing the option for some time. It would give us an expanded Northern Constabulary of around 1,300 police officers, which would cover a population of about 450,000 and an area of 15,000 square miles, with a budget of about £70 million. The expanded force would be a substantial organisation.

I have an open mind on the three other forces in Scotland. Maybe Grampian Police and Tayside Police could merge. Strathclyde Police could join with Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary. Lothian and Borders Police might merge with Fife Constabulary and Central Scotland Police.

Although I favour the four-force model and have made that clear to the Government, I look forward to hearing the arguments of the people who favour a single force. I want to hear how such a force would ensure enhanced local accountability and better local policing for the Highlands and Islands, and which of its Scotland-wide functions would be operated from the north.

10:41

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I have listened with interest to the Liberal Democrats and, like other members, I am shaking my head in wonder. It seems that they have a face for every door and a different comment for every door. That is typical of the Liberals.

Labour's proposals for a single police service, a national fire and rescue service and a national care service would benefit vulnerable people in society, cut down on red tape and redirect money to be spent on things that matter to the public. I have put on record my support for a single police force and can see no logic behind the Liberal Democrats' argument. A universal force could save money. More important, it would make policing more efficient and put money where it is needed.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

Cathie Craigie: I need to make progress.

My constituency, Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, falls within the jurisdiction of Strathclyde Police, and I whole-heartedly agree with Chief Constable Stephen House, who last month expressed his support for a single Scottish police force. He said:

"We would not need a series of ad hoc mutual aid agreements. If a major incident happened, we would not need a series of hurried phone calls between forces regarding resources. We would be able to act as one organisation to make sure that what was needed was done."

Police would be able to respond more quickly to large-scale incidents, as the cabinet secretary pointed out.

Mike Rumbles: How does the member think that her constituents in Cumbernauld would feel if the chief constable of a new single force were to be located in Aberdeen?

Cathie Craigie: In this time of modern communications, I do not think that where the chief constable is located is important.

The Liberal Democrats seem to think that there is a conspiracy against Grampian Police and Northern Constabulary and that a single force will focus on the central belt. I am pleased that Chief Constable House agrees with me that that is no more than scaremongering. A Liberal Democrat councillor has compared the power that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice would gain if there were a single police force to the power of Colonel Gaddafi in Libya. That is wholly untrue. The suggestion is careless, irresponsible and ludicrous.

What people want is a police force that meets their aspirations at local level. We do not need multiple administrative functions and senior officers. People in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth want local community policing. They want to see police on the beat. When they make contact with the police by telephone, they want to speak to people who know what they are talking about. They want to see civilian staff behind the desks, so that the police can be out on the streets doing the job that they are trained to do.

A single force will allow redistribution of funding so that we can spend money in communities and on having police on the streets, rather than spending money on administrators in central offices.

Alison McInnes: The crux of much of our concern is the issue of police on the streets, but on whose streets? Is there not a danger that there will not be an equitable distribution of police resources under a centralised national force, that resources will all be drawn towards the centre, where the biggest amount of crime takes place, and that it will be much harder for areas of lower crime to secure enough police?

Cathie Craigie: No, I do not agree with that at all. People are far too professional to allow that to happen. The police have to respond to the needs of a community.

Somebody mentioned Parkhead earlier, and I think that it was Jeremy Purvis who mentioned old firm games. Of course policing is required when there are tens of thousands of people gathering—more than are needed in a small town or village. Those are professional decisions, taken by professionals.

The proposal for a national fire and rescue service has wide support. The people who do the job know that it can be done better and more cost effectively if resources are targeted to the front line, not to bureaucracy.

I will move on to Labour's proposals for a national care service. Jackie Baillie explained our position on this very well. I am proud to be a member of the party that established the national health service and the wider welfare state in the

aftermath of the second world war. In times of hardship, particularly economic hardship, it is important that politicians step up to the plate and make decisions that will benefit the lives of the people who elected us to serve. The national care service will provide a consistent approach to caring for our elderly population. I am sure that I am no different from other members, who will have heard stories of terrible cases where an elderly person has spent a period of time in hospital; they and their family may have tried hard to get a care package set up, for instance, but have ended up feeling that they have been thrown from pillar to post, between the local council and the national health service, with no one taking responsibility for the package of care that is needed.

About a year and a half ago, I had a meeting in a constituent's living room. There were 12 professionals there, some representing the NHS and some representing the local council. It took those 12 people to try and set up a care package to meet the complex needs of the individual concerned—and that was after months during which my constituent had been trying to get things organised herself. Surely that is not right. As Jackie Baillie pointed out, there is duplication, with people seemingly doing the same job. Instead, we could bring it all together and have the job done better with one organisation taking responsibility. I think that we could do that under a national care service. Budgets are tight, and we have to consider ways to spend money wisely.

Presiding Officer, I am just waiting for you to intervene to tell me that it is time that I was sitting down. I will pre-empt you and come to my conclusion.

The Liberal Democrats are against a single police force, which would improve efficiency. They are against a national care service for Scotland, which would benefit the elderly and the vulnerable in our community. They are against a national fire and rescue service, which would direct money right to the front line, rather than to the bureaucrats behind their desks. They are against moving and changing with the times. They have come to the chamber today to slam the proposals that others have put forward, but they do not have any proposals themselves. As I said earlier, they have a face for every door, but they do not have the police detail. It is farcical.

The Liberal Democrats have sold their souls to the Tories, and the SNP has spent four years promising so much and delivering so little. Neither of those parties can be surprised if they never again gain the support of the people of Scotland.

10:49

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): There is much in the tone of the Liberal Democrat motion with which I am naturally sympathetic. The centralisation of service provision is indeed something that should be avoided in order that local accountability, which the motion alludes to, is enhanced. However, the Liberal Democrats cannot have it all ways. They cannot devote as much energy as they have done to keeping the Parliament subjugated to the authority of Westminster and simultaneously claim to be both democrats, which they have proven themselves not to be, and decentralists. Neither can they so enthusiastically prop up the most damaging policies of excessive, too-deep-too-fast, public sector cuts that we have seen in a generation from the Liberal Democrats south of the border while blocking moves to save millions of pounds on administering out-of-date systems for fire and police boards, each with its own bureaucracy. They cannot cut and then refuse to cut the bureaucracy. They cannot have it both ways.

I understand why the Liberal Democrats want to make their points—as a symbolic, easy-hit campaign tool a few weeks ahead of a Scottish election—but I do not accept that their intentions carry anything even remotely resembling the Scottish national interest. The Scottish Government stands for the Scottish national interest above all else, which is why, in the face of serious budget cuts, plans to amalgamate police and fire services seem immeasurably preferable to the alternative loss of front-line services and the damaging effect that it would have if the Lib Dems had their way.

Robert Brown: Can Bob Doris shed any light on the question that I have asked before? When will the savings, so called, kick in? Will it be during the period of the current comprehensive spending review, for example?

Bob Doris: We cannot have a consultation process while working out the final details and then micromanage savings. Mr Brown should get on board with the consensus and be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Given the choice between an organisational structure in Scottish policing that fits the admittedly attractive-sounding philosophy behind the Liberal Democrat motion and the maintenance and expansion of the SNP policy of extra police, I will choose the extra police every time. It is the sign of a good Government that priorities are decided on the results that make Scotland a better place to live in, and with recorded crime at a 32-year low, I tend to think that most people in Scotland would prefer policies that focus on protecting their rights as citizens to live free from the horrors of crime over cutting police. The crime statistics tell me that

there are about 1,100 extra police officers since 2007. They are simply not expendable, so a responsible Scottish Government has to take steps to maintain those numbers.

I welcome this debate, as it is of course the stated intention of the Government to listen and to consult widely before enacting any proposals. However, it is clear that there will be savings for the public purse. The interim report of the sustainable policing project estimates annual savings of £197 million for a single police force. Opponents are free to argue that that is not the case and that no savings will be realised, but I do not think that that position is objective. Any politician who seeks to oppose such plans on ideological grounds will have to explain any figures that they have sourced and where they would get their money from.

There are problems with the Liberal Democrats' motion on a number of levels, but I will elaborate on just two. First, the sheer alarmism of the wording makes me think that the Lib Dems' main interest is to create headlines for the election campaign, not to offer the constructive input that the Parliament needs. It is not often that the Labour Party, the Conservatives and the SNP all get together to seek the interests of the Scottish people, while the Lib Dems are left standing on the sidelines. Let it be noted that the Lib Dems are on the sidelines this morning.

On social work, for example, the motion states that we will be

"destroying those successful local initiatives that are already in place".

The Lib Dems need to name them and tell us why they will be destroyed. Serious concerns need to be aired as part of a process of constructive politics, but when the policy intention is clearly to protect services in difficult times, it is simply not good enough to create even more fear and alarm without explaining in convincing detail what could be made worse or suggesting how to make matters better. The Lib Dems are offering nothing in this debate except service cuts on a cheque signed off from their Government at Westminster.

Jim Hume: The member said that we are not offering anything. We are actually offering to keep local accountability. Can I read a small quotation and see what his answer to it is? This is from a Hawick policeman:

"There is nothing more precious than local knowledge, especially in the police force. I have seen at first hand centralisation in the police force. Many have never even heard of the Borders, never mind knowing where it is."

Bob Doris: I could not hear all of that, but let me tell the member about local knowledge in Strathclyde, where there is already devolution of decision making, despite the large size of the

police force. In Possil in Maryhill, there are dispersal orders in place as a result of the local knowledge of local police officers and local decision making on the ground. If that is happening in Strathclyde, why cannot it happen within a national structure? The Lib Dem position is completely untenable. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Purvis may wish to intervene.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Excuse me, Mr Purvis. If you have an intervention to make, would you get to your feet, please?

Jeremy Purvis: I apologise, Presiding Officer. I thank the member for letting me in after my unwarranted sedentary comment. My point was that it is clear that the member has made up his mind that there should be one police force for Scotland.

Bob Doris: Quite the opposite, Mr Purvis. I am taking part in the debate because I remain to be convinced on what the best structure is and because I want to inform myself. This morning, I have had information from the Conservatives, the Labour Party and the SNP Scottish Government, but I have had absolutely nothing from the Liberal Democrats. Perhaps the best structure would be a national force; perhaps it would involve two or three forces. I do not know what the final solution is, but I know that it is necessary to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

When it comes to the final framework for the police force, the ink is not even on the paper as yet, never mind dry. I urge the Lib Dems not to seek headlines, but to pursue the interests of the Scottish people by getting on board and joining the consensus in the chamber.

10:56

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Like you, Presiding Officer, I am not seeking re-election in May. I will genuinely miss the friendship of many committed and hard-working members of the Scottish Parliament—including you, Presiding Officer—from all parties. I do not think that it is yet fully recognised around the country how hard working members are, and I will do my best to spread that around.

I will also miss these overwhelmingly exciting debates, but I will not miss the sanctimonious, holier-than-thou sermons from some of the Liberal Democrats, in which they preach rather than debate.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): Does the member expect the excitement level to rise when he returns to the House of Lords?

George Foulkes: It is certainly more exciting when I am there than when I am not. That is for sure.

The Liberal Democrats keep trying to represent themselves as the nice party, the one that is different from the Tories and the Labour Party and the Punch and Judy show that they put on, but now the difference between Liberal Democrats in opposition and Liberal Democrats in government has been exposed at Westminster. As Jackie Baillie said, they are handmaidens to the Tories; I would say that they are the Tories' little helpers.

The mantra that keeps being repeated, which we heard again from John Lamont, is that the excuse for their doctrinaire cuts—which is what the cuts that we are getting from Westminster are—is the Labour Government's mismanagement of the economy.

Robert Brown: Will the member give way?

George Foulkes: Och—in a moment.

At no point during the 13 years of the Labour Government did I ever hear a Liberal Democrat or, indeed, a Tory say, "Spend less," "Don't spend as much, Gordon," or "Don't spend all that, Alistair." It was quite the reverse. They wanted more to be spent on the health service and on education—they argued that case again and again. They will not acknowledge that we have a worldwide economic crisis, which stemmed from sub-prime mortgages.

The scale of the cuts that are being enforced by the UK Government—Liberal Democrats as well as Tories—is not justified in any way. We see the U-turns of the Liberal Democrats and their real hypocrisy on tuition fees, on which they signed the pledge and then pretended that they had not. On bankers' bonuses, they wanted swift action when they were in opposition, but in government they have done almost nothing. We are talking about the reorganisation of the police service. What could be more damaging to the police in Scotland and the UK than cutting the pay of the people who do the work?

Now the Liberal Democrats are behaving like the Keystone Kops. Vince Cable blurts out his hatred for Murdoch to an undercover reporter and, as a result, loses the power to decide. Nick Clegg forgets that he is in charge as the Deputy Prime Minister and goes off on a skiing holiday to Klosters. That is not to mention David Laws. No wonder they got the Barnsley chop and came in in sixth place. They were not just behind the British National Party and the UK Independence Party; they were even behind an independent candidate. That is a real humiliation for the Lib Dems, and it will come to them in Scotland, too.

Locally, the disenchantment with the Liberal Democrats is reflected right here in Edinburgh. Jenny Dawe might not yet be quite as unpopular as Nick Clegg, but we should give it time. Councillor Dawe is certainly heading that way as a result of her shambolic performance as leader of City of Edinburgh Council. Antipathy towards the Lib Dems has already been reflected in the recent by-elections in Liberton and Gilmerton, when they were trounced by the Labour Party.

Councillor Dawe has demonstrated the same astonishing level of arrogance as Nick Clegg, most recently in her handling of the gathering 2009 affair. Our own Public Audit Committee unanimously—including Nicol Stephen—deemed the evidence of the leader of the council to be not credible.

Robert Brown: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Perhaps we could have some guidance on what on earth all this has to do with the motion that is before us.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have been keeping my eye on that. As George Foulkes comes back in, I ask him to keep his eye on the motion to which he is speaking.

George Foulkes: This is all about localism. Mr Brown might have a desire to take over from you as Deputy Presiding Officer, but I hope that in May the electorate will ensure that that is not possible.

Councillor Dawe could have held up her hands and accepted the conclusions in the Public Audit Committee's report, but what did she do? She blackened the names of some of the council officials.

Then we have the shambles of the implementation of the trams project. *[Interruption.]* I am talking about Liberal Democrats in power locally and making comparisons. If we look at what they do—their arrogance over the gathering and their incompetence over the trams—we know what they are like in power.

Mike Rumbles: Would the member make those same comments about the Liberal Democrats who supported the Labour Party in a coalition Government for the first eight years of the Parliament's existence? Is he still so critical of Liberal Democrats when we work with Labour?

George Foulkes: Yes. The one thing about Mike Rumbles is that he talks and talks and talks, but he seldom listens. The only way to learn—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Foulkes, just be careful about what you are saying. We are talking about local services.

George Foulkes: The only way to learn is to listen, not to talk, and Rumbles never listens.

I am talking about localism and the funding cuts that have been led by Councillor Dawe. The most recent cuts, to the disabled workforce, have put people's lives at risk. The work that is being done by disabled people in Edinburgh gives them fulfilment and a sense of purpose. It is particularly shocking that Councillor Dawe even thought about jeopardising their independence in the first place.

The Community union, along with the other unions that are represented at Blindcraft, has organised a march on Parliament today to call on Scotland's political leaders to save the organisation. I urge the Scottish Government to do all that it can to save Blindcraft and come outside at 12.30 to join the demonstrators.

When we look at Edinburgh and Aberdeen locally, whether we are looking at the police service or the fire service or tuition fees, we see Liberal Democrats in power and we see the hypocrisy of them doing something totally different, and saying something totally different, from what they did when they were in opposition.

I will miss a lot of the friendships that I have made here, but I will not miss the preaching of those sermons, particularly from the Liberal Democrat front bench.

11:05

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Notwithstanding how much I enjoyed Lord Foulkes's speech, I will try to address the terms of the motion that is before us. I am grateful to the Liberal Democrats for bringing the debate to the chamber, as it allows us to explore issues of local accountability and perhaps to contrast what the Lib Dems say today with their past record.

Before I get into that, I must first agree with James Kelly—I see that he has momentarily left the chamber—on how disappointing it is that there have been so few Liberal Democrats in the chamber for the debate this morning. We started the debate with only 11 Liberal Democrats present when Robert Brown got on his feet. That number fell to five, and throughout most of the debate there have been only six present in the chamber. Perhaps the Liberal Democrats are getting the rest of us used to how things will be after May. Perhaps, as they sit and look round at the rows of empty seats in the chamber, they will be reminded of their conference in Perth last weekend.

In opening the debate, Robert Brown talked about the importance of local accountability and how the centralising approach that others are developing is anathema to the Lib Dems. Indeed, the motion states in glowing terms:

"the people of Scotland will be better served by a new approach from government that trusts local people to make good decisions for their areas".

I checked the Liberal Democrats' record in government, as I am sure Robert Brown would have expected me to do. I wonder where that concern for local accountability was when, as I mentioned earlier, the Liberal Democrats were part of a Government that scrapped the area tourist boards and took away the local democratic accountability from tourism? Where was that concern when the Liberal Democrats oversaw the scrapping of the three regional water boards and their absorption into Scottish Water as one national service?

Where was the new approach to which the motion refers that

"equips local government with the powers, levers and authority to drive innovation and improvement in local services"

when for eight years the Lib Dems were part of a Government that ring fenced virtually every penny that went to local government? Where was the new approach to local accountability when Nicol Stephen, as a Lib Dem Minister for Transport, removed Strathclyde Passenger Transport's rail powers and centralised it under Transport Scotland as part of the Scottish Government?

I understand the Liberal Democrats' need to develop a narrative for the coming election, given the dire straits that they are in. However, we should judge them by their actions in government, not by their rhetoric today.

I turn to the issue of social care. I was a little confused when I saw the motion, as it refers to the centralisation of "social work"—in fact, it took Robert Brown to clarify that for us in his opening remarks, when he referred to social care, so I give two out of 10 to the drafter of the motion.

There is a serious problem with social care that is recognised on all sides of the chamber. We have separate budgets for these matters: social care is funded from local government, and yet hospital stays are funded from the NHS. That has created a concern that was highlighted by Lord Sutherland more than 10 years ago, as it has led to the problem of delayed discharge, which is familiar to all of us in the chamber. As somebody who represents Fife, I am painfully conscious of the problems with delayed discharge that there have been in that area recently. The Minister for Public Health and Sport has made great efforts to try to resolve a problem that has been caused in part by a council in which the Liberal Democrats have a leading role, but there are severe difficulties there.

The problems of delayed discharge are well known, and they cause human misery to those involved and to their families. What is more, delayed discharge costs the public sector: it is more expensive to keep people in hospital than to

have them in a care setting, so it makes no sense. The other parties in the chamber have at least thought about that, and have solutions that all go in the same direction of travel. Our party supports the transfer of social care out of local government into the health service, the Labour Party supports a national care agency and the SNP supports lead commissioning. Those are different approaches, but they take us in the same direction. It is a pity, therefore, that the Liberal Democrats are out of step with the rest of us.

Robert Brown: Does Murdo Fraser accept that running through that is a decision about the best way to tackle an admitted problem? Does he not accept that the centralising way is not the way to deal with the issue, which is crying out for a local solution?

Murdo Fraser: I would welcome a solution from the Liberal Democrats. We have heard nothing from them on how they intend to tackle these serious problems. At least the other parties in the chamber, although we may differ in our approach, recognise that there is a problem and have the same direction of travel. It is a pity that we have heard nothing from the Liberal Democrats in that regard, but perhaps Mr Rumbles, if he makes a winding-up speech, will enlighten us about exactly what the Liberal Democrats propose on social care.

Richard Baker and other members have said that preserving the status quo in police structures will mean cuts to the number of front-line officers. The overriding priority for us in policing is to maximise the resources on the streets and the number of officers in uniform. We should not be wedded to historic structures. The world has moved on from where we were 30 years ago, so it is right that we now review where we are with the structure of policing. The point was well made by a number of members that if we reform the current structure, there will be cost savings and, of course, transitional costs, but in the longer run we will make savings, which can be reinvested in front-line services.

Liberal Democrat members have referred to the issue of local tensions and how they would be expanded if we had a national police force. However, local tensions already exist within Tayside, for example. People in Perth and Kinross ask why all the police resources are put into Dundee, and people in Angus ask why all the police resources are put into Perth. Such tensions already exist, but if we listened to the Liberal Democrats we would think that they would be a novel development.

Jeremy Purvis referred to G division in the Borders. I have no personal knowledge of policing in the Borders, but I know about the divisional structure in my area. There would be no reason at

all for divisional structures to change simply because we moved from the current set-up of police forces to a single force or, indeed, four forces.

Rob Gibson referred to the dishonesty of Lib Dems in the Highlands protesting outside Dingwall police office. Again, I have no personal knowledge of policing in the Highlands, but I cannot imagine that it will be more likely that Dingwall police office will close as a result of a merger of police boards. In fact, I think that the opposite is the case, because if we do not take steps to reduce policing costs nationally, we will not have the money to sustain our local forces and local numbers. Of course, we also need to have accountability.

I agree with my colleague John Lamont on the crucial point that we have 1,000 extra police officers on Scotland's streets thanks to the Conservatives. That is what matters to people, who want to see police in uniform on the streets deterring crime and providing visible reassurance. The Liberal Democrat priorities are clear: they would rather preserve their head offices, the chief constable salaries and the men in suits. That is not our choice.

11:12

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): A lot of what we do in preparation for any debate in the Parliament is based on assumptions about what we expect others to say. We are surprised, occasionally, to find that our opponents' arguments are not what we might have predicted. In that regard, I did not expect to hear what I did from Robert Brown and his Liberal Democrat colleagues. I am a little surprised that I did not hear the normal, sometimes even rational, Liberal fear of the big state and domineering Government. However, what I heard was Robert Brown and his colleagues being, to me at least, hysterical and talking baseless hogwash.

I usually consider Jeremy Purvis to be a rational communicator in the chamber, but his speech was like the reading of a screenplay from a disaster movie describing a barren wasteland where outlaws have taken over and the police have abandoned the Borders to its fate. That approach has no credibility whatsoever in a debate around an analysis of what is required at present to address the problems in our public services.

Robert Brown: The problem behind the police force debate is that we have not had an analysis from the Government, nor have we had the basis of any figures. That is part of the difficulty.

Michael McMahon: Robert Brown is simply adding to the kind of remarks that I have been describing. An analysis has been undertaken. Indeed, this issue has been under discussion for

decades, never mind for the past few months since the budget cuts have come into view.

Robert Brown accuses Labour of bravado. However, what we want to do has the support of senior police officers and, as James Kelly pointed out, the Fire Brigades Union. Surely when we look at our local services it would be bravado to ignore those bodies and the pressures that are being brought to bear on them.

That said, Robert Brown made a fair point about the current position of the SNP, which seems to be trying to patch up its difficulties in different parts of the country. As representatives of the north, Rob Gibson, Dave Thompson and Maureen Watt will of course want to speak about the situation in that part of the country. However, it does not really help the debate to create geographical divisions by talking about where a particular headquarters should be located or what services should be run from the north rather than from the west or the south. We have to get away from that when we discuss police services. We have to get away from the kind of ludicrous, bizarre nonsense in which, when the Pope or some senior figure visits the country, a team of police officers has to sit at Harthill service station to meet those coming from the east, simply because they are not allowed to travel the extra 20 miles into Glasgow.

However, I do not want to be too critical of the SNP; after all, Maureen Watt warned us not to be cynical. I cannot believe that a couple of weeks before the election a Government would discover that it wanted to look at, say, another solution for a unpopular electricity line that it had already passed but I could not possibly make such a cynical remark in a debate in the run-up to an election.

I have always been of the opinion that the best defence against a commandeering Government is an assertive citizenry and that is what can be achieved in the reforms to our police service, our fire and rescue provision and our national care service that I believe are necessary. There is absolutely nothing inherently centralist or undemocratic about reducing the number of police and fire authorities, or about combining adult care services in one public sector area instead of keeping them split between the NHS and local government. Indeed, Labour's avowed intention is that, in restructuring these services, priority setting will be devolved to the local level and that democratically elected representatives who listen to the communities that they represent will have even more of a say in the delivery of services than they do at present. The governance of local services must, by its very nature, be as local as possible.

Moreover, as necessity is the mother of invention, any Government of Scotland must do all that can to shield people from the worst effects of

the global financial crisis while delivering social and economic reforms. Although we must protect public services as best we can, the public sector's structure, approach and objectives should not be immune from reform, the main aim of which must be to provide public services that are more flexible and are adaptable to individual local needs. There must be more of an emphasis on moving towards a delivery-based philosophy that encompasses a radical dispersal of power, in which people have more say over the services that they receive and front-line staff have more of an input into the services that they provide. In no way can that be described as a centralising power grab. Instead, we are proposing a diffusion of power that should and must reduce bureaucratic burdens.

Mike Rumbles: I have a genuine question. At the moment, the chief constable is responsible for operational matters. If we have a single chief constable for Scotland, he or she will have that operational responsibility—or is Labour seeking to change that?

Michael McMahon: Mr Rumbles's question presumes that there is no hierarchy of decision making in the current eight-force structure. Chief constables have powers that are dispersed down to local level—

Mike Rumbles: But what about operational responsibility?

Michael McMahon: It would not matter whether the new chief constable of a single Scottish police division was based in the last house in John o' Groats; the decisions that are made at a local level will be based on the divisional structures in the local communities. That is the important point that the Liberal Democrats appear to be missing.

Public services should improve as they become more personal and cost effective while, at the same time, strengthening democratic deliberation and control in our local communities. Policing must respond to local priorities and any redirection of power must allow for leaner central Government. Local public services must change for the emerging era and deliver what people want in the way that they want them; indeed, the services for those people must be preserved in the face of all the challenges that arise in this current economic climate.

Sustained investment in public services since devolution should have created a better relationship between central Government and the front line, empowered both to focus on what they do best, and, in so doing, delivered better value for money. Progress has undoubtedly been made in many areas, but the next steps of reform and the next decisions on how services will meet citizens' expectations must increasingly be for local areas and for front-line services to respond to freely. As

citizens and communities are empowered, central Government must sharpen its focus on its core role of setting policy priorities, guaranteeing national standards and building up capacity in the public services.

We live in turbulent times, and Scotland is in a state of turmoil that has been caused by the 21st century neo-conservative coalition at Westminster. It ill befits the Liberal Democrats, who are one of the parties in the coalition, to hold a debate in the Scottish Parliament in which they criticise those who want to make the reforms that are necessary to deliver the best public services that can be delivered in economic circumstances that they have created.

11:21

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): I welcome the debate, not least because it provides quite a rare opportunity. It has well and truly exposed the Liberal Democrats' hypocrisy. I have found myself agreeing with members I would not normally agree with.

Let us stand back and look at the context of the debate, which is important. In Westminster, Liberal Democrat MPs are cutting the Scottish budget by £1.3 billion, and Liberal Democrat MSPs are refusing to enter into a debate in the Scottish Parliament about the consequences of those cuts for Scottish services. The Liberal Democrats have no ideas. Every idea that is put forward, whether it is on police, fire or health and social care services, is opposed. I will go further than that. If a party has had a hand in cutting the Scottish budget, it almost has more of a responsibility to come to the Scottish Parliament with ideas about how the consequences of those cuts can be dealt with. What we have heard this morning has really exposed the Liberal Democrats. They say one thing in one place and another thing in another place. Cathie Craigie put things well when she said that they have

"a face for every door".

One thing that has not emerged in the debate is the real irony in the talk about health and social care. The lead agency model, which is the SNP's preferred model, originated in Highland Council, which the Liberal Democrats run. I pay tribute to Michael Foxley for having the initiative to look at reforming public services, but his Scottish Parliament colleagues come here and criticise the very model that the Liberal Democrats are pursuing in Highland Council. I am surprised that the hypocrisy and astonishing irony of that has not come out in the debate so far.

Jeremy Purvis: On the issue of finance, the most recent example that we have in Scotland of stripping away from a regional model to a single

national model is provided by Skills Development Scotland. The regional delivery of skills through our local enterprise companies was stripped away to delivery by a single agency. That has cost £20 million net more in administration, IT and bureaucracy. The savings came only when more than 100 members of staff were made redundant. Is that the model for a single police force?

Shona Robison: It ill behoves the Liberal Democrats to question the savings that will be made through reforming public services, because in Westminster they have pushed through the abolition of quango after quango for the reason that it will save money. It is absolutely right to get rid of many of those quangos, but surely the Liberal Democrats cannot use the financial argument for a bonfire of the quangos in London and come here and say, "Reforming services will save no money." That cannot be correct. Surely public services in England are not so different from public services in Scotland in that regard. The Liberal Democrats cannot say one thing in London and something completely different in Edinburgh. Jeremy Purvis cannot have a face for every door—people will see through that. They are already seeing through it.

The Scottish Government is committed to integrating health and social care. I will stick to those issues for the remainder of my comments, because police and fire services have been well debated this morning. Our goal is to ensure that people have access to sustainable, appropriate services that meet their needs, not services that are planned and delivered according to organisational boundaries.

Like Jackie Baillie, I have worked on the front line in social care. I am struck by the fact that three of the main parties in Parliament have reached the conclusion that we must have a single, integrated system of health and social care. The only exception is the Liberal Democrats. That is interesting. I need remind no one here of the financial constraints that face us. Front-line services that protect the most vulnerable in our society should be the priority for every member of Parliament. For our part, we are prepared to have a dialogue with others about the best way to ensure that the front line is maintained.

We know from the evidence from our reshaping care for older people programme that we have to act now and that we have to act decisively. We have to be ambitious and innovative to ensure that we meet people's needs, particularly those of our growing elderly population. As Jackie Baillie rightly said, after all the years of good progress in some areas but not enough progress in others, we cannot wait for some future local solution to emerge and for everyone suddenly to agree. Older people cannot wait for everyone to wake up and

smell the coffee. It would be irresponsible of members not to realise that.

Carrying on with services as they are currently configured—the status quo, which the Liberal Democrats support—is not affordable. It will cost us an extra £1.1 billion by 2016. If we do not do something, that resource will come out of the front line, which is unacceptable. Our goal instead is to help older people to stay in their own homes or a homely setting for as long as possible. That is what people want and it is what clinicians tell us is the best for people, whenever possible.

To achieve that, we have to take responsibility nationally and locally for good stewardship of the public pound. Of course, at the end of the day, the public pound is the public pound, whether we are talking about the NHS or local government. What we have to decide as leaders is how that public pound is best deployed to keep people safe in their own homes in these times of budget constraints.

Where does that leave us? There is only one answer in health and social care, and that is a single, integrated system. Yes, we have to have a debate about the best model. The lead agency model has great merits, because of its simplicity. However, the destination for three of the parties that we have heard from this morning is not dissimilar. The good thing to emerge from this debate is the responsible and mature approach of many in Parliament to these important and difficult issues. The one glaring exception is the Liberal Democrats. This morning, they have been found wanting.

11:29

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): There is no doubt in my mind that our choice of subject for this Liberal Democrat-led debate was absolutely right. The Parliament should be

“concerned by the apparently endless desire on the part of centralising national politicians to attempt to take over control of local services”.

The uncomfortable speeches from SNP back benchers show that at least some of them are embarrassed by their Government’s centralisation agenda. Even some Labour members were uncomfortable. When I asked Cathie Craigie how her constituents in Cumbernauld would feel if the single police chief for Scotland was based in Aberdeen, she ducked the question. That says everything.

Michael McMahon *rose—*

Mike Rumbles: Let me get started. From my questioning of Michael McMahon, it is clear that Labour members misunderstand the

responsibilities of the chief constable. That responsibility cannot be devolved.

Michael McMahon: Does Mike Rumbles understand that the areas that Cathie Craigie and I represent have divisions within Strathclyde Police and that what really matters to the people in Lanarkshire whom we represent is that a police officer is there when one is needed? People do not care where the police officer who bosses them lives.

Mike Rumbles: Spot on—that is exactly the point that we are making. People do not want their resources to be directed by a chief constable who is based in Glasgow or Edinburgh.

In his opening speech, Robert Brown highlighted the Labour Party’s natural instinct for centralisation. Labour members are absolutely clear that they want a national police force, so they are at least honest and open in their response.

Dave Thompson: Will the member give way?

Mike Rumbles: In a minute.

We in the Liberal Democrats do not agree with the Labour Party and we fiercely oppose what it wants to do, but at least Richard Baker and Michael McMahon for Labour take an honourable position. However, we should compare that with the less-than-honourable position of the nationalists. Kenny MacAskill’s amendment, which has been cobbled together with the Conservatives, is astonishing. It uses the word “local” six times—can you believe it?—even though, time and again, the minister attempts to centralise power. What hypocrisy!

On policing, despite the fact that no evidence has been presented, the minister continues to say—he said it again today—that a national police force would have more weight. He said that he will not really consult on one of the three options—the status quo—on which he is consulting. That option is in the consultation, but he will not accept it because it is not an option. What a consultation! At a stroke, the minister has undermined and pre-empted his so-called consultation. Incidentally, in that consultation, the minister is desperately trying to find evidence to justify his position.

Kenny MacAskill, our Cabinet Secretary for Justice, must be more conscious of his role in Parliament. He needs to be more careful with his choice of language. For instance, during his speech, he said that, while we speak, “a terrorist” has been arrested in Scotland, but that person is of course a terrorist suspect. That is typical of our justice minister’s lack of care. He plays fast and loose with the English language, and he is at it again with his amendment.

Richard Baker argued that a national police force is essential to save money, yet the previous

Labour Government in England—his party—dropped the proposal because it would cost an estimated £400 million, so where is the saving? When I intervened to ask Richard Baker whether a chief constable who was based in the central belt would prioritise operational matters in the north-east, he made the impractical suggestion that the chief constable would not necessarily be based in the central belt. Aye, right. As I said, the Labour position is honourable, but flawed. Labour members must resist the temptation of overegging it.

John Lamont for the Conservatives failed to understand what operational independence for our chief constables means. If we have one chief constable for Scotland, local accountability will completely disappear. I see John Lamont shaking his head, which shows that he still does not understand. That is the view of the chief constables of Grampian Police and Northern Constabulary. He really must listen to our chief constables. David Cameron, the Prime Minister and Conservative Party leader, argues for the big society. That is about volunteering, but it is also about devolving power and control to local people. We heard nothing from the Scottish Conservatives about the big society. Instead, at decision time this evening, they will vote for the opposite of the big society, because they will vote for the nationalist amendment. As we know, the nationalists are involved in a national power grab.

Many of the back-bench speeches, particularly from SNP members—there were no back-bench speeches from the Conservatives, I might add—were typified by embarrassment at having to support the centralisation agenda, while wanting but failing to support the local chief constable.

Rob Gibson: I think that our arguments are about supporting our local communities.

Where is the truth in the Liberal Democrats' allegation that the Dingwall area headquarters will close?

Mike Rumbles: I must admit that I am not familiar with the Dingwall police station. If Rob Gibson will forgive me, as a member from the north-east, I cannot talk about Dingwall.

I am afraid that Maureen Watt's contribution was particularly woeful.

I was particularly looking forward to hearing what MSPs such as Brian Adam and Nigel Don had to say, because I know that they are in favour of Grampian Police. However, they are not here to say so. I am disappointed that they did not turn up.

The battle lines for the forthcoming Scottish election are now being drawn. The people of Scotland have a clear choice to make. On one side we have the Labour Party, the Nationalists

and now, unfortunately, the Conservatives, who have decided to support the centralisation of power with regard to our police forces, our fire and rescue services and our other local services.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): No we have not.

Mike Rumbles: It would have helped if Alex Johnstone had listened to the debate before making an intervention—he has just appeared in the chamber.

George Foulkes: Will the member give way?

Mike Rumbles: I do not have time, unfortunately.

George Foulkes: I have been here every minute of the debate.

Mike Rumbles: Oh, go on then.

George Foulkes: The battle lines are drawn. Does Mike Rumbles support Danny Alexander's proposal to cut police pay?

Mike Rumbles: It might surprise George Foulkes but, as I said earlier, the last time I looked, the police service in Scotland was devolved to us. We make those decisions here, not them.

Kenny MacAskill: No. There is the Police Negotiating Board.

Mike Rumbles: No. We have responsibility for the Scottish police forces.

Kenny MacAskill: It is not true—

Mike Rumbles: Will the cabinet secretary stop trying to shout me down from a sedentary position? Goodness me.

It will become clear to the people of Scotland, in the election campaign, that only the Scottish Liberal Democrats will fight for the retention of our locally controlled services, against the power grab that is currently under way.

Kenny MacAskill: The member is—

Mike Rumbles: If the cabinet secretary wants to intervene, I will gladly give way.

Kenny MacAskill: Is the member aware that the Police Negotiating Board is pan-UK and that police terms and conditions and pay are set across the UK?

Mike Rumbles: Of course, I am well aware of that.

Kenny MacAskill: That is not what he said.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Mike Rumbles: That is the choice that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has made, because policing in Scotland is devolved to this place. He

has decided to accept the status quo. Policing is a devolved issue for this Parliament to deal with, and it is about time the Cabinet Secretary for Justice realised the extent of his powers.

It will become clear to the people of Scotland during the election campaign that the Liberal Democrats will be fighting for local police services, local fire and rescue services and other local services, which need to be retained under local control.

As a result of this debate, the people of Scotland know that the Labour Party, the SNP and the Conservatives are on one side of the argument and the Liberal Democrats are on the other. The Scottish Liberal Democrats will fight local people's corner.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:39

Energy-from-waste Plants

1. Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on large-scale energy-from-waste plants. (S3O-13276)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The Scottish Government recognises that the energy-from-waste process has a role to play in the delivery of our zero waste policy, albeit a restricted role.

It must be remembered that the new regulatory measures that we seek to introduce under the zero waste plan will restrict significantly the volume and type of materials that can be processed in thermal treatment plants. It is important, therefore, that we do not go down the road of building large-scale, inefficient energy-from-waste plants, as the materials to feed such facilities will not be available in the future.

Stewart Maxwell: The minister might be aware that, in a speech to Parliament on 24 January 2008, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment laid out the Scottish Government's policies for a zero waste Scotland. He said:

"the Government is opposed to large, inefficient energy-from-waste plants. Such plants could easily become white elephants and drain public funds. They require excessive transportation of waste and could crowd out recycling and waste prevention."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 2008; c 5494.]

I very much agree with his statement.

Will the minister reaffirm that the Scottish Government continues to oppose large-scale energy-from-waste plants that are assessed as contradicting Scotland's zero waste strategy and deemed to be inefficient in the amount of waste that is recycled and in how the energy that they produce is used? Will he confirm that an incoming Scottish National Party Government would continue to oppose such plants?

Jim Mather: I am happy to build on my original answer. I reaffirm that the Scottish Government's position remains that we do not support large-scale, inefficient energy-from-waste facilities. I fully expect that any future SNP Government would maintain that position.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Given that energy-from-waste plants are

one of the least preferred options in the waste hierarchy and that they undermine efforts to reuse, recycle and compost, does the minister agree that the Scottish Government should do much more to limit the percentage of waste that is directed to such plants? Given the minister's previous answer, will he explain to my constituents why his Government has not chosen simply to say no to Shore Energy's appeal for the proposed pyrolysis incinerator energy-from-waste plant close to homes, schools and nurseries in my constituency?

Jim Mather: The key message is that only materials that cannot be reused or recycled should go to energy-from-waste plants. Local authorities should avoid committing large tonnages to long-term residual waste treatment contracts, as they might struggle to meet their contractual obligations in the long term, because new measures that will come into force will limit material streams.

As for the debate about Elaine Smith's local situation, I suggest that she discuss that with her local authority. Where necessary, she can weave in the Scottish Government to help to manage the conversation going forward.

Social Care (Parkinson's Disease)

2. Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how plans to integrate social care into the national health service will affect people with Parkinson's disease. (S3O-13225)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): The integration of health care and social care is a key issue for people who live with conditions such as Parkinson's disease. We are tackling that in several ways. In the next financial year, we will invest £2 million to support local partnerships with the integration agenda. We have set up a £70 million change fund to increase communities' capacity to support people through partnerships between health care, social care and the third sector. Self-directed support has great potential to help people to integrate all the services that they need. That approach, of course, applies to people with Parkinson's disease.

Marlyn Glen: Parkinson's UK has long called for better links between health care and social care. If full integration is not planned, that will mean lead commissioning without statutory underpinning. How will the minister guarantee support for and access to services for all those who have Parkinson's, regardless of their age?

Shona Robison: The lead agency model is one model for fully integrating health care and social care, in which the council commissions the NHS to deliver social care under one system. As in the Highland area, discussions can take place about what the local authority may commission to be

delivered. The basic point is that the outcome for service users and carers is that their services will be delivered under a single system.

I know that Labour takes a different position on the delivery model—it proposes a national care service—but I hope that we can agree that the outcomes for older people, people with Parkinson's and people with other conditions are the most important thing. In my view, the outcomes will be best served by a single system and an integrated model.

Freight Facilities Grants

3. Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what response it has had to its invitation to submit note of interest forms for freight facilities grants for 2011-12 and to what extent it expects the fund to be over or undersubscribed. (S3O-13243)

The Minister for Transport and Infrastructure (Keith Brown): We have received notes of interest from 19 eligible projects, eight of which have indicated that the planning and build of the facilities could be completed by 31 March 2012 and so could utilise the 2011-12 budget. If all of those eight projects were to be successful in their subsequent applications at the levels of support indicated, the fund would be oversubscribed by £3.75 million.

Cathy Peattie: Given that there was only one week in which to declare a note of interest, I am pleased to hear the number of applications that were made. However, given the oversubscribed nature of the grants, will the minister consider re-opening the application process?

Keith Brown: We are talking not of applications but of notes of interest at this stage. It is always true to say that there are many more applications for freight facilities grants than there are successful applicants. That is not because of a lack of funds in the budget line but because many applications do not come to fruition. That is for a number of reasons, which I think that Cathy Peattie recognises.

It is worth pointing out that we have had around £10 million in the budget for freight facilities grants, which is £10 million more than the United Kingdom budget for those grants, because it was cut more than five years ago. We have spent substantially more in Scotland up to this point. Many projects do not go all the way through the process.

It is unfortunate that Cathy Peattie and her colleagues voted against the £2 million that we allocated to the grant in the budget. We will persist with it nonetheless. We are anxious to see how many of the eight projects get to a level at which we can support them during the current year. Of

course, what happens in future years in terms of how much will go into this funding is for future Governments to decide. We have no intention of re-opening the notes of interest process at this stage.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): The industry often sees the cost of Network Rail work as excessive and says that those costs are a big factor against any increase in rail freight connections. Given the opportunity offered by the recent devolution in the structure of Network Rail, will the minister take an early opportunity to talk to Network Rail in Scotland to get it to start to reduce its charges to more realistic rates?

Keith Brown: I am happy to do that. Over the past week alone, I have spoken to Network Rail a number of times on the issue. As the member rightly points out, the further devolution of Network Rail functions—and it is further devolution; Network Rail Scotland was already perhaps the most devolved part of the UK network—presents a number of opportunities, not least in terms of the new First ScotRail franchise. I am happy to take up the point with Network Rail as Alasdair Morgan suggests.

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

Unemployment

5. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to reduce unemployment. (S3O-13235)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The latest published figures show that Scotland has the highest employment rate in the UK: 71.1 per cent compared with the UK average of 70.5 per cent. In the last three months of 2010, Scotland was the only part of the UK where unemployment actually fell.

While those figures are to be welcomed, we are far from being complacent. On the contrary, we are doing everything within the limit of our devolved powers to help even more people back to work. In the coming year, we are committed to delivering a record 25,000 modern apprenticeship starts, 14,500 training places for the unemployed and 7,000 flexible training opportunities for smaller businesses that want to invest in their workforce. We have also announced a £10 million package of support for small businesses that recruit the long-term unemployed and a further £10 million community jobs fund to offer work opportunities to young people in the third sector. In uncertain times, I believe that those measures will help to consolidate further Scotland's labour market position.

Ken Macintosh: Does the minister recognise that the recession has hit young people particularly hard? For example, in East Renfrewshire, youth unemployment has more than quadrupled over the past year. As well as the measures that he has outlined, will the minister pledge his support even at this stage for Labour's future jobs fund?

Jim Mather: I admire the proposition that the member puts forward. It is entirely right that we focus on unemployment and unemployed young people. Unemployment is impacting on them very badly. Having economic recovery and high levels of employment is the main focus of this Government, and it will continue to be so.

I turn to the competing fund from Labour. Our funds are on the table; they are in action and working. In putting the proposition and such questions to ministers, there needs to be a certain humility on the part of Labour. It was Labour that denied this country the resilience and increased competitiveness that greater autonomy and independence would have brought it; it was Labour that kept Scotland in the branch economy, vulnerable to downturns; it was Labour that created the downturn and committed a gross failure of stewardship; and it was Labour that initiated the cuts on Scotland that were too fast and too deep.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Surely advances in communications technology enable us to tackle rural unemployment by relocating more Government jobs to communities in the Highlands such as Lairg, Golspie, Wick and Thurso. Does the Scottish Government support that proposal? Will it bring maximum pressure to bear on Her Majesty's Government in London to do likewise, rather than to scrap rural jobs by virtually closing the HM Revenue and Customs office in Wick?

Jim Mather: I note the fervour of the question. I know that the member is now well connected in high places in London and can get that message across directly. Yesterday in Edinburgh, Richard Lochhead and I attended an event on rural broadband. Real lead is being put into the pencil of rural broadband. The member knows about what is happening with Highlands and Islands Enterprise and projects in its area. That creates a situation in which such jobs and private sector jobs can be relocated to the Highlands and Islands and the rest of rural Scotland, so that people can move to a rural setting to do the work that they have done in cities in the past but in a much better place with better quality of life.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): The minister said that, within the limits of devolution, the Government was doing its best to cope with unemployment. I infer from that that he thinks that

a measure greater than devolution would produce a better result. Can he tell me how he will get there?

Jim Mather: I would love to have a full day to discuss that. Although I will leave politics in May, I will continue to be part of that process, which is the direction of travel. The current position is the ratcheted thin end of a wedge that will go further and further. Scotland will become independent, because people always adopt what works.

Barra Wind Turbine (Lease Negotiation)

6. Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making in negotiating a lease with the community in Barra for their planned wind turbine at Gob Sgurabhal. (S3O-13263)

The Minister for the Environment and Climate Change (Roseanna Cunningham): On 25 February 2011, Scottish Government officials issued a draft lease to the Gob Sgurabhal wind turbine project co-ordinator for consideration. I apologise for any mispronunciation of the Gaelic.

Alasdair Allan: There was none that I heard. I warmly welcome the fact that an offer of a lease for the land has been made. Can the minister confirm that the department will continue to negotiate with the community to agree an appropriate rent that will allow community benefit to be derived from the project?

Roseanna Cunningham: I commend the crofters on their initiative, but I advise members that having wind turbines on croft land is a relatively new approach to the use of such land, which meant that there was no off-the-peg lease to use and that some thought had to be given to the initiative. The initiative deals with issues of high energy costs and fits in with the Government's overall policy on renewables.

Sales or leases by the Scottish Government are normally required to be advertised. We took time to consider that but, because of the potential for the community group, we deemed it acceptable under the public finance manual to proceed under private provisions, which is now happening. We will negotiate a fair and equitable rental value to allow this exciting project to provide financial benefits to the community, as well as to meet the Government's requirements as landlord.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Does the minister agree that the local Barra community should be commended for a project that will, I hope, produce a sustainable income for the community for many years to come and for many generations of Barra people?

Roseanna Cunningham: I think that I have already said that. I add that I expect that there will

be many more similar applications, once people see the success of the project and the enormous benefits that the approach can bring to very rural and peripheral areas.

Whistleblowers

7. Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it takes to encourage and protect whistleblowers in public services or those working for companies fulfilling public contracts. (S3O-13288)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The Scottish Government has an established policy on whistleblowing for Scottish Government staff, which is based on the provisions of the civil service code and the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. The policy is published on the Scottish Government website.

The relevant national policy for NHS Scotland states:

"Organisations must welcome the raising of issues and concerns and promote this as a measure to ensure employee satisfaction and ultimately lead to improvements in patient care ... Employees must also be assured that no victimisation as a result of raising a concern will be tolerated by the organisation."

It is for individual local authorities to ensure that their staff are aware of the policies that are in place to encourage and protect whistleblowers. Contracts between the Scottish Government and providers of goods and services do not normally include clauses on the relationship between the contractor and his staff, beyond those that are necessary for performance of the contract.

Bill Wilson: Does the Scottish Government agree that, with reference to whistleblowing, WikiLeaks provides a valuable service; that individuals who provide information to it, such as Bradley Manning, should be viewed as heroes rather than villains; that however they are viewed they should not be subject to cruel or degrading treatment; and that subjecting individuals to prolonged isolation is a form of torture?

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but that has absolutely nothing to do with the Scottish Government's remit, so I will not call the minister to respond.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Given that many national health service staff can be absent from work for weeks, months and, in some cases, years—both paid and unpaid absence—will the Government ensure that employment mediation services are available and do all that is possible to get valued staff back to work rather than punish people for raising issues of patient safety?

Jim Mather: I apologise, but I did not catch what was said.

The Presiding Officer: Briefly repeat your question, please, Mrs Scanlon.

Mary Scanlon: I just asked whether the Government will ensure that NHS staff who have been off work for months and years are given access to employment mediation services and that staff are not punished for raising issues of patient safety.

Jim Mather: That is a matter for another portfolio. However, as someone with a track record of favouring mediation, I am interested in the member's question, which I am sure has been heard by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing.

Police and Fire Services Review

8. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether its review of police and fire services will include an analysis of the impact of any restructuring on civilian police staff numbers. (S3O-13252)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Yes. The work of civilian support staff is one of the core functions against which the sustainable policing project, which is being led by Deputy Chief Constable Neil Richardson, is assessing the three reform options on which we are consulting. That work will be reported to the Scottish policing board on 21 March and published on the Scottish Government website by 22 March to help inform the debate on the future of policing in Scotland before our consultation closes on 5 May.

Alison McInnes: Should not the cabinet secretary have fully evaluated the impact of his reforms in advance of the consultation, so that the public were properly informed of the real impact on staffing numbers? What is his response to the fact that the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland is in no doubt that the Government's savings figure could be achieved only through the loss of thousands of officers and support staff? Does the cabinet secretary believe that ACPOS is scaremongering?

Kenny MacAskill: Yes. Those figures are disputed. What is clear, though, is that the consultation is on-going and that information has been provided to the police family.

As has been pointed out, the status quo is not tenable, because we would end up in the same position as south of the border—which is due to the Liberal Democrats—where 28,000 front-line staff are threatened with redundancy and police officers' terms and conditions and pay are threatened with being varied and reduced.

Indeed, I remember being in this chamber for a debate on forensic services, when we took steps as a Government to ensure that we protected front-line services in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow, and were criticised by Ms McInnes. The position of the Liberal Democrats south of the border has not been to preserve those services; it has been to privatise them.

Bill Wilson: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Can you provide clarification, even at a later date, as to why I cannot ask the Government for its views of and position on WikiLeaks?

The Presiding Officer: It is because questions must be within the general responsibility of the minister to whom they are posed, Mr Wilson

Fish Discards (European Commission Proposals)

9. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what its response will be to the European Commission proposals to stop fish discards. (S3O-13209)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government believes that discards of fish are a scandalous waste of resource brought about in large part by the failed common fisheries policy. We are committed to working towards the elimination of discards, and the initiatives that we have developed with the Scottish fishing industry and environmental non-governmental organisations are leading the way in Europe. I hope that the Commission will now make proposals that build on Scotland's achievements.

Robin Harper: Given the cheerfully piratical disregard for any or most regulations designed to conserve our fish stocks that is exhibited by a substantial minority of Scottish skippers, is the minister confident that anything other than an overall reduction in the catching power of the European and Scottish fleets will deliver the possibility of our having a harvestable stock of fish left in Scottish waters in 20 years?

Richard Lochhead: I remind the member, in light of his inaccurate information, that the current compliance rate among the Scottish fleet has never been better and that the Scottish white-fish fleet has halved the discard rate of North Sea cod since 2008, which is the biggest achievement in Europe. I suggest to the member that he investigate those facts and get his information right in future.

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-2945)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Presiding Officer, if I may, I will briefly mention two important homecomings. First, I mention the return of the body of Lance Corporal Tasker, who was from Kirkcaldy, in Fife. The story of Liam Tasker and his dog Theo, and their courage, their life-saving activities and their sacrifice, has touched many, many people across the country. The Parliament sends its condolences to Lance Corporal Tasker's family.

Secondly, we should welcome home the team from Grampian Fire and Rescue Service. The team of six has just returned from New Zealand, where it has been assisting the search and rescue operation following the devastating earthquake in Christchurch on 21 February. I know that the Parliament values immensely the team's contribution, which is something that everyone in Scotland can be proud of. [*Applause.*]

Iain Gray: I am happy to associate Labour members with the First Minister's remarks. We send our condolences to the family of Lance Corporal Tasker.

I see that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing will speak to the British Medical Association today to tell them how well she is doing. She might be better speaking to patients, such as the 24,500 patients who had their operations cancelled by the national health service last year. Does the First Minister think that that is good enough?

The First Minister: I am sure that Iain Gray acknowledges the tremendous work of the health service and the fact that waiting times for operations and treatment have been slashed in Scotland during the past two years. The most recent statistics show that at 31 December 98.8 per cent of patients were waiting 12 weeks or less for operations and 99.6 per cent of patients were waiting 12 weeks or less for in-patient or day-case treatment.

There are a variety of reasons why operations have to be cancelled, but the whole Parliament should acknowledge that the figures, which are the best-ever statistics that our national health service has achieved, indicate that our doctors and nurses, and all workers in the health service, do exceptional things on behalf of us all.

Iain Gray: Twenty-four and a half thousand cancelled operations last year is not the best statistic that the NHS has ever had. Behind every number is a personal story. Yvonne Williams, from Helensburgh, represents one of the 24,500. She was due to have her gall bladder removed at Vale of Leven hospital last year. The hospital cancelled the operation with four hours' notice, because there were not enough beds. She was given a new date and told to phone the hospital on that day at 5.30 am to ensure that it had enough beds.

There are reasons why operations are cancelled. Yvonne's operation was cancelled because there are not enough acute hospital beds. In opposition, Nicola Sturgeon said that she would increase the number of acute beds in the NHS, but in Government she has cut them. Why has she broken her promise to patients?

The First Minister: The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing will be happy to look at the circumstances of an individual case.

I am sure that Iain Gray would not want to give the Parliament or indeed the wider public the impression that the health service is failing the public in any sense. It is not doing so. Ninety-eight point five per cent of operations go ahead as planned when patients come to hospital. We would all like it to be 100 per cent—of course we would—but 98.5 per cent is an impressive statistic. As with the other statistics that I quoted, the hope and belief is that we can get the figures up to record levels.

Iain Gray should remember that the number of hospital beds fell every year when the Labour Party was in control of the Scottish Administration, so it seems rather foolish to try to make a political point on the issue. I am sure that he will acknowledge that 98.5 per cent of operations going ahead as planned, although not the 100 per cent that we would all like to be achieved, is nonetheless a formidable statistic on achievement in our health service.

Iain Gray: The number of long-stay beds indeed fell under our Administration—as we transferred patients to care in the community, where their care properly should be.

Nicola Sturgeon promised to increase the number of acute hospital beds. Over the past year alone, NHS Tayside has cut 100 beds; Glasgow has cut 200 beds; Grampian has cut 600. NHS Scotland has lost 1,400 acute beds over the past year and 4,000 acute beds have been cut since Nicola Sturgeon took charge. That is why more operations are being cancelled. Last year, 2,500 staff were also cut from the NHS, with hundreds more job losses planned. Beyond the press releases and the photo opportunities, is it not the

truth that the First Minister has failed to protect our NHS in Scotland?

The First Minister: I am glad that Iain Gray chose to ask about staffing in the national health service in Scotland. We have the statistics, of course. In quarter 1 of 2007, the figure was 153,400. In quarter 3 of 2010, it had risen to 161,300. That is an increase of 7,900, or 5 per cent. That includes 1,500 more medical and dental staff. The dental staff are particularly important, as that increase has led to 1 million new dental registrations in Scotland. This country has a public dental service again. There are more than 1,000 more nurses and midwives, and nearly 1,000 more allied health professionals.

We have been able to achieve those expanded staff numbers in the health service because this Administration did not go down the road that the Labour Party stood on at the last election—to remind members, that involved having no consequential awards to the national health service in Scotland. The Labour Party stood on a manifesto that said that health would just have to cut its cloth while money was directed elsewhere. We know that more money has been spent on the national health service under this Administration and that that has allowed the increase in staff numbers.

Looking to the future, anyone who saw the extraordinary “Newsnight” interview, when Iain Gray was asked whether national health service funding would be ring fenced and he could not answer, will know that the present Administration’s commitment, even in these difficult times, to award consequential awards to the national health service stands in stark contrast to a party that does not even know the answer to that particular question.

Iain Gray: I will take on the First Minister any time when it comes to who will stand up for our NHS. Telling us his spin in a quiet voice does not make it any less spin. Last year, 2,500 jobs were gone—652 of them in Glasgow and 705 of them in NHS Lothian—and 3,000 more job losses are planned in NHS workforce plans. The health secretary promised not to cut bed numbers, but she has done. She wrote personally to NHS staff, saying that their jobs were safe, but they are not. She promised that delayed discharge would be zero, but in one NHS area 93 people died waiting to get out of a hospital that they did not need to be in.

The First Minister boasts that our NHS is better than England’s. I should hope so. In England, the Tories are dismantling the NHS. Is that the best that he can do? Has not the First Minister broken his promises on the NHS, just as he has done on schools, jobs, students, class sizes and everything else?

The First Minister: The three commitments that we have given are, first, that there will be no compulsory redundancies in the NHS in Scotland in the lifetime of this Government. Secondly, we said that at the end of the current parliamentary session there will be more staff working for the national health service in Scotland than there were at the beginning of this Administration—that is the 7,900 figure that I mentioned earlier. Thirdly, we are looking extremely carefully at ensuring that we can redeem a commitment in terms of awarding all consequential awards to the national health service, and we intend to do that.

Iain Gray says that he is willing to take me on. I point out that, in terms of making that commitment to the health service, he was not even able to take Gordon Brewer on, never mind me.

As far as the tone of answering or, indeed, asking questions is concerned, I think that putting forward reasoned arguments with backed-up statistics is a good way to do things. If Iain Gray objects to my speaking to him in a quiet voice, I point out that appearing every week as Mr Angry does not make him either tough, effective, or respected by people in Scotland. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

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

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S3F-2946)

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

Annabel Goldie: Six years ago, there were nearly 1,500 health visitors in Scotland. How many are there today?

The First Minister: The health visitor numbers in Scotland, like the rest of the health service, are performing extremely well in the national interest and purpose. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Annabel Goldie: If the First Minister does not know, would it not be easier to say, “I don’t know”? Let me confirm the facts. In 2005, there were nearly 1,500 health visitors. In 2010, there were marginally over 1,200. Back in 2009, the First Minister said to me:

“I am interested in and concerned about the position and numbers of health visitors in Scotland, and that will be an abiding concern.”

That concern is so abiding that we have seen the number of health visitors in the majority of health board areas drop under his watch. So much for an abiding concern.

For the Scottish Conservatives, health visitors are the vital point of contact with parents and young families. In the community and in the home, they speak to mum and dad, giving reassurance, health and advice, and often spotting problems before they develop. Their value was recently reinforced by Professor Susan Deacon's report.

What will the First Minister do to match the Scottish Conservatives' commitment to spend £20 million a year on getting more health visitors to support more parents and more children right across Scotland and to give that crucial early years support?

The First Minister: The figures that I have show that there is an increasing number of health visitors in Scotland.

I say to Annabel Goldie that, yes, it is true that the Conservative Party has said at the United Kingdom level that there will be real-terms increases in the national health service budget, and this Administration has committed to moving forward with putting the consequentials into the national health service in Scotland. That is what has, over the past four years, allowed the expansion of health service numbers, and it is what will protect the national health service from much of the public spending pressure.

However, Annabel Goldie should also realise that even that commitment does not make the health service immune from pressure. We all know that health service inflation is extremely rigorous, and in many cases higher. It also means that we have to restore our commitment to a national health service. I think that the direction of travel of the national health service in England is deeply problematic. I look to the recent circumstance where we found that we were able in Scotland to provide—by the medium, incidentally, of health visitors and also through our general practitioner services—an effective response to the situation with a potential flu pandemic. That was not able to be performed in England.

Therefore, before we take any lessons from Annabel Goldie or anyone else about the direction of travel in the English health service, let us consider the protection of funding in the national health service in Scotland and the fact that we have an integrated service, with people working for something that they are proud of. That is one reason why the performance of the national health service is better than it has ever been before, and why every member of the Parliament should be intent on defending it.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

3. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S3F-2947)

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

Tavish Scott: Does the First Minister accept that the most recent reorganisation of Scottish local government cost between £375 million and £720 million? Does he also accept that the previous UK Government, to its credit, abandoned an enormous reorganisation of the police in England because it would have cost at least £400 million? The First Minister said today that he wants decisions on the police and other matters to be based on evidence. If he questions those figures, when will he publish his own?

The First Minister: The figures in terms of the review of police are being and will be made available and are being studied at the present moment. As Tavish Scott well knows, they are the subject of quite legitimate debate among the chief constables and other people in Scotland who have an interest in such matters.

I do not accept Tavish Scott's argument that having a police structure in Scotland, whereby one force covers half the population of the country and seven other forces—with another seven chief constables, all the attendant assistant chief constables and the whole panoply of bureaucracy that that inevitably involves—cover the other half, can possibly be considered to be the most effective way to run a police service across the country. Therefore, it is entirely correct that those matters are under review. I have set out the Government's direction of travel. As I understand it, Tavish Scott stands alone in not thinking that there is room for improvement in the current structure of eight police services across Scotland.

Tavish Scott: My argument is that the Government must have a case that is based on evidence, and it has not produced any. The real question is why the Government cannot produce any figures to support its own consultation. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice promised them in January and again in February. Two weeks ago, the First Minister told me that they would be published "shortly". The Parliament could have been given the figures today, but no. The chief constable of Lothian and Borders Police says that the consultation that the Government is responsible for is "inaccurate and potentially misleading".

The First Minister is going to the councillors conference this afternoon. They will have to pay for any changes. If he will not tell the Parliament how expensive his plans will be, will he tell local government? Why is he withholding that evidence?

The First Minister: There are very few people in Scotland who believe that we could not make

substantial efficiency savings by having fewer police authorities. The debate that is taking place among chief constables is about the extent of the savings that are possible from altering the structure of the forces.

It is correct and proper to have that debate and for these matters to be examined properly, but we cannot content ourselves with the view that we will not make progress on the issue. We must make progress because, apart from the need to have efficient delivery of government in Scotland, every public service is coming under the most profound revenue and capital pressure thanks to the Liberal Democrats and their Conservative colleagues in the Government at Westminster.

I believe that Tavish Scott sincerely holds the views that he expresses when he asks his questions. As regards his comments elsewhere, I particularly salute his fair-mindedness when he said in *Holyrood* magazine:

"I think the SNP has done well after four years in a minority government."

I agree with him.

Old Firm Summit

4. Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what progress was made at the summit on Tuesday 8 March concerning the disorder at and following recent old firm football matches. (S3F-2954)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government, at the request of Strathclyde Police, was happy to convene Tuesday's summit to chart a way forward. There was good will from all parties in addressing the issues that we know are our collective responsibility. There is no place in football for those who let their passion for the game become violence or their pride in it become bigotry. These issues will not be resolved overnight. I know that the chamber is united in supporting that continuing process and the work of the action group that came out of Tuesday's meeting.

Anne McLaughlin: Does the First Minister agree that one of the biggest concerns about football violence is related domestic violence? That is not caused by football, nor is it caused by alcohol. Football gives the excuse; alcohol turns thoughts into actions. Until we, as a society, tackle the underlying issues that allow some men to think that violence is acceptable behaviour, all the summits in the world—welcome as that one was, especially as it was held on international women's day—will not turn the problem of domestic violence against women around. We need to get to the root of the problem, which means not just asking why some men are violent after football games, but asking why some men are violent, and

what each and every one of us can do to tackle that together.

The First Minister: I thank Anne McLaughlin for raising the issue. The rise in the incidence of domestic violence after old firm clashes was charted and presented by the chief constable and was one of the central reasons for the summit.

Domestic violence is abhorrent and it has long-term implications for future generations. Work done by the violence reduction unit, for example, shows that children who witness such behaviour at home are damaged and go on to be disturbed and violent adults who repeat the cycle. There can be no excuse for domestic violence—not alcohol, not football—but that does not mean we cannot take targeted action together when we see flashpoints and when people and institutions can be mobilised to help the campaign.

One of the positive results of the summit was the police initiative, supported by the old firm clubs, for an agreement to examine the use of football banning orders and the clubs' codes of conduct to deal with criminal behaviour away from the grounds. That criminal behaviour—and it is criminal behaviour—includes domestic violence. That was one of the positive ideas that came out of the summit.

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the continuation of funding to groups that are involved in shifting attitudes against sectarianism. There is no doubt that it is a complex issue that requires a coherent response backed up by leadership. In addition to that funding, what specific civil service resources will be used to provide support and guidance to those groups to bring about a positive change in attitudes in our communities?

The First Minister: I salute the work of the nine anti-sectarianism groups that are funded by the Government. As the member well knows, that funding has increased substantially during the past three years and it is money well spent. The actions and direction of organisations such as the sense over sectarianism project, Nil by Mouth, Show Racism/Bigotry the Red Card, the Iona Community, the Youth Community Support Agency, Bridging the Gap and Supporters Direct in Scotland are community-based actions that should be lauded and supported by every single person in the chamber.

Earlier I mentioned the action group that was formed from Tuesday's summit. That will go ahead with good work. The work of the other groups that I mentioned is to be supported and co-ordinated so that we can be certain that the excellent work that they do has the maximum effect. In addition to supporting each of those groups, as we should do, the co-ordination and the will to make that happen

will mean that community initiatives receive greater support from the national Parliament and have greater impact in the communities in which they work.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Does the First Minister agree that the overwhelmingly searing image of the recent events was the sight of the manager of Celtic and the assistant manager of Rangers squaring up to each other, following a number of on-field incidents involving players and staff? Does the First Minister agree that when football managers and players are paid the sums of money that they are and act as role models for our young people, the clubs and the Scottish Football Association must get their houses in order? Was that discussed at the summit? What undertakings did the First Minister get from the clubs on those issues?

The First Minister: Yes, that was discussed at the summit. The clubs willingly made undertakings and the police made proposals that were directed at addressing and reinforcing that point. They were well received and agreed at the summit.

I want to mention another important aspect. Football players and management are heroes or role models to hundreds of thousands of people in Scotland. That must be well understood and they must take responsibility for it.

The summit also considered the spread of threats and violence, particularly because of the recent threats against the Celtic manager that were, of course, condemned by everyone, as we would expect. Threats and sectarian behaviour on the internet were also discussed. I thought that it was a positive aspect of the summit that the police indicated their determination that there can be no immunity and no anonymity. If people commit illegality over the internet, they shall be traced and dealt with just as if they had committed illegality in any other aspect of life.

Apprenticeships

5. Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): To ask the First Minister, in light of comments by Sir Tom Hunter that Scotland is facing a tsunami of unemployment and that the people of Scotland deserve better, whether the Scottish Government will now enable every qualified young person to have access to an apprenticeship. (S3F-2959)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Tackling youth unemployment is a priority for the Scottish Government, as it should be for every single member in the chamber. I hope that everyone will join me in welcoming the fact that over the next financial year we have provided additional investment that will deliver almost 100,000 training opportunities across Scotland. That includes a

record number of 25,000 modern apprenticeships: the highest number ever available in Scotland.

In that light, I find it incomprehensible that the Labour Party should have chosen to vote against a budget that contained such progressive measures to tackle the scourge of youth unemployment.

Lewis Macdonald: I am glad that the First Minister has indeed followed Labour's lead on apprenticeships to some extent. He clearly still has some way to go—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Lewis Macdonald: Does he share Tom Hunter's concern that there are 35,000 young people who are not in employment, education or training? Will he now also back Labour's new green deal, in order not only to insulate thousands of houses and tackle fuel poverty, but to give many of those young people access to skills and work?

The First Minister: Let us talk first about Labour's lead, as Lewis Macdonald described it. In 2006-07, the Labour-led Administration offered 15,000 modern apprenticeships in Scotland. The figure of 25,000 this coming year is not only a record, but a 66 per cent increase on what Labour led. Lewis Macdonald may describe that as following a Labour lead, but I think that it is a very substantial and welcome bonus, and an increase in hope for young people throughout Scottish society.

As far as other aspects go, Lewis Macdonald should perhaps agree and accept that when it comes to the green economy, the Government has been groundbreaking in its approach and has put forward double the number of approvals in renewable production systems that the previous Administration managed. We therefore do not just lead the Labour Party: in some of those technologies, Scotland now leads the world.

Universities (Appointment of Principals)

6. Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on the reported comments by Universities Scotland that "Universities are autonomous legal entities" and that "The appointment procedures for the university's principal is a matter for each institution's governing body". (S3F-2953)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We must remember that Scottish universities are responsible for spending around £1.1 billion of taxpayers' money. It is therefore essential that they have a proper balance between legitimate autonomy, of course, but also accountability to the public purse.

Elizabeth Smith will be aware that a group of some 200 academics from the University of Glasgow have put their names to a paper that calls for greater democracy within university management. They have suggested that principals should go through a confirmatory election before they are appointed.

That is an interesting and radical suggestion. Given the obvious strength of feeling among academics, it is only right that their proposal is properly discussed and debated before the Government takes a view.

Elizabeth Smith: It is good to hear that the Scottish Government is very supportive of robust, transparent and autonomous processes. They can perhaps be enhanced, but many are already in place.

Will the First Minister agree that another advantage of introducing a graduate contribution, apart from ensuring that the universities would receive more money, which they require, is that such a system would make the leaders of those institutions even more accountable to students and staff?

The First Minister: No. I think that the Conservative party's suggestions would have the danger of not awarding places in higher education and university education on the basis of ability, as opposed to the basis of ability to pay. I do not agree with the direction of travel of the Conservative party in this chamber, nor do I agree with the direction of travel of the coalition Government in Westminster, which seems intent on a wholesale withdrawal of state funding from higher education.

One of the advantages that I believe we have is that the balance of thinking in this Parliament and this country sees a totally different and better future for higher education and our students.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I think that the First Minister said that universities and their practices have been very much in the news recently—the University of Glasgow in particular, but also other universities throughout Scotland. Does the First Minister agree that universities cannot remain static? They need to change, and they must respond to the concerns raised, becoming more accountable and transparent. As I think that the First Minister said, they are, after all, public institutions.

The First Minister: I agree with much that Sandra White says and with the direction that she takes, and I have already mentioned the 200 academics from the University of Glasgow.

We should remember for a second that Scotland's ancient universities in particular were founded on a principle that is, I think, unique in

terms of university governance. The rector who chaired the court of many of those universities was elected by the academic body and by the student body as a whole. Let us not bring ourselves to believe that democratic accountability would be a novel idea for Scottish universities. In many ways, democratic accountability to the academic and student body would be a reassertion of one of the founding principles of Scottish universities.

Lee Jeans Sit-in

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-7898, in the name of Duncan McNeil, on the 30th anniversary of the Lee jeans sit-in. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament remembers the 240 women who staged what it sees as a historic sit-in at the Lee Jeans factory in Greenock 30 years ago, beginning on 5 February 1981; notes that the workers barricaded themselves into the canteen for seven months in protest at the decision to close the factory; salutes the workers for capturing the imagination of the whole country and achieving a landmark victory against a US multinational; wishes the former convener, Helen Monaghan, and machinists, Margaret Wallace and Catherine Robertson, well for the 30th anniversary reunion event that they have organised, and considers the Lee Jeans sit-in to be an inspiration to women workers all over the world.

12:32

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): I thank everyone who signed the motion to celebrate this event and everyone who has stayed behind for the debate.

In a week when people all over the world have celebrated international women's day, I welcome Helen Monaghan—the leader of the Lee jeans sit-in—and Catherine Robertson and Margaret Wallace, who have travelled through from Greenock for today's debate, giving us this opportunity to recognise the 30th anniversary of the Lee jeans sit-in.

The VF Corporation, a multinational, was attracted to produce Lee jeans in Greenock with the help of a Government grant, on the basis that it had to stay for a fixed period. That period had come to an end, and it was the company's intention to move to Newtownards in Northern Ireland to take advantage of a similar grant that would be available there. The management confirmed the closure of the factory to the workforce on 5 February 1981. The response from those workers was swift and direct—barricading themselves into the factory and preventing stock and machinery worth around £1 million from leaving.

That response was completely understandable, given the background of the time. Scotland's unemployment rate was 13 per cent. In Strathclyde region, it was 17 per cent and, in some areas of Greenock and Port Glasgow, it was as high as 25 per cent. The women had witnessed the effect of that on their communities and families—their fathers, their brothers and their husbands. Many of the women were the sole

earners in their households. They were not working for pin money.

The women's first task, of course, was to inform those families that they would not be home that night—no easy task before the advent of mobile phones. Indeed, it would lead to many difficult discussions. At the recent celebration, one of the women, Marie, told me about her call to her young husband to inform him that she would not be home because she was sitting in. He was incredulous; he had just got home from his work and demanded that she get home as well. However, she was equally determined to stay. "Who's gaunae make my tea?" he asked. She would not be moved and spoke to her father, a trade unionist and Labour man, who intervened on her behalf. Her husband had to get used to making his own tea while Marie, with others, would go on to make Scottish labour history.

I am told that that first evening was exciting and fun. There were songs and stories and 240 fish suppers washed down with Irn Bru. David Whitton, who was an industrial correspondent at the time and who visited the factory regularly—he would have loved to be here, but he has a family celebration to attend this afternoon—claimed that he bought the fish suppers. Many people claim that they did that—I even think that we claimed it for a while.

It is fair to say that the women did not expect to be there for seven nights, never mind seven months. News spread quickly. It was the talk of the shipyards the next morning. I had known Helen Monaghan for a considerable time, attending the shop steward courses at the local college, and I and other colleagues went to the factory that morning with some money and messages of support. I can still recall speaking to Helen through those meshed windows that could not open properly. All the faces at the door made me feel like I was visiting prisoners.

I can also remember one of the first public meetings—a Clyde shop stewards meeting in Port Glasgow—at which we heard Stan McNee's rallying cry that we would "not let these Yanks take the jeans off our women". The remark proved very popular, given the traditional rivalry between the local young males and the United States navy personnel who were also based in the area, and we collected a lot of support as a result.

I also recall Helen Monaghan speaking at one of these traditional town hall mass meetings—other members will know what I am talking about. Confronted with a room filled from floor to gallery with all these shipyard bears, she choked with emotion during her speech and, of course, many heads went down. Noses were blown and handkerchiefs were common; there was not a dry eye in the house. When she finished her speech,

the audience rose as one and supported the women in their industrial dispute for the duration of the fight.

Back at the factory, with its more female occupation, there did not have to be any warnings about bevvy or vandalism. Cleaning and cooking rotas were implemented; the place was spotless. Moreover, maintenance continued to be carried out on the factory machinery, because people fully expected to be working on it.

There were even babies in the factory, because some of the women had to take children there. Theatre groups performed for them; indeed, our own Sarah Boyack celebrated her birthday at the factory in a red revue performance. Helen Monaghan tells me that, during the difficult times when people started to drift away and morale inevitably began to dip, those performances greatly lifted the women who remained.

Of course, as with all families, there was some tension among the women. Margaret Wallace and Catherine Robertson were young and full of energy. They could not do enough and were demanding to do more; to put it bluntly, they were doing Helen Monaghan's head in. An ideal opportunity came along in the shape of invitations to speak to a range of wild—perhaps that is a Freudian slip—and wonderful groups that had shown an interest in what they were doing, and they toured the country. Catherine and Margaret were sent away to tell their story and to raise support and much-needed finance. The money was distributed on the basis of the needs of families, not individuals, which is interesting and was a new approach.

That released some tension until Margaret and Catherine returned with their various reports. The final straw was when Margaret returned. As she describes, her appearance had changed dramatically over the couple of months. She had been transformed into a person with a cropped haircut, whose favourite colour was black and whose favourite footwear was a pair of Doc Martens. She reported meeting Vanessa Redgrave, who had suggested that armed insurrection was the only reasonable way of gaining success for the working classes. Helen quickly changed tack, and Margaret was redeployed to collect money from shipyards and pitheads, just in case her energy and enthusiasm led to a civil war.

That straightforward, honest and committed approach to saving jobs confounded and surprised many, and it certainly shocked VF Corporation and the local management, who had abandoned those involved early on. The trade union officials of those involved were bemused and confused by their single-minded determination and refusal to compromise, and the women certainly surprised

the wider trade union movement, which was demoralised by the loss of militant car workers at Chrysler, red Clydesiders joining the dole, and shipyards closing. We witnessed the closure of steel plants and, of course, the mighty National Union of Mineworkers was on its knees and under attack.

In many ways, the people involved in the sit-in gave as much to the labour and trade union movement as they received. They provided a spark of light in a very dark time. Many shared a great sense of achievement with the victory in August 1981. Those people were an inspiration in their leadership under Helen Monaghan. Many who clearly remember the events and many who are MSPs today have told me that they were inspired by those actions.

While we celebrate the victory this year, I would like to think that the Scottish Parliament was brought about by the resistance of those involved and the resistance of those who fought and did not get victory. This year, we should use the example of their commitment and determination to fight for the right to work and to remind ourselves that the Parliament was set up to ensure that we protect the Scottish people from uncaring Governments that believe that unemployment is a price worth paying.

I look forward to the film of what happened, and suggest that Peter Mullan or even Ken Loach could make a great film. If Dagenham women can do it, our women can do it. I also look forward to the 40th anniversary of the sit-in and to having a pleasant lunch with Helen, Margaret and Catherine after the debate.

12:43

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Duncan McNeil on securing the debate.

I was an eight-year-old at the time of the sit-in and do not really have a clear picture of what happened, but I remember growing up in Port Glasgow and viewing the decimation of the area as thousands of redundancies occurred with the closure of the shipyards and the engineering companies. There was no sign whatsoever of a bright future.

Duncan McNeil touched on the unemployment statistics. It was reported at the time that there was 25 per cent unemployment in the Greenock area. Much of the consideration of job losses then focused on men but, as our discussion shows, women, too, were adversely affected.

In preparing for the debate, I spoke to a range of people within and outwith the Scottish National Party to get a bit more understanding of elements

of the campaign. One local member told me that the campaign was very much community oriented and that the whole Inverclyde community rallied round. I was told that there was political and financial support from throughout the United Kingdom, which highlights the effect of the campaign not just on the population of Scotland but on that of the UK as a whole.

Jim Sillars told me a couple of things about the campaign. He said that it was a genuine community and working-class campaign. That highlights the strength of the population of Inverclyde and how our community spirit rallied to fight on local issues. It still does. He also said that there was no political sectarianism whatsoever, which demonstrates how parties and people who are not aligned to parties can and do work together for the public good.

One of the 240 women involved in the sit-in, Ellen Church, was a distant family member of mine. Sadly, Ellen has passed away, but I asked one of her sons, Paul, whether he was happy for me to mention her name in the debate. Paul was happy for me to do that, and he told me about Ellen's contribution to the campaign and the hardship that women and their families in the Inverclyde area—particularly those involved in the campaign—had to contend with at the time. Paul was greatly proud of his mother and her contribution, but he was also proud of all 240 women for their fight and what they achieved.

The campaign highlighted various things. It demonstrated the battle for jobs—a battle that continues—on the part of the working class. It showed that the working class in industrial areas are prepared to fight for a better future for themselves and their communities and that the all-female campaign resonated with many people. It highlighted the strength of the Inverclyde women.

Once again, I commend Duncan McNeil for securing the debate. It is not only a fitting tribute to the 240 women but a fitting way to highlight an important part of Scotland's industrial legacy, and that of Inverclyde in particular. I hope that there will be more debates about the campaign in future. As parliamentarians, we cannot let that history die. We must continue to promote it and to tell people what we fought for in the past.

12:48

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Duncan McNeil on securing the debate on the sit-in at the Lee jeans Greenock plant.

Like every other Scottish trade unionist, I was astonished when I heard of the sit-in, which was led by Helen Monaghan, Margaret Wallace and Catherine Robertson. I feared that it would be over

in a couple of days. How wrong was I? Within days, there was stalwart support from, among others, Jane McKay of the trades council. The late John Hardy of the former T and G, who was a district manager at the time, gave the campaign his support, although my understanding is that he was not allowed into the factory at the beginning of the sit-in because men were not allowed in—that sounds like a good idea to me. There was support from the women's family and friends and, as has been said, the local community.

Those courageous women of the lower Clyde demonstrated that they would not be dismissed so carelessly and coldly by their American masters in the VF Corporation. Their American bosses must have been stunned by the affront of the 240 women in a Scottish town somewhere on the Clyde—a town whose name those bosses probably pronounced "Grenock". As Duncan McNeil said, the multinational company was eager to shift its Greenock operations to Northern Ireland during the troubles in order to obtain further funding from the Thatcher Government. However, on the lower Clyde, a small, ably led group of Scots women sent those indifferent, unthinking capitalists homeward to think again.

Let us not forget that Helen Monaghan and her comrades offered to negotiate a three-day week and a programme of job sharing. As Duncan McNeil said, some of those women were the sole earners in their families, yet they were still willing, initially, to make compromises.

One of my abiding memories of that historic moment is of Helen Monaghan somewhat nervously clutching her handbag in front of her and addressing a wild group—as Duncan McNeil would call them—of National and Local Government Officers Association members who were all social workers, in the Glasgow city halls. Hugh Henry and I were among them, as at that time we were shop stewards. Helen Monaghan spoke to the trade unionists in a plain but heartwarming way about the need to stand our ground when faced by capitalists who are interested only in giving comfort to their shareholders and themselves. She told us that she had no idea what her boss was going to tell her when he called her in. She came out of his office stunned and spoke to her fellow shop stewards and the other women who were there. They knew that they had to make a decision immediately. When in doubt, what do you do? They barricaded the boss in his office, sent out for fish suppers, had a singsong through the night and decided what their next step would be in the morning—sorted. A typical women's response.

We took heart from and immense pride in the actions of those brave and stoical women of the lower Clyde. As Duncan McNeil said, it was a

significant moment in Labour's history. However, the Lee jeans sit-in should not be seen only as part of history; it should serve always as a benchmark of what to do when we need to challenge those who have power over us economically and politically. The Lee jeans sit-in by Helen Monaghan and her comrades is an example of an honourable refusal to acquiesce in decisions that are taken by others that affect the lives of ordinary people everywhere, and we should not forget it.

12:51

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): I well remember the Lee jeans sit-in, as I visited the factory on a number of occasions. I was then a Liberal councillor in Inverclyde and also the vice-chairman of the Scottish Liberal Party. I thank Duncan McNeil for bringing the debate to the chamber, because I am in no doubt that the sit-in was an enormous triumph for the 240 women in the factory. It was a tremendous triumph for the leaders—Helen Monaghan, Margaret Wallace and Catherine Robertson—and for the trade union movement in Greenock and the west of Scotland. I am not a trade unionist but, sadly, I have marched with Duncan McNeil on too many occasions when the rights of workers and their jobs have been threatened in the community in which I was born and brought up and in which I am proud still to live.

The Lee jeans factory was important, not just because of the 240 women who worked there, but because in the 1960s it became clear that there was a difficulty in having all of Greenock's economic eggs wrapped up in sugar and shipbuilding. In the middle of the 1960s, the then chief executive of the Greenock Corporation, Mr J D Smith, said that we must broaden the industrial base, and so the Larkfield industrial estate was created. Among the earlier incomers to that estate was Lee jeans.

There was a real sense of hope and an expectation that the broadening of our economic base was important. So when in 1981 the VF Corporation—acting like the very worst of grant-hoppers and seeking to exploit the grant that it had received for coming to the Larkfield industrial estate—wanted to ditch the workforce and the plant and simply move to Northern Ireland, there was anger in the community. That was not only because of the prospects for 240 of our workforce, but because the efforts that the whole community had made to bring in companies and broaden the economic base were being threatened by a selfish and self-centred group of people.

Like Duncan McNeil, I remember the early visits to the sit-in. It was a bit quaint conducting a visit from the other side of the grilled windows. I was

not absolutely sure that I was in Larkfield industrial estate and not on prison visit duty at Gateside prison. I wonder how on earth Helen Monaghan, Margaret Wallace and Catherine Robertson and the others managed to organise those visits, as we had no mobile telephones, as Duncan McNeil said. On my second and third visits, I got the information through that I wanted to provide support and then the meeting was conducted from inside the factory. The way in which they were able to persuade the security guards and so on was remarkable—the management had given up; they knew that they were on the wrong side of the argument and they certainly were not going to get in the road.

I simply do not know how the women managed to sustain their efforts over the seven days that turned into seven months. The personal sacrifices, difficulties and issues for them and their families were huge. It is bad enough facing up to your old man to tell him he's no getting his tea for tonight, but it is another thing to explain to him that he has no getting his tea for the next seven months, and we should acknowledge that.

We should recognise the enormous courage of these people and the enormous sacrifice that they made. They gave the community the sense that people who wanted to exploit the local workforce in Greenock by taking advantage of grants and so on were in the wrong place. The community of Greenock had more to it than that—more gumption and more conviction. I congratulate everyone who took part in the sit-in.

I was privileged to meet them in my capacity as a local Liberal councillor and as the vice-chairman of the local Liberal Party. Our small demonstration of support probably meant absolutely nothing, but at least it ensured that it was genuinely a cross-party issue for the community.

I congratulate Duncan McNeil on giving us the opportunity to remember people who deserve the credit for what they achieved.

12:50

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow) (SNP): I grew up in Greenock and Port Glasgow. My dad was in the Army and we travelled to Germany and various parts of England, all of which was a great experience. However, our grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins were always in Greenock. It is where we went for all of our holidays and it is where my heart was. In 1974, when I was eight, I and my sister Janet, who is in the public gallery today, were finally taken home to settle in Greenock.

There was much to be proud of in my home town. The shipyards always held a real excitement for me. When the hooter went off at 12, we could

only stand back and watch as literally thousands of men poured out and headed to the nearby pubs for lunch. The pubs would have the drinks waiting, having spent the previous hour pouring them, preparing for the rush.

It was a busy, thriving industrial town. However, in the late seventies, things started to change. I recall the sinking feeling every Monday morning when I was at first year in high school and we would be sitting in registration class and the teacher would ask how our weekends had been. Every Monday, someone else reported that their dad had been made redundant from his job in the yards. My best friend's mum worked in the yard canteen and she lost her job too. Every Monday, someone else told the same story—some other family wondering what on earth the future held for them. After a time we came to expect it and, eventually, I was in the minority of pupils in my class whose parents had jobs—they were psychiatric nurses at the local hospital and there was no shortage of jobs for them.

The experience changed us. It changed my friends. It changed their parents. It changed Greenock, Gourock and Port Glasgow. Like many towns and cities in the United Kingdom, we suffered greatly under Thatcher's harsh policies and her refusal to support working people.

However, when the women at the Lee jeans factory in the Larkfield decided that they were just not going to take it anymore, I vividly remember feeling that all was not lost, that people had rights and that if those rights were not being recognised, they had the right to fight for them. That is precisely what the women were doing. What they were also doing—although I did not realise it at the time—was helping to shape me politically. If the mass redundancies fuelled my interest in politics, the women at Lee jeans fired me up at the age of 15 and made me realise that it is possible to fight back.

The Thatcherite policies of condemning communities to the scrap heap and playing one community off against the other showed us just how regressive a central Government can be, but the women at Lee jeans proved how effectively communities can be empowered just by working in solidarity with one another in a disciplined but humanitarian way.

Those women were not political, and they certainly were not party political. What they were was determined. I believe that they had a distinctly female type of politics that makes me wonder how different the world would be if women were making more of the world's decisions—perhaps Greenock women, in particular.

For instance, how many men would have thought to use Persil coupons? When Margaret

Wallace and Catherine Robertson travelled across the UK to speak at rallies, they used two-for-one train vouchers from Persil packets, to save as much money as possible for the families at home.

I will talk about how those involved continued to support their families. Because of the mass redundancies in the traditionally male industries in our town, many women were the main breadwinners, so donations were distributed out again to the families. Every woman's family was considered individually and how much they received depended on their individual circumstances and need. How much better a place the world would be if that principle were applied today to close the massive gap between rich and poor in the world.

I have thoroughly enjoyed talking about my home town, particularly as most speakers have been fellow Greenockians—or Portonians, as some of my colleagues have pointed out. I particularly enjoyed the image of Duncan McNeil arriving the day after the sit-in started with bags of messages—I had pictured Fine Fare's carrier bags, but he was talking about messages of support. I have also enjoyed paying tribute to Helen Monaghan and the other women who helped to shape me politically and without whom I might not be standing here today.

I end simply by reflecting on the fact that we continue to live in the shadow of Thatcher and Tebbit's unfair trade union laws—I notice that no Tories are in the chamber for the debate, which is no surprise. I look forward to the day when the Parliament has the normal powers of a normal nation and the powers to set our own socially just labour laws. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I say to our guests in the public gallery that, although they might be tempted to applaud, our rules do not permit applause from the public gallery.

13:01

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Duncan McNeil not just on securing the debate but on making a powerful and emotional speech, which was worthy of the women whom we are here to celebrate.

In 1981, I was a young schoolteacher down in Rothesay, and I used to travel home at weekends. On every journey home, I witnessed what was happening in the west of Scotland, as I did in my working life, where I saw young children whose hope for the future was being squeezed out of them as unemployment rates rose. I was also a young activist in the labour movement.

It is genuinely hard for me to overstate the impact of the Lee jeans women and the sit-in on

my politics and my view of what politics was about. It transpired that trade unionists were not just men—they included these wonderful and inspirational women. Trade unionism was not just about heavy industry and shipbuilding, which was my picture of it as the daughter of a seafarer—Port Glasgow was the dry dock—but about the importance of other work to communities. The stereotypical view of the trade unions' role did not apply. Here were women with great optimism and great humour who were standing up for themselves, their families and their communities. In the few words that I can say today, it is impossible for me to tell the Lee jeans women how important they were to all of us and how exciting it is to speak in the debate.

In the past 30 years, what politics is about and what the role of ordinary people is in changing communities have been redefined. That can be tracked back to women such as those from the Lee jeans sit-in, who said, "This is not good enough. We will stand up for our families and our communities." Not only did they say that in a time of great depression and fear about what was happening around them, but they could win. We hold on to that now as a powerful message about what people can do when they come together.

The Lee jeans women quietly made history. We are good at celebrating our heroes, but we need to do more to remember the history of women such as the Lee jeans women—we need not only to ensure that their history is celebrated but to demand that their legacy shapes our future action. We can think back to what happened in the 1980s, when—as Duncan McNeil said—unemployment was said to be a price worth paying, and we can look ahead with fear because we might have people in power now who take the same view.

Decisions that are being made now are having a disproportionate impact on women—on their capacity to get jobs, because their jobs are disappearing, and on their capacity to be supported, through child care and other measures, to go out to work. The services on which women rely disproportionately are under attack. Even a very simple figure sets that out. A calculation of the changes in benefits, tax credits and so on has been made that shows a loss of something like £4 a week in a man's wage but £8 in a woman's wage.

We need to reaffirm the importance of understanding the important role that women play in their families, communities and the workplace. It is timely for us to remember, in celebrating everything that the Lee jeans women did, and to reaffirm, that this place—this Parliament—should have high levels of women's representation and that it should speak for women's interests. In the 1980s, the powerful women's voice stopped a

huge company in its tracks. That voice will also have an important job in protecting women, families and communities in the times ahead.

I thank the Lee jeans women for everything that they did to give us hope in the 1980s. They transformed the view of women's role and the power that women have when they come together. We need to ensure that this celebration is also an inspiration for the future.

13:06

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): I warmly congratulate Duncan McNeil on bringing the debate to Parliament and for telling the Lee jeans story so well. The common theme in the debate is that the Lee jeans experience touched us all. I was born and brought up in Greenock. I have lived in Greenock, Gourock and Port Glasgow and been to school there. I think that I became an economic migrant during that time of 25 per cent unemployment. It is a real privilege, therefore, to make this contribution.

As others do, I owe those ladies a debt. Their action in the 1980s woke me up, as it did others; it convinced me that things were clearly not right in Scotland. I saw that we had sleepwalked our way into a very bad position and their action helped me to build my political philosophy. It saw me leave a multinational and start my own business. It persuaded me that Scotland needed better than branch-economy status. It highlighted for me our vulnerability to the next hungry area of the world to where disloyal nomadic employers will relocate because people in those places are willing work for less.

The influence of the Lee jeans ladies and that of Jimmy Reid must have shaped what I have done latterly. Back in 2003, when I stood for Parliament and Jimmy Reid signed my nomination papers, I was determined, influenced and focused on researching and understanding why the action had happened and what could be done to benefit my home town and other parts of Scotland. Today, I join other members in the Scottish Parliament in telling the ladies that they were right. They were right to take a stand and right to see how wrong the Lee jeans management was on moral, ethical, human and economic grounds. I want to contribute to the vindication of their action and to celebrate the stand that they took.

The pendulum is now swinging back in the direction of the 1980s, but the message is getting through. People such as Rosabeth Moss Kanter at Harvard Business School are beginning to point out that the companies that are succeeding in the 21st century are the companies that adopt an ethical approach to their customers, employees,

suppliers, communities and—of course—shareholders. Also at Harvard, Michael Porter is saying that the companies that will survive in the 21st century are those that identify the concept of shared value. He talks of those companies redefining profits to benefit customers, employees, suppliers, communities and the taxpayer—generally, the approach tries to lift all the boats.

The financial crisis has seen us come to the end of an era in which it was okay to thrash the assets and be callous about all the people who are involved in the business, just to show the next return. That is not okay; it was never okay. The stand that Helen Monaghan, Margaret Wallace, Catherine Robertson and their 237 colleagues took at Lee jeans was prescient and right. They showed the way it has to be.

The work of a couple of amazing guys with Scottish connections—Kenneth and William Hopper—tells us that America grew great in the period 1850 to 1950 because of the country's wholesome ethos at the time. America was trying to create a heaven on earth by bringing everyone into the camp and thereby lifting everyone's living standards. At that time, Americans were willing to open themselves to new ideas and improve things in an open way and for ever.

They lost the plot in 1911, when the cancer started and Frederick Taylor arrived with his stopwatch to do the time and motion studies that broke the morale of working folk, created the gap between working folk and management and created the fallacy of scientific management—that it was okay for people to go from making jeans to agriculture, production and banking without deep knowledge of the sector, and that short-termism was okay. We have allowed that approach to penetrate the City of London, Wall Street and master of business administration courses. Recently I heard the nice comment, "Do you think that India and China are going to let Wall Street and the City of London clean the profits off the top? Certainly not." They will certainly not allow short-term management to do that.

We need a better way and we need to understand that there is a moral obligation on society and players in the business space to try to work in a collegiate way with their workforce. We can have economic companies thrashing the assets, or we can have companies that are organic, that work in an egalitarian way with their communities and that allow those communities to evolve into new missions, as old missions are overtaken by the passage of time, by new inventions and so on. That fulfilment is the key thing that we see in companies such as Tullis Russell Group Ltd, which was subject to an employee buyout. Today we see in the newspapers that the John Lewis Partnership is

sharing its profits with its partners—that is to say, all of its employees. Arup, the engineering company, is going from strength to strength because the employees own and run the company.

We may well look back on the management attitude that was taken in 1981 as something from the dark ages that is behind us and from which we can move forward. The key issue is how we align more and more businesses with their employees, so that they get a much more collegiate approach. The penny is dropping with the corporations, which are understanding that shareholder value is never enough. The Royal Bank of Scotland delivered shareholder value, but companies must endure and grow. For working communities to endure and grow, they must adapt, innovate and forever execute better. To do that, they must listen to the people who work in the place, have made a commitment to it and are putting their working lives and efforts in line with it. Communities of that kind such as Tullis Russell, John Lewis and Arup are allowing people to be more in control of their destiny and to be all that they can be. The big priority now is to adopt what works well.

Johann Lamont made a potent comment about the power of coming together. There is also the power of women. I have been telling my daughter for ever that the future is female. That is coming true in her—she believes it and is moving forward.

There is a debt that most of us owe. I often debate how the wholesome values that we have and that are evident in this debate—our sense of national identity, of birthright and of self—were passed on to us. Did they come from the schools, the universities, the churches, the professions or the trade unions? In part, they came from all of those. However, they really came from sitting on granny's knees and being told who we were and what we stood for. When the ladies in the public gallery, all of whom are considerably younger than me, come to the stage of being grannies, they will have a great story to pass on for Scotland.

13:13

Meeting suspended until 14:00.

14:00

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Europe, External Affairs and Culture

Creative Scotland (Expenditure)

1. James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what procedures are in place to monitor the expenditure of Creative Scotland. (S3O-13228)

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): As it is a statutory non-departmental public body, the expenditure of Creative Scotland will be monitored through the statutory requirements that apply to it, principally through the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, which requires it to exercise its functions in accordance with the act, audit its annual statement of accounts, lay an annual report in the Scottish Parliament and prepare a corporate plan.

James Kelly: I thank the minister for her answer. Recently published details of expenditure by Creative Scotland have caused some concern—specifically, expenditure of £58,000 to fund a dance programme based on the works of Alfred Hitchcock and a trip to Tonga to study Polynesian dancing. That is at a time when hard-pressed organisations throughout the country are facing up to the financial crisis. Will the minister commit to a review of Creative Scotland expenditure and outline what actions will be taken against unnecessary expenditure, such as on the examples that I gave?

Fiona Hyslop: I have already met Creative Scotland and reminded it of its duty, which other bodies also have, to ensure that public spending provides value for money for the public purse. I point out that our world-leading creative industries support 60,000 jobs and generate £5.2 billion each year for the Scottish economy. I was frequently asked during the passage of the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Bill, which I think the member was involved in, to reassure the Parliament that as a minister I would not interfere in artistic decisions made by Creative Scotland. Unless the Labour Party is now backtracking on its commitment to artistic independence, the member may want to reflect on his question.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister reiterate on her Government's behalf the commitment to the hands-off principle in the arts, as included in the Creative Scotland Bill by this Government? Does she agree that when we

start talking about the potential for Government censorship of the arts, that is a bad prospect for Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: The arm's-length principle was enshrined in recent legislation and supported by all parties in the Scottish Parliament. Policing and censorship by Government of individual artistic expression or of decisions made by artists or by Creative Scotland, as the body responsible for artistic grants, would be of some concern to the cultural community in Scotland. I agree with the member that we need to be cautious and careful about the arm's-length principle.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Question 2 was to be from Elizabeth Smith, who I think must have failed to notice the change of starting time.

Historic Scotland (Odeon Cinema, Edinburgh)

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

To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions it has had with Historic Scotland regarding the former Odeon cinema on Clerk Street, Edinburgh. (S3O-13216)

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Following the decision to refuse listed building consent on 21 May 2010, there have been no bilateral meetings between the Scottish Government and Historic Scotland about the Odeon cinema site.

Sarah Boyack: I thank the minister for her answer. She may be aware that the owners have resubmitted their controversial plans for the Odeon to the council after failing to find a buyer, but there are real concerns among the community, potential buyers and arts groups that the guide sale price of £2.93 million did not reflect the deterioration and dilapidated state of the Odeon.

In the minister's last letter to me in November she advised that

"Historic Scotland has indicated that due to the volatility of the market and the lack of recent sales and comparables, a set price may be inappropriate".

In the light of those comments and the community council petition to save the Odeon, which has collected more than 4,000 signatures, will the Scottish Government now intervene to save this important building?

Fiona Hyslop: As a former minister, the member will be familiar with the rules relating to planning applications. If there is a live application currently with the council, the matter is with the council for determination. She will also be familiar with the process under which there may, in future, be reference to Historic Scotland. We must reflect on where the application that is currently before the council is in the process, and I understand that

no decision has been made in the past few days. The member will appreciate that we must abide by due process. I am aware of her and other MSPs' concern about the building; however, as I said in my answer to her first question, listed building consent was refused on 21 May 2010, which was the last time that there was involvement by Scottish ministers in the case.

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): I associate myself with Sarah Boyack's remarks. The minister will be aware that there is great concern in the community that the developers are using an overinflated price as a ploy to ensure that no one can buy the property and keep it in the design that we need to save. Given that concern and the involvement of Historic Scotland, in the past, in facilitating discussions on the matter, will the minister do all that she can to ensure that Historic Scotland and the Scottish Government once again get behind the campaign to ensure that we save the Odeon in its current state?

Fiona Hyslop: I place on record my acknowledgement of Shirley-Anne Somerville's firm interest in the case. She invites me to provide support from Historic Scotland and the Scottish Government for the campaign; however, I ask all members to reflect on the fact that ministers are not in a position to support a campaign when they might have to make decisions about a listed building consent. There are procedures that we have to follow. In this instance, the ball is firmly in the council's court and it is the council's responsibility to make a decision at this time. I recognise the efforts that are being made—the local campaign group has kept me informed of its activities—but it would be wrong of me to prejudge any decision that might be required of the Scottish ministers in the future.

Historic Buildings (Protection)

4. Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the powers and responsibilities of Historic Scotland and local authorities are regarding the protection of historic buildings. (S3O-13241)

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Through Historic Scotland, the Scottish ministers work closely with local authorities to protect and enhance our country's historic environment. That work is carried out through a wide range of legislation, policy and guidance. The importance of historic buildings, individually or collectively, can be recognised by Historic Scotland through the listing process and by local authority designation of conservation areas. When change is proposed, the planning system ensures that the desirability of protecting a historic building's particular character is a key part of the wider consideration of an application.

Regulations are in place within the planning system to ensure that the Scottish ministers, through Historic Scotland, are involved at the appropriate stages in the oversight or handling of certain types of case.

Elaine Murray: The minister may be aware of the growing concerns about the number of listed buildings and buildings in conservation areas in my constituency that have fallen into disrepair. Indeed, there has been an e-mail campaign directed to her MSP address on the subject of St Mary's Street, in Dumfries. The problem is that the owners often do not live locally and it is sometimes difficult to trace them or they do not respond to communication. Can the minister advise me of any examples of intervention to prevent the loss of built heritage that could be copied as examples of good practice? Will she also comment on the request for her to call in the planning application regarding St Mary's Street?

Fiona Hyslop: The member raises a number of issues. In my first answer, I said that protecting the character of the historic built environment is a key part of the wider consideration of an application—it is not the only consideration, but it is a key one. In a number of cases, including that of the St Mary's Street building to which the member refers, Historic Scotland has taken a view on whether account of that has been taken in that wider consideration.

As for good examples of communicating with absentee landlords or owners, I am more than happy to identify good practice and share it with the member if that would be helpful. One of the aims of the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, which was recently passed by the Parliament, was to provide mechanisms whereby duties could be placed on those who do not want to improve or take care of the historic environment for which they have responsibility. The bill gives more powers to local authorities, rather than Historic Scotland, to intervene to ensure the financing of improvements, although in some instances it gives Historic Scotland powers of easier intervention that allow it to go into certain properties to ensure, for example, that repairs are made. The member might want to look at that piece of legislation, which we have just passed. I am also more than happy to identify examples of good practice to pass on to her.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): When I came into the Parliament some eight years ago, I asked the then minister about the vexed question of Historic Scotland's failure to come to any agreement with the owner of Castle Tioram on the castle's future. The Minister for Culture and External Affairs has given me encouraging noises over the past months. Will she take the opportunity, which will certainly be my last

at culture questions, to update us on what is happening with the castle or will we have to wait another eight years before Historic Scotland finally sees sense on the matter?

Fiona Hyslop: I am conscious that the former Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution, Michael Russell, is sitting beside me. I have been in post for somewhat over a year now, and I can inform Ted Brocklebank that no new application has been submitted for Castle Tioram. However, active discussions are taking place with the owner, and Historic Scotland is working closely with him and his team to establish a new way forward to serve the castle's best interests.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Does the minister believe that the regeneration of Portsoy harbour in my constituency through the provision of funding under the Historic Scotland conservation area regeneration scheme—CARS—will be a real boost to local tourism, will support the Portsoy traditional boat festival and will serve as an excellent example for other parts of Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: Indeed I do. Since 2007, £16 million has been awarded to 34 locally run schemes. I understand that, in Portsoy, the £500,000 that has just been announced under round 4 of CARS is funding work surrounding the quay and is aimed at providing economic drivers and enhancing tourism. There are also wider social benefits, such as youth development skills that will be acquired through the repair of facilities that are to be used by local boat builders in the provision of after-school opportunities.

The funding is about not only regeneration and conservation but services that can have wider benefits for communities. I am delighted to agree with Stewart Stevenson on that point.

The Presiding Officer: Question 5 was not lodged.

Middle East and Africa (Support)

6. Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it can provide to people in those areas of the middle east and Africa that are experiencing civil unrest. (S3O-13277)

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government supports the right to free speech, to peaceful protest and of people to choose their own Government. We are keeping the situation across the region under review and stand ready to help where we can. That approach was demonstrated in relation to Libya when we worked closely with the United Kingdom authorities to assist Scots who were trapped in the country.

I will also write to the Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell, adding our voice to the United Nations call for access for humanitarian agencies to areas in Libya that are affected by violence.

Anne McLaughlin: Will the minister join me in condemning Robert Mugabe's repressive regime in Zimbabwe, which arrested, detained and abused 45 people simply for watching and discussing the Egyptian revolution? Six of them remain in jail charged with treason and facing the death penalty. Some of their friends are in the gallery, and I know how much it would mean to them to hear the Government condemn those arrests and the horrific and brutal way in which Mugabe ensures that no Zimbabwean dares to do as Tunisians, Egyptians and Libyans are doing in peacefully campaigning for the most basic of rights—democracy.

Fiona Hyslop: The Government has already expressed its support for the international community's condemnation of, and action against, Colonel Gaddafi. If Robert Mugabe is offering support to him, that only serves to strengthen the concerns that the Government has previously expressed about the situation in Zimbabwe.

There is no legitimacy in ruling a country—whether Zimbabwe or Libya—through fear, intimidation and force.

The Presiding Officer: Question 7 was not lodged.

Eastern European Governments (Engagement)

8. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what engagement it has had with Eastern European Governments. (S3O-13221)

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Administration has established productive links with the Governments of central and eastern Europe. That includes meetings between the Scottish ministers and visiting heads of state, ministers, ambassadors and consuls general. I am also delighted to tell Parliament that the Romanian ambassador opened a new consular office in Edinburgh last month.

Helen Eadie: I am delighted to hear that. However, given the opportunities that stem from the priority status for funding of those countries, I am surprised that the Government has not worked harder to develop enterprise and civic friendships. Maybe I will withdraw the point about civic friendships in the light of what the minister has just said, but I am thinking of countries such as Bulgaria and Hungary, particularly given the recent development involving jet2.com, which the minister's colleague launched just last week.

There are celtic connections in Bulgaria, and there has been a request from that country for help, particularly in relation to serious organised crime.

Fiona Hyslop: I reassure the member that we have extensive and regular contacts with a number of countries. She should remember that three countries are represented here by career diplomats—Poland, Romania and Ukraine—and that we have honorary consuls and consuls general of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia and Slovenia. We were pleased to meet the Czech ambassador recently, and the Czech foreign affairs committee is here in the Parliament today. We have been discussing a number of issues, particularly in relation to energy, electricity and business. I therefore reassure the member on that point.

Community Arts Initiatives

9. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what support is provided to community arts initiatives. (S3O-13230)

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government places great importance on community arts in providing opportunities for participation in and appreciation and enjoyment of arts and culture throughout Scotland. Creative Scotland funds a number of community arts activities through the awards for all, inspire and cashback for culture programmes. Projects that are supported include the Village Storytelling Centre in Pollok, in the member's constituency, with a programme of storytelling events for children, young people and their families in that area of Glasgow.

Johann Lamont: I welcome the minister's comments, particularly as she acknowledged the wonderful work that is done by the Village Storytelling Centre, and I note that there are other projects in my constituency.

The minister acknowledges the importance of community arts, which go far beyond simply the arts dimension to involve people and support vulnerable groups. I am sure that she will be aware of the anxiety of community arts organisations that, in tough economic times, the service that they provide will be seen as a luxury. In the light of the Government's commitment to preventative spending, what analysis has been done of how community arts can be used to support people at an early stage, to prevent, and to save money at a later stage when people, through isolation, might end up going into hospital or whatever.

Fiona Hyslop: I very much support the sentiment of the member's question. It is one reason why we have maintained Creative

Scotland's budget through difficult times. Many of the community arts projects are supported by councils, but her point about preventative spend is well made. Shona Robison, the Minister for Public Health and Sport, and I co-chaired a conference specifically on health-related issues. Mental health patients in particular and those who suffer from mental health problems can very much benefit from support. The inspiring change project, which has provided support for prisoners to try to prevent reoffending, has shown evidenced research. If there is anything else that I can identify, I will let the member know.

The Presiding Officer: Question 10 was from Rhona Brankin, who I think has also failed to make it to the chamber.

I have to say that it is regrettable that one person did not note the change of time and another simply has not turned up. That is disrespectful to the chamber and is greatly to be regretted, particularly as I know that Stewart Maxwell had a supplementary question to one of the questions. I do not know whether anybody had one for Rhona Brankin's. However, I am left with no choice other than to move to the next set of questions.

Education and Lifelong Learning

Fife Council Education Department (Meetings)

1. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met Fife Council education department and what was discussed. (S3O-13215)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The Scottish Government is in regular contact with Fife Council about a range of subjects relating to education and children and young people. I met members of Fife Council education department at the opening of Parkhill primary school in September last year. The Minister for Children and Early Years met Fife Council education department in April and May 2009 to discuss child protection services and other issues relating to education.

Claire Baker: The cabinet secretary is aware that the council's decision to close Ardroy outdoor education centre has caused a lot of concern among teachers, pupils and parents. It is a popular facility and one that contributes to the wellbeing of children throughout the region, particularly those from deprived communities. One concerned constituent said to me, "My worry is that, if they close Ardroy, many children just won't get the opportunity to go anywhere." Does the cabinet secretary agree that Fife Council's decision is

short-sighted and not in the best interests of Fife children?

Michael Russell: No, I do not agree because, originally, the short-sightedness lay with the previous Labour administration of Fife, which failed to maintain the centre. The centre faces some fairly horrific costs to replace its sewerage system, and it is under a notice from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. Public finances are severely constrained, as a result of Labour mispending and incompetence. In all those circumstances, the centre's closure is deeply regrettable.

However, I am very glad to say that Fife Council has confirmed that alternative opportunities for young people will be offered. I think that that shows the effectiveness of the present Fife Council, as opposed to the previous one.

Nurture Classes (Support)

2. Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what support it is giving to nurture classes across Scotland. (S3O-13226)

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): Nurturing approaches in schools and pre-school establishments are a practical example of early intervention under the early years framework and curriculum for excellence, to enable children and young people who have not experienced consistent parenting and secure attachments to improve social and emotional development, attainment and communication skills so that they are ready to learn.

The Scottish Government's positive behaviour team is promoting and supporting the implementation of nurture groups and approaches across Scotland through national training, networking and capacity building, and through its work locally with local authorities and schools.

Charlie Gordon: Is the door still open for nurture groups to become a standard feature of the development of the curriculum for excellence?

Adam Ingram: I have a long-standing commitment to the promotion of nurture groups. I first raised the subject in my previous life, as convener of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on mental health, back in 2003, and I spent a lot of the previous session of Parliament lobbying Peter Peacock on the benefits of nurture groups, so I am certainly interested in ensuring that children who require such a service have access to it.

Borders College (Meetings)

3. John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish

Executive when the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning last met the principal of Borders College. (S3O-13203)

The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): The First Minister and the previous Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning, Keith Brown, have enjoyed visits to Borders College. I have yet to meet the principal of the college, but I look forward to an early opportunity to do so.

John Lamont: The minister will be aware of the difficult decisions that the college has to make because of the reduction in its funding, which include a number of staff cuts. Having spoken to the principal yesterday, I know that she believes that, despite those changes, the college will continue to work hard to deliver the Scottish Government's priorities.

Does the minister agree that our colleges and universities are critical to ensuring that our workers have the skills that the Scottish economy needs as it emerges from the economic downturn, and that it is therefore unfortunate that the Scottish Government has not put in place a sustainable funding future for colleges and universities to secure those skills?

Angela Constance: I am very much aware of the difficulties that Borders College, like other colleges, is experiencing, and I appreciate that it must make savings of around £785,000. I share the member's concern and join him in recognising that Borders College is committed to maintaining student numbers and ensuring minimal disruption to the learner.

With respect to Mr Lamont, I hope that he will also take his concerns to the United Kingdom Tory Government in London, given the savage cuts that we are experiencing. That said, I am politically and personally committed to ensuring that we find a way forward for all of Scotland's colleges, and I am listening very closely to the 41 colleges across the sector that are calling for change.

Universities (Funding)

4. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive, in light of the report of the Scottish Government/Universities Scotland technical group on higher education, what it considers the teaching funding gap between Scottish and English universities will be by 2014-15. (S3O-13204)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): Our analysis of those figures suggests that a net funding gap of around £93 million could emerge with the rest of the UK in 2014-15. That is based on the assumptions that are set out in the report and Scottish universities earning extra income of

up to £62 million by 2014-15 through charging students from the rest of the UK higher fees.

David McLetchie: Those figures are based on the absurd assumption that there will be no growth in fees down south over that period. It appears that the deficit deniers of SNP and Labour are now making up higher education policy based on phantom figures. Mr Sim, the director of Universities Scotland, has said that its £202 million estimate—not £93 million—for the funding gap was “conservative” and that to bridge it without a graduate contribution would require “brave decisions” to be made about spending cuts elsewhere. Would our brave cabinet secretary care to volunteer areas that lie within his portfolio and which would be suitable for cuts, or is that another buck that he intends to pass?

Michael Russell: David McLetchie must not get intoxicated by his own rhetoric, even at the conclusion of the parliamentary session. The reality is that this Government has done more to work on, and with, the sector to plan for its future. The green paper process, which was much derided, particularly by Labour, has turned out to be a remarkable success because, for the first time ever, we have a comprehensive set of figures. Universities Scotland might wish to work with the top end of its figures, but I have not chosen to go to the bottom end. Unfortunately, David McLetchie is comparing gross with net and a good lawyer like him should know that he should never do that. We need to make a decision in Scotland about the proper public funding of universities.

The Conservatives have made an alternative decision that people should go to university because they have the ability to pay, not the ability to learn. That is totally alien to the Scottish tradition. The Conservatives must answer for that decision, but I will answer for the sustained, long-term future for Scottish universities that I am determined to put in place.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): What impact will the raising of tuition fees to £9,000 have on the accessibility of higher education in Scotland?

Michael Russell: We will see an undesirable effect on access to higher education south of the border. That policy must answer for itself, but its apologists in the Scottish Tory party are being sucked into the swamp of saying that higher education should be provided for the benefit of the individual rather than for the benefit of society. That is entirely alien to the Scottish tradition.

We will see a growing divide south of the border, and I do not want to see that in Scotland. It is no accident that we have five of the top 150 universities in the world. That is because of our tradition of more open access, because we value

education in the way that we do, and because our universities have democratic governance. I want to preserve those things.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Following publication of the report by the Scottish Government and Universities Scotland, the Labour Party has made a commitment to no tuition fees either up front or at the back end. Will the cabinet secretary match our commitment?

Michael Russell: I was entertained to read the account in *The Daily Telegraph* of how that decision was made. It seems to have left Mr McNulty a little bit surprised, to say the least. Nonetheless, if Mr Macintosh shows the patience for which he is renowned, he will discover that the offer that he has made has certainly stimulated some thinking. Of course, the greater thinking is not about the review that Iain Gray has offered, which is utterly ludicrous considering the timescales involved. The greater thinking is being done about how we make radical change to Scottish universities, and Mr Macintosh will not have to wait very long before he discovers my views on that.

College Students (Work Placements)

5. Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is giving to colleges to provide work placement opportunities for students. (S3O-13274)

The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): Colleges have a very clear understanding of the value of work placements. Only two months ago, I was delighted to launch the education into enterprise programme at Adam Smith College; I believe that Tricia Marwick was there. That is a £1.1 million initiative involving a consortium of colleges and the University of Abertay, which aims to introduce accredited work placement opportunities into many existing courses. It is being supported by the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils.

Tricia Marwick: The minister has alluded to the fact that we had a wonderful day at the education into enterprise project at the Levenmouth campus of Adam Smith College earlier this year. The minister is aware that the project will create 800 work opportunities for students in small and medium-sized companies, thanks to the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council funding that she mentioned. Does the minister agree that the education into enterprise project will provide a major boost for young people in Levenmouth and beyond? What plans are there to roll out the project elsewhere in Scotland so that other young people can have the benefits of it too?

Angela Constance: I did indeed, along with Tricia Marwick, have the opportunity and the privilege of speaking to many of the young people and students who are benefiting from and participating in the programme. There are a lot of positive lessons to be learned, and I am sure that there is plenty of scope for best practice to be rolled out across the country.

It is important to say that a great deal of that type of work already exists. The £1.1 million for this project forms part of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council's £4.7 million learning to work two programme for wider activities that was announced last year. A lot of work is going on over a range of activities in work experience-led initiatives.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): What assessment has the Government made of the impact of the withdrawal of funding for school-college partnerships, particularly on the most vulnerable students who will not be able to access college placements?

Angela Constance: Marilyn Livingstone is right to speak favourably of the school-college partnerships. The Government has asked colleges to focus provision in that area on the secondary 3 to secondary 6 age group, which is very much in order and in keeping with the delivery of the senior phase of curriculum for excellence.

It is important to recognise that for school pupils, particularly younger pupils, schools are the primary—although not the sole—provider of those experiences. However, there is another range of partners in the form of youth organisations and youth work to meet that need.

Colleges and local authorities are free to respond in their own way to local needs and to do work in that area with the younger age group if they so wish. However, members should be reassured that we are continuing to focus our activity on the S3 to S6 age group with regard to curriculum for excellence. That is consistent with long-standing practice and with the original guidance that the Labour and Liberal parties issued on the lifelong partners strategy.

Schools (Repairs)

6. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how many children were being educated in schools classed as in need of repair in May 2007 and how many are now. (S3O-13269)

The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): In April 2007, there were nearly 257,000 children being educated in schools in condition categories C or D. By April 2010, there were fewer than 120,000 children in such schools, which is a reduction of more than 135,000. That

has been possible because 330 school building projects have been completed since May 2007: that is more in the past four years than the previous two Administrations managed in the past eight years.

I have arranged for a list of the 330 school projects to be placed in the Scottish Parliament information centre; the bib number is 52569.

Kenneth Gibson: Does the minister agree that the Scottish Government's commitment to refurbishing and rebuilding hundreds of our schools has created a more positive learning experience for our young people, and that future projects such as the new Garnock academy in my constituency, which will be built with the help of £18.8 million in Scottish Government funding, will benefit thousands of Scots schoolchildren for generations to come?

Angela Constance: Yes, absolutely. I am delighted to say that this Administration is spending more on school buildings and refurbishment, and that we are doing it faster and more effectively for the public purse. I am pleased that the constituency member has acknowledged the good work that is going on in relation to Garnock academy.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Will the minister confirm that £18.8 million in capital funding is still available for Garnock academy? When will that funding be available? The original plan was that it would be available in 2013-14. Is that still the year in which that capital funding will be available?

Angela Constance: I am very aware from discussions with my colleague Kenneth Gibson that there has been a lot of politically motivated scaremongering with regard to Garnock academy. Let me reassure Mr McNulty that this Government's pledge is firmly in place and that we will meet every penny of the £18.8 million funding, which will be delivered on time to ensure construction in 2013-14, despite Westminster's savage cuts in capital budgets.

Scots Language (Examinations)

7. Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans are being made to ensure that the Scots language is included in the Scottish Qualifications Authority exam schemes from 2011-12. (S3O-13270)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The Scots language is alive and well in Scottish education, I am glad to say. A number of excellent resources have been prepared by Learning and Teaching Scotland, and I recently asked it to consider a new vision that will provide more consistency and focus

to the Scottish elements of the curriculum. The study of Scottish texts is already a requirement of national qualifications in English, and the Scottish Qualifications Authority will work with partners to ensure that Scots is given a high profile within the new qualifications that are being developed for curriculum for excellence.

Rob Gibson: I welcome the place of Scots in the curriculum, but could guidelines extend the requirement beyond studying at least one Scottish text and allow students to use Scots in any oral or written assessments, if they wish to?

Michael Russell: Those are sensible contributions, but we need to join up all the elements of Scots and Scots study in the curriculum. The work of Learning and Teaching Scotland will bring that forward and provide consistency and focus to the whole issue. As that work rolls out, I am sure that the member will be pleased and excited.

The Presiding Officer: Question 8 is from Andy Kerr, but I am afraid that he is not in the chamber; I simply refer to my earlier comments in that regard. Question 9 was not lodged.

National Union of Students (Meetings)

10. Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the National Union of Students. (S3O-13267)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): As part of the green paper discussions, I have held regular meetings with all the key stakeholders in the higher education sector, including NUS Scotland. Most recently, NUS officials attended the higher education green paper summit meeting in Glasgow on 1 March 2011. NUS Scotland also meets my officials regularly; only last week, they met to discuss how they can continue to contribute to policy development in a number of areas, including how we can improve student support over the coming years.

Linda Fabiani: Did those who attended the most recent meeting with the cabinet secretary express pleasure at the recent budget and its commitment to further education funding? Did they welcome the certainty in that funding, which is in marked contrast to the contradictory statements that were mentioned earlier and Labour's failure adequately to cost and fund its fees pledge, which looks like leading to another betrayal of students as in 1997 and 2001, when it promised no fees, prior to their introduction?

Michael Russell: There is only one party in the chamber that has never voted for fees. I make that point so that it is clearly understood by the wider Scottish population that there is one party that has

been consistent in its position on fees and will remain so.

I point strongly to the support for students that I am keen to bring forward. In these difficult times, I am conscious that every part of public spending is under pressure, but in the part of the budget that was my responsibility I sought first to ensure that there was no diminution of support for students; we managed to do that.

We did not, for example, abolish the education maintenance allowance as was done south of the border, although it was claimed that we had done so by the former First Minister, Jack McConnell, in his Christmas message to the good people of Wishaw. One should not mislead people during the festive season. There was no cut nor reduction to the EMA, which remains central to my plans for student support. The cash value of student support has continued in place, and I worked very hard with my colleague John Swinney to ensure that the support for students through bursaries was increased, which was a measure that the Liberal Democrats requested. We succeeded in that, largely because students themselves were very keen on it.

In all those circumstances, student support remains central to the process in which we are engaged, and I want to continue to grow it.

The Presiding Officer: I am afraid that I must conclude themed questions at that point. We need to leave a little time for people to change places, and the next debate is extremely tight.

Scotland Bill

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-8114, in the name of Iain Gray, on the Scotland Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons. I repeat that time is extremely tight and therefore ask members to be punctilious in their timekeeping.

14:40

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): Today is important for the Scottish Parliament and all those who believe in devolution for Scotland. As the Scotland Bill Committee's report makes clear, the Scotland Bill provides for the first time meaningful tax-raising powers and decentralisation from a UK Treasury that, until now, has collected 96 per cent of tax revenues. I put on record my gratitude to the politicians of the devolution parties who have made the Scotland Bill a reality. This work will result in radical changes to our young and developing Parliament. Whereas others talk about Scotland's future and what might be, we, the parties that support strong devolution in the UK, have ensured a settlement that contains new and radical powers. I also pay tribute to my colleague Wendy Alexander, who brought about the Scottish commission on devolution, and to Kenneth Calman and all the commissioners for their excellent work.

In its analysis, its explanation, its rationale, its recommendations and its conclusions, the committee's report is a great piece of work. However, it is a matter of genuine regret that the present Scottish Government has been unwilling to participate. It could have chosen to accept the will of the Parliament at any stage: when the Calman commission was set up; when the commission consulted and engaged and when the quality of its analysis, its arguments and indeed its report became clear; when this Parliament endorsed the report; when the successor UK Government accepted the commission's recommendations; or even last December, when this Parliament agreed the Scotland Bill's general principles. However, that it did not do so is only to be expected. Today is the last chance for the Scottish National Party Government to be constructive. A change of heart would be welcome.

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government has been extremely constructive not only with the bill committee but with the UK Government. We have made 30 different suggestions for improvements in the bill. Surely the member recognises that that is constructive engagement.

Pauline McNeill: The member does not recognise that, but I will come to that. Until now, Fiona Hyslop has argued for independence or full fiscal autonomy to the death. Nothing else will do; it is the only issue in town—despite the fact that the public have not supported the SNP's view. Indeed, these days it is not clear whether its policy is full fiscal autonomy or independence, but perhaps that can be cleared up today.

Fiona Hyslop has participated, however, in misinformation and scaremongering. Until now, her party has stood outside the process for change for Scotland, the constitutional convention and so on. Need I say any more?

We should be grateful to the Scotland Bill Committee for its analysis of the issues, some of which I want to draw attention to in the short time available. The first issue is an understanding of the bill's place in the development of Scottish devolution. *[Interruption.]* Bruce Crawford seems to think that that is amusing.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): I do not think that you are very amusing at all, actually.

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Pauline McNeill: The Scotland Act 1998 was by any standard a landmark piece of legislation. It gave the Parliament very wide powers and, as the Calman commission showed, it got the bundle of legislative and executive powers about right. Moreover, it provided mechanisms to make changes and adjustments in the light of experience. Those mechanisms have been used many times, almost invariably to add to our functions.

However, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see that the 1998 act probably did not get the financial system right in the long run. Relying on the Barnett formula from Westminster might have served us well in many ways, but it is time to progress the settlement and be more accountable for what we spend. Given that we spend public money, we should also be responsible for raising some of it.

The second Scotland Bill will also be a landmark in that it will give Parliament powers over nearly a third of the revenue supporting devolved spending and will allow tax powers to be changed and devolved in the future. That is the big picture that the committee has set out very clearly and which is, in essence, why the Parliament should agree to the Scotland Bill proceeding.

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Pauline McNeill: I will take a brief intervention.

Tricia Marwick: I was struck by the member's assertion that the Scottish Parliament would be responsible for levying almost a third of the money that it receives. That is simply not true. The figure is nothing like 30 per cent. Both the Calman commission and the Secretary of State for Scotland included the council tax in the figure, which the Scottish Parliament does not raise. The true figure is 25 per cent. It is important not to overegg the pudding.

Pauline McNeill: I have heard Tricia Marwick say that before, but the last time I heard her say it, she said that the figure was 15 per cent. I am reading from the committee's report, although I am aware that she made a minority submission to it.

We owe the Scotland Bill Committee for a second service. It examined in huge detail the criticisms that were made of the bill and, as a result, brought about a rounded set of recommendations that will enhance the bill further if enacted. It would have been easy to have dismissed the criticisms as no more than whatever the bill's opponents could dream up to discredit it, but the committee considered them on the basis of detailed evidence.

The commission on devolution presented a problem for the SNP, because it gained support and credibility. Members will remember the Scottish Government making the accusation in the chamber and on many platforms that Scotland would have lost £8 billion if the Calman proposals had been in place. Alex Salmond and Fiona Hyslop said that that is what the Scotland Bill would cost the Scottish budget. They called it the "deflationary effect". I always wondered what remit officials were given to come up with that one. Now we know. The committee was more analytical than the Government, and it clearly set out that that conclusion was wrong, inaccurate and deliberately misleading. The report shows in detail that, if the plans were introduced from today, then, on the Scottish Government's basis, they would increase rather than decrease the Scottish budget. Indeed, if the income tax base were to increase in the future, Scotland would also gain, which is another incentive to have a growth strategy. The SNP chose one year of the devolution project, projected forward and got the figures that it was after, but it has been found out.

There was a daft notion that income tax is somehow a declining tax. Tell that to anyone who pays it. The committee's careful analytical work shows quite the opposite, of course. Many experts agreed that the package of taxation powers, income tax and a smaller number of taxes is sensible and the right place to start the process of fiscal devolution. Such an approach is found in many other federal and devolved nations.

Finally, the committee reported on the absurd claims about the economic growth that would follow if we moved to the full fiscal fairyland that the Scottish Government wants to inhabit. The committee dealt thoroughly and decisively with that matter. It got to the bottom of such claims, and that is perhaps not happy reading for the Government. The SNP has continued to claim that full fiscal autonomy leads to growth. That is an unfounded assertion; it is a fallacy. Indeed, the First Minister specifically stated that full fiscal autonomy would lead to 1 per cent growth per year. He founded that statement on the work of two professors who claimed that a 1 per cent increase in revenue devolution at the United Kingdom level might be expected to increase the country's gross domestic product by 0.9 per cent. It is now clear that the Scottish Government misused the evidence of Professor Hughes Hallett and Professor Scott. More important, the committee was able to draw out that there is no such link. Even Reform Scotland, which has campaigned for fiscal responsibility, agreed with the committee that things entirely depend on what is made of the powers. Higher growth should be the objective of any future Government, but more fiscal powers in themselves will not achieve that.

The necessary adjustment in the block grant that the committee identified is the important thing to get right. It is obvious that there will be uncertainties in the first years, and stability in Scotland's financing and accuracy in establishing the Scottish tax base are needed. The Scotland Bill Committee made the sensible suggestion that there should be a review in 10 years' time. The radical suggestion by the committee that an overall limit on increased borrowing powers should be markedly higher is also sensible. The examination of tax bands and ensuring that Scotland gets parity in any future change to corporation tax is forward thinking.

I recommend that the Parliament passes a legislative consent motion that refers to the various suggested amendments in the report. This will not be the final word. After Westminster, we will consider the issue again in a future session of Parliament. It is correct to do so. If we do that, we will have served the people of Scotland well.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that, further to motion S3M-7550 passed on 9 December 2010 supporting the general principles of the Scotland Bill as introduced in the House of Commons on 30 November 2010, the Bill be considered by the UK Parliament; invites the UK Government and the UK Parliament to consider the amendments and proposals made in the report of the Scotland Bill Committee, and looks forward to considering any amendments made to the Bill with a view to debating them in a further legislative consent motion before the Bill is passed for Royal Assent.

14:50

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): This debate is a staging post in the Scotland Bill process, and the Scotland Bill is a staging post on the constitutional journey to achieve more powers and responsibilities for the Scottish people.

The SNP Government has been constructive in its approach. Our motion in December welcomed the general principles of the transfer of powers, and our motion last week and amendment today agree to further consideration of the bill, apart from four areas of reservations and transfer of power away from this Parliament.

Today is an opportunity for Parliament clearly and unequivocally to call for the bill to be improved, building on the work of the Scotland Bill Committee. We regret that the bill is a missed opportunity. It could do so much more to benefit our nation, with greater transfer of financial responsibility to achieve economic growth and jobs for Scotland.

We have continuing concerns about fundamental flaws in the financial provisions, which will need serious surgery to work. However, there are seven years before those provisions are expected to come fully into force, and in that time we expect the Scottish people to demand far more fundamental economic and constitutional powers to build a better nation.

Today is an opportunity for the Parliament to make clear, as the committee has, that we need to consider the bill again in our next session. Further consent will be needed once Westminster shows how far it will go to improve the bill.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I was intrigued by what the minister said about supporting the bill, with reservations. That is not quite what she said at the beginning, when she damned the income tax proposals and said that they were totally unworkable. Has she changed her view on those?

Fiona Hyslop: We still think that there are fundamental flaws in the income tax proposals, not least because we have no idea how the Treasury will adjust the block grant. There is a danger that the Parliament could support a pig in a poke, unless there is an opportunity over the next seven years to improve that aspect. The bill can be improved. Consistent with our motions in December and last week, and our amendment today, the Government will back the motion if its amendment is unsuccessful.

In the meantime, the Scottish people have an opportunity in May to influence the bill. If they want the bill to be stronger, with more financial responsibility, they can vote for the SNP. If they

just want a funding mechanism change, they can vote for someone else.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will the minister give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I am moving on.

The Scottish Government has provided the impetus for the current national debate on the way in which Scotland is governed. Our position is clear—only independence would allow Scotland to reach its full potential.

Jeremy Purvis rose.

Fiona Hyslop: However, we recognise that some, including Mr Purvis, have other sincerely held views. Hence our national conversation provided a detailed and ambitious vision of greater responsibility for Parliament and for Scotland and its people.

We have produced detailed proposals for a referendum, including a three-way referendum embracing devolution max as one of the options. A schism, a split, a chink of light in Conservative unionism, in the shape of Margaret Mitchell, shows that some people might be persuaded.

The Scottish Government is committed to giving the people of Scotland the right to have their say—a choice that Opposition parties wish to deny them. We are therefore happy to support Margaret Mitchell's amendment if ours is defeated—unless she is about to say something that I disagree with.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Just to make it absolutely clear, I say that the referendum that is proposed in the amendment is on the LCM powers as proposed in the motion. It is clear that it is specifically on those powers.

Fiona Hyslop: The member might want to look closely at her amendment, because it talks about fiscal powers.

The Government has taken the Scotland Bill on its merits. We support those parts that would benefit Scotland and resist those that would not. I acknowledge the work of the Scotland Bill Committee. The Government agrees with a number of its recommendations. I am pleased that the committee has agreed—in full or in part—with 10 of the 19 improvements to the bill that the Scottish Government suggested in its LCM in December. However, as with the bill, the Government disagrees profoundly with parts of the committee's report. We remain of the view that full financial responsibility is the best way, short of independence, for Scotland to improve its economy, increase jobs and fulfil our potential.

It is regrettable that Pauline McNeill, with satisfaction, tried to imply that there is a question about whether fiscal responsibility can improve the economy. The evidence that was provided showed

that the opportunity to improve our economy has two elements. One is that the mix of tax and benefits would allow integration and provide a one-off improvement. The second aspect, as Reform Scotland clearly said, is what we do with the powers. In contrast, under the Scotland Bill, responsibility for key taxes would remain reserved. Corporation tax, green taxes, fuel duty, North Sea revenues and excise duties would all remain outwith Scotland's control. However, I am encouraged by the committee's recognition that the bill can be only the first steps. I am particularly encouraged by the committee's comments on higher rates of income tax and corporation tax.

The Government is clear that the financial proposals in the bill in their current form have an inherent deflationary bias. I reassure Pauline McNeill that that is the view of the office of the chief economic adviser. I would be cautious about casting aspersions on such professional advice. The proposals would have cost the Parliament £8 billion since devolution. No self-serving assumptions about the future, selective analysis of historic trends or vague half-promises about there being no detriment can alter that fact.

The only assurance or comfort that Pauline McNeill offers is that, somehow, in a period of slashing and burning of public finances in the next four years, the income tax proposals in the bill become attractive. Perhaps the member would like to explain why that is any justification whatever.

Pauline McNeill: Why did the Government choose 1999 as the basis of its calculations? Does the minister accept that, if the Calman proposals were in place now, Scotland would have an increased benefit. Can the minister be clear about that?

Fiona Hyslop: As far as I remember, 1999 was the year in which the Scottish Parliament was established and devolution began. The projections that were provided to the committee showed that there would have been a £10 billion deficit under the proposal and that, rolling forward, there would be an additional problem to 2014-15. The member might have benefited from reading some of the evidence that was provided.

Pauline McNeill: Will the minister give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I am moving on.

It is important to point out that, although the bill seeks more powers for the Scottish ministers, it provides a net loss of powers to the Scottish Parliament. The Parliament stands to lose three powers and gain only one. The Government has argued against the proposed reservations in principle, for which we make no apology, and in the specific cases.

On insolvency, it is clear that the rules for which the Parliament has competence are an integral part of Scots law. It makes no sense for those to be decided at Westminster, and the Calman commission did not make such a recommendation. I am pleased that the committee agrees with the Scottish Government that social landlords should be removed from the provisions. That is why it is unfortunate that, on Monday night, before this Parliament has had a chance to support the bill committee's report, the Westminster Parliament took a decision and voted against the committee's recommendation.

On health professionals, the committee proceeded under a misapprehension that the current situation is an "unintended consequence" of the drafting of the Scotland Act 1998. The current arrangements, including the role of the Parliament, were codified in the UK Health Act 1999, which was introduced as a bill in January 1999—shortly after the Scotland Act 1998 was passed—and which received royal assent before we assumed our full powers. That shows that the current system was understood and intended at the time. The current system ensures consistent regulation throughout the UK and, crucially, it ensures that the content of regulations reflects Scottish qualifications and systems. The issue is not minor. The careers, qualifications and futures of individual health workers in Scotland will be affected, as will their employers' plans. It is therefore no wonder that, in evidence, the health professions whose regulation is currently devolved unanimously supported the Parliament's current role.

There are other parts of the report that the Scottish Government welcomes and which reflect the Government's evidence to the committee. For example, we welcome the recommendations on the need for clear proposals on reducing the block grant; the early establishment of the joint finance committee; more flexible borrowing powers; joint governance of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs; and greater powers for the Parliament on drink driving, speed limits, the Crown Estate, MG Alba and marine conservation.

I am grateful for the committee's attention to our arguments on those points. The Government also welcomes the conclusion that clauses should be removed from the bill, especially proposals on international obligations and, as I have said, social landlords. However, I must alert the Parliament to the fact that, again, on Monday night, Westminster voted against the committee's recommendations in that regard.

I have other concerns but, primarily, we have to reflect the fact that the bill represents a missed opportunity. There is consensus on the need to develop our constitutional settlement and there is

consensus about the need for greater financial responsibility for this Parliament. Further, there is a UK Government that is committed to decentralisation and localism and which contains a party that is committed to home rule. Therefore, we face an opportunity to rebalance the political and financial relationship within the United Kingdom to ensure that Scotland pays its way not for 15, 25 or 33 per cent of its expenditure but for 100 per cent. That is what responsibility is all about.

The bill could give the Scottish Parliament the power to make its own judgments about its own competence through a process that would be similar to the democratic process that we have just seen in Wales, where our colleagues, with the support of the Welsh people in a referendum, have decided to extend their legislative competence.

For the Government, the Scotland Bill Committee, this Parliament and the people of Scotland, the bill represents a staging post and unfinished business. First, the Scotland Bill Committee has identified changes that should be made to the bill and has suggested immediate action on important issues—the establishment of a joint Exchequer committee and more detail on the block-grant reduction mechanism, as it is essential for the Parliament not to sign up to a pig in a poke. Secondly, the committee has identified areas for greater devolution outwith the bill, in relation to the Crown Estate, marine conservation and benefits policy. Thirdly, the committee has identified areas where the financial powers can evolve, in relation to higher rate income tax, corporation tax and other new taxes. Fourthly, this Parliament should become responsible for the big issues that affect Scotland's future, such as the economy, jobs, poverty and welfare, energy and the environment.

The Scottish social attitudes survey that was published in December 2010 found that 62 per cent of people favour significantly more powers for the Scottish Parliament and that, on tax and on welfare benefits, 57 per cent and 62 per cent of people, respectively, want the Scottish Parliament to make the decisions for Scotland. The people of Scotland are far ahead of the Calman commission, the Scotland Bill, the UK Government, and the Opposition parties. They are ambitious for their Parliament and their nation. This Government is, too, and will continue to press for the Scottish people to be allowed to govern their own affairs as a nation equal among nations.

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): Will the member give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I am closing now.

Throughout the process of constitutional debate that was initiated by the Government in the national conversation, we have been open to

ideas that would benefit Scotland, wherever they have come from. We continue that approach with regard to the Scotland Bill and the report of the committee. As detailed in our amendment, we believe that the Parliament should not support parts of the bill. Most important, we believe that it is vital that the UK Government and the UK Parliament respect the will of this Parliament.

The ball is now firmly at the feet of the unionist parties in Westminster and, in their votes over the next 12 days, we will see whether they are prepared to pay any attention to this Parliament and its committee or whether they need a firm reminder at the election of their need to do so.

However we vote on the Government amendment, we must all unite to support the committee's conclusion that the bill must come back to this Parliament once it has been considered by the UK Parliament so that we can consider it as a whole before deciding on final consent.

I move amendment S3M-8114.1, to leave out from first "the Bill" to end and insert:

"Scotland is best served by a Scottish Parliament that has the full range of powers and responsibilities necessary to improve Scotland's economic performance and promote sustainable economic growth; agrees that the current provisions of the Scotland Bill do not provide those powers and responsibilities; recognises the improvements to the Bill suggested by the Scotland Bill Committee but is of the view that further improvements are needed to provide the financial responsibility that Scotland needs and to address other flaws in the Bill; nevertheless agrees that the UK Parliament should consider the Bill, apart from the provisions that reserve insolvency and the regulation of health professions (clauses 12 and 13) and allow UK ministers to implement international obligations in devolved areas (clause 23) and partial suspension of Acts subject to scrutiny by the Supreme Court (clause 7), and further agrees that, given the amendments requested by the Scottish Parliament, the incoming Scottish Parliament should consider the Bill as amended by the UK Parliament in a further legislative consent motion before the Bill is passed for Royal Assent."

15:03

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Today's debate is hugely important, and I fully recognise that, on the issue of the fiscal powers that should be available to Parliament, members will argue from the basis of different but equally deeply held convictions. Whichever perspective we come from, there can be no doubt that the tax-raising proposals that are under consideration in today's legislative consent motion represent a significant change to the existing fiscal powers that are available to the Scottish Parliament and will have potentially far-reaching consequences for Scotland as a nation and within the United Kingdom.

My referendum amendment brings to the debate an aspect that, hitherto, has not been discussed and raises the important democratic principle that is at stake. On that basis, I seek the support of every member across the chamber in putting it to the UK Parliament that a referendum be held on the fiscal powers that the LCM proposes. It would be a dark day in the evolution of the Scottish Parliament if that fundamentally important issue fell on the sword of partisan politics, and I am therefore calling on all parties to give their members a free vote on the issue.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I am trying to find out whether this is an opening speech for the Conservative party or an opening speech for Margaret Mitchell—I am not quite sure.

Margaret Mitchell: This is an amendment speech. With his political experience, Mr Rumbles should know that.

The Parliament has justifiably been proud that, since its inception, it has been much more user friendly than Westminster and that MSPs have been far more accessible to the public than their counterparts south of the border have been. However, in setting up the Calman commission, in the commission's remit and in the subsequent consideration of the commission's recommendations and of the Scotland Bill Committee's report, MSPs have been guilty of talking largely to themselves or academics.

Politicians know that constitutional change is not a major issue for constituents. The Calman commission was convened not to respond to public clamour for change, to make Holyrood more accountable or even to mark the watershed of 10 years of devolved government; rather, as the December 2007 approval date indicates, the commission was the unionist parties' reaction to the advent of a minority SNP Government in May 2007.

In the first instance, the commission's remit was to recommend changes to the constitutional arrangements to enable the Scottish Parliament to serve the people better. In other words, Holyrood politicians decided on constitutional navel-gazing when, in the real world, it was widely recognised that the elephant in the room was the desperate need to reform how business in the Parliament is carried out. Insufficient debating time is allowed for important issues and inquiry reports, and committees are hard-pressed to undertake post-legislative scrutiny. Addressing that fundamental issue would without doubt serve the people of Scotland better.

The commission's remit also focused on improving the Scottish Parliament's financial accountability and continuing to secure Scotland's

position in the United Kingdom. That is where the main debate has remained.

Those who favour the commission's proposals and what has been described as Calman plus—in the form of the recommendations in the Scotland Bill Committee's report—cite the Calman consultation as the mandate for progressing the tax-raising provisions and other provisions that we are considering today.

I acknowledge whole-heartedly the commission's aim to give

“prime importance to engaging with the public”,

but it is worth examining in detail how successful it was in achieving that objective. A questionnaire was available online and on paper and 921 responses to it were completed. The commission said that that was an important strand of its engagement strategy, but it also said:

“As respondents were entirely self-selecting the results, although interesting and valid for that group, constitute a non-random sample not necessarily representative of public opinion.”

The commission held 12 events in 2008 in 11 locations. The events were widely publicised, but only about 300 people attended them. The commission had 150,000 information leaflets distributed to about 7,000 premises. To put that in context, Scotland's population is about 5.1 million, and more than 140,000 people live in Dundee alone. It is clearly impossible to claim that the consultation represented the views of the people of Scotland.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): Will Margaret Mitchell take an intervention?

Margaret Mitchell: I am sorry—I am in my last minute.

The only way to ensure that the Scottish Parliament genuinely seeks the views of and listens to the people whom it represents on this most important of all issues is to hold a nationwide Scottish referendum. I ask members—regardless of the side of the fiscal powers debate on which they fall—to put party politics to one side and to support the referendum amendment, on the basis that the public have a democratic right to decide whether to transfer the powers that are described in the LCM, such as those on income tax, from MPs to MSPs.

I have much pleasure in moving amendment S3M-8114.2, to insert after “Committee”:

“together with the proposal that a nationwide referendum be held in Scotland on the fiscal powers of the Scottish Parliament on the grounds that the public has a democratic right to decide whether to transfer powers such as income tax from MPs to MSPs”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I say to Mr Rumbles that the rationale behind the current procedure was that Ms Mitchell had lodged an amendment. However, I will reflect on what he said and I will return to it later today.

15:09

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to speak in support of the legislative consent motion in the name of Iain Gray, which is supported by Annabel Goldie and Tavish Scott. In so doing, I commend the coalition Government at Westminster for taking forward the work of the Calman commission to enhance the powers of the Scottish Parliament. I was a supporter of greater fiscal powers for this Parliament long before it was fashionable in my party to be so. I am particularly pleased that we will have a more financially accountable Parliament in the future—one in which politicians will be held to account not only for the money that they spend but for how it is raised.

At the outset, I record my thanks to the members of the Scotland Bill Committee who did a huge amount of work in scrutinising the legislation and producing their report—or should I say reports. We have not only the excellent committee report, but the remarkably churlish and petulant minority report, the latter of which goes on about “political motivation”, “bias and distortion” and damage to the reputation of this Parliament.

I pay particular tribute to the committee convener, Wendy Alexander. Wendy will shortly leave the Parliament after serving with distinction for 12 years. Wendy and I have often crossed swords in the past, but I have also worked closely with her. Some years ago, with Alex Neil and George Lyon, we set up the cross-party group on the Scottish economy. Although I have often disagreed with Wendy, I have nonetheless always respected her intellect. The detailed and comprehensive report that is before us is a fitting legacy of her period in the Parliament.

I never imagined that Wendy Alexander's last weeks in the Parliament would see her cast in the role of a vicious and remorseless mugger—someone who abuses committee witnesses. According to some, Wicked Wendy, ably assisted by her henchman, Dastardly David McLetchie, ganged up to terrorise poor, innocent and unsuspecting professors of economics who came before the committee to have their say on the Scotland Bill provisions, apparently not for one moment suspecting that they might be asked to justify their opinions. Indeed, in the eyes of some members on the SNP benches, it was extraordinarily impertinent of Wendy Alexander, David McLetchie and other committee members to dare to ask the so-called experts about their

published views on the pros and cons of fiscal devolution or full fiscal autonomy. Far from diminishing the role of the committees in the Parliament, the Scotland Bill Committee did exactly what a committee is supposed to do: it rigorously challenged and tested the evidence that it received. To do anything less would be a disservice to the work of the Parliament. For that reason, I commend Wendy Alexander and her colleagues for the work that they did.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: Not at the moment.

The proposals in the Scotland Bill will give the Scottish Parliament control of around one third of its revenues. In so doing, we will create for the first time a Scottish Parliament in which politicians are held to account for how a sizeable proportion of the money that they spend is raised. For the first time, politicians in this place will require to set an income tax rate to fund their spending plans—a rate that may or may not be in line with that which is payable south of the border. That is an important step change. To my mind, it will ensure that Scotland will be better governed in the future. I agree with the committee's conclusion that the Scotland Bill proposals will give the Scottish Parliament very wide fiscal powers.

Fiona Hyslop: Does the member acknowledge that to rely on only one tax—income tax—is a heavy risk? This year alone, we raised £2 billion from the bank levy and £12 billion from the VAT increase. There is also the £3 billion from the increase in national insurance payments and £500 million from the increase in fuel duty. In this year alone, such tax variations would diminish the tax take for Scotland under the Scotland Bill provisions. Does the member acknowledge that there is a risk in relying on income tax alone?

Murdo Fraser: Of course, it is not a single tax that is being devolved, but a range of taxes. We already have a basket of taxes: non-domestic rates, council tax, stamp duty and landfill tax are all devolved. I do not accept the minister's characterisation of the situation.

The Scotland Bill Committee robustly scrutinised the evidence that it received for and against the proposals. Of course, the SNP proposes that all taxes in Scotland should be levied by the Scottish Parliament. As the committee made clear in its report, the SNP produced no detailed plan for the proposal. Paragraph 42 of the report makes it clear that the Scottish Government's plans consisted of a single side of paper—not quite the back of an envelope, but not far away from it.

There has been no attempt by Scottish Ministers to engage constructively in debate on the detail of how the financial provisions in the Scotland Bill

might be improved. No amendments or written suggestions for improvement were received during evidence taking. Ministers' ideas were finally submitted to the committee as late as 20 February—more than 10 weeks after the bill's publication. That is hardly a serious attempt to engage with a serious process.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way on that point?

Murdo Fraser: No. The minister will forgive me, but I have already given way once.

In paragraph 43 of its report, the committee states that it did not examine in detail the option of full fiscal responsibility

“as there was no detail to examine.”

There were

“no costings for these plans”

and

“no material explaining the practical implications for taxpayers, employers, Scotland's financial sector or collection plans.”

If SNP members feel that the committee did not give sufficient attention to the option of full financial responsibility, that is the fault of no one but the Scottish Government and the SNP. If they had wanted to engage with the process, they had the opportunity to bring forward serious proposals, but they failed to do so.

We are now in the extraordinary position that the three unionist parties in the Parliament are supporting legislation to devolve greater powers—and, importantly, financial powers—to the Parliament. However, the SNP—the party that is supposed to believe in independence for Scotland—is dragging its feet. It has completely failed to engage with the debate and has failed to give meaningful evidence to the committee. SNP members of the committee have resorted simply to playing party politics and to crying foul when the argument has gone against them.

The proposals in the Scotland Bill will strengthen the Parliament and our Government in Scotland and will make for better politics in the future. I commend the Scotland Bill Committee and, in particular, its convener on their sterling work. I have pleasure in supporting the motion.

15:16

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): This is probably the last major debate of the session. It is highly appropriate that it should be on the Scotland Bill and the committee report on it. Ultimately, it is about the place of the Parliament and of Scotland within the evolving constitutional framework of the United Kingdom.

The report confirms the Calman commission's view that the Scottish Parliament has been a great success, that it has embedded itself in the constitution and that its basis is sound. It is, perhaps, no particular surprise that the report broadly backs the proposals in the new Scotland Bill. However, many people—they obviously include Fiona Hyslop—have been and will be impressed by the robustness both of its analysis and of its recommendations for improving the bill and the operation of the new powers for which it provides.

It is highly appropriate for me to begin by thanking the clerks, advisers and researchers for the huge effort that they put into the process, as well as fellow members of the Scotland Bill Committee, all of whom—minority view or not—can take credit for the strength of the report.

The Scotland Bill is being delivered by a Liberal Democrat Secretary of State for Scotland, with Conservative partners in the coalition Government and with the support of the Labour Party. It is a step change for Scotland that will put in place a solid and federal framework for the future, thereby strengthening Scotland and the United Kingdom immeasurably. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Moore, who appeared before the committee twice and has led from the front on the issue. He has launched a Scotland Bill that more than meets the aims of the Calman commission and that is as historic in its time as the original Scotland Bill was in 1998.

I want to concentrate on the constitutional framework, which will, in retrospect, prove to be the most significant aspect of the bill. The reforms provide the framework for the future: not just any future, and not for a slippery slope to independence or to fictional Valhallas such as full fiscal responsibility, but a future that is built on what I can justly describe as quasi-federal lines, consisting of a stronger Scotland in full partnership in a strengthened United Kingdom. In short, the bill will create the sort of structure that is to be found in many “normal” European democracies such as Switzerland, Spain and Germany.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I greatly appreciate the analysis, but I wonder why the member would go to such lengths to ensure that we do not have sovereignty. We can enjoy equal sovereignty in a better way than we can enjoy federation in an unequal partnership.

Robert Brown: I respect Margo MacDonald's views on these matters, which are shared by others, but she must accept that other legitimate and, perhaps, more “normal” arrangements are to be found in other constitutional jurisdictions.

There is a developing framework around the potential for the Parliament to acquire new tax

powers in the light of experience. There are golden rules around the use of the borrowing powers, mechanisms for change in the grant, a more mature relationship with the Treasury and HM Revenue and Customs, and a wider role for the Office for Budget Responsibility.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Robert Brown: If the member does not mind, I will make some progress first.

The committee report is bold in arguing that the significant borrowing powers that are being provided for should be based on transparent principles and that, after the current financial pressures ease, they might imply in practice higher borrowing limits and less Treasury interference in detail—although even the Scottish Government recognises the macroeconomic responsibilities of the United Kingdom Government.

The committee makes the important proposal, which echoes through Liberal Democrat contributions over the years, that there should be a joint exchequer committee with statutory underpinning that acts as a powerful forum for intergovernmental discussions on the wide range of fiscal issues that are now in play, and which is able to sort out the differences over the scope for new taxes, the cost of tax collection and issues about the grant. That is part of the respect agenda, but the institutional framework displays the growing maturity of the arrangements. As the report states, they are parallel to the set-up in other federal and quasi-federal countries.

As I did at the launch of the report, I remark today that the most notable feature of the report is its confidence—confidence in the future; confidence in our ability to say to Westminster, “Yes this is great, but we need improvements too”; confidence that comes from developing a vision of the future that is signed up to on a consensual basis by the bulk of political and public opinion in Scotland; and confidence in the strength and potential of Scotland in a United Kingdom that will, itself, be strengthened by the proposals.

It is the SNP that has been all over the place on the matter. If anything was clear, it was that it was against key aspects of the bill, notably the income tax proposals, and against anything at all, however sensible, that involved re-reservation. SNP members were even against the re-reservation of Antarctica. Whether they have in mind some latter-day Darien scheme, I am not quite sure. Today, it seems that the SNP is no longer against the income tax proposal, which is not mentioned in its amendment, and nor does it seem to be against all re-reservations on principle. I wonder whether I detect some delicate shift in the balance between

the fundamentalists and the gradualists that has hitherto remained out of sight.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way on that point?

Robert Brown: Yes, I will.

Fiona Hyslop: As I said, the amendment today is completely consistent with what we put forward last week. If the member looks at what we said last week and in December, he will see that we want to improve the financial provisions. Will he point me to where the Scotland Office has explained the block adjustment? How can he be confident, with any certainty, that the five pages of explanation are good enough? Does he agree with the committee that we need more detail?

Robert Brown: I will come to that, but it is the movement in the SNP position that I am talking about at the moment.

Members may recall, as I certainly do, that the First Minister mocked the Calman process, as he did the constitutional convention, and yet it is the Calman process that has the vision and the philosophical and economic underpinning and framework. Indeed, we hear today the heavy sound of bandwagons being jumped on by the SNP. It is the First Minister and his Government who are diminished by their schoolboy puffs and exaggerations, by their sniping from the sidelines, and by the economic myths that seem to be inseparable from the independence argument, even if the efforts of the public relations people in the SNP are temporarily clothed in the garments and pretentiousness of government.

The report does one other thing: it cruelly exposes the inadequacies of the SNP position, its slogans and its far-fetched claims for the land of milk and honey that would come with independence. Independence is a damaging irrelevance for Scotland.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): What about France?

Robert Brown: There is no plan for any aspect for it.

Stewart Stevenson: The Netherlands?

Robert Brown: The overhyped claims of the historical inevitability of the fairy dust of independence creating economic growth—

Stewart Stevenson: Denmark?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, Mr Stevenson.

Robert Brown: Those claims have been destroyed as the nonsense that they always were. Starkly, on pages 75 and 76, the report lays out for all to see the essence of the SNP's

misrepresentation—its very own dodgy dossier. The official SNP Government document of January 2011 and the misleading changes in it that exaggerate further the already polemic and debatable claims of Professors Hughes Hallett and Scott.

I believe that the report will prove to be a seminal document that sets the stage for the future of our country. As Murdo Fraser has already said, it is a fitting finale to the political career of Wendy Alexander, who has been there throughout the Parliament's preparation and its journey to this point. Wendy provided much of the intellectual firepower that led the committee, but I hope that she and the Parliament will forgive me when I observe in conclusion that the Scotland Bill walks in the shadow of Jo Grimond and Russell Johnston, of David Steel and the Steel commission, to which I was proud to contribute, and of the many Liberals and Liberal Democrats who trod the path and argued for the cause, when others fell by the wayside, of a Scottish Parliament with substantial tax powers, and of home rule for Scotland within a federal United Kingdom—a cause that we have long believed in, which gives us strength and diversity, and which reaches back to the unfulfilled demands of the Scottish commissioners of union in 1706.

In conclusion, the Scotland Bill is not the end of that road, but we can increasingly see the solid framework of the future of our Scotland and our United Kingdom in this bill, behind which I urge our Scottish Parliament to unite in the vote tonight. I support the motion.

15:25

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): I pay tribute to my committee colleagues, who are all highly experienced parliamentarians in their own right, and to the clerks, to the Scottish Parliament information centre and to our advisers. Ours was the first-ever committee dedicated to considering a bill. According to the spin, we would simply rubber-stamp it, we would not study the Government's alternative and we would make few improvements. In short, we would fail.

However, the committee's collective commitment was to a report that was strong on analysis, rigorous about the evidence and short on rhetoric. Let me give just one highly topical example of the improvements that the committee is recommending. This morning, the Treasury announced that it intends to claw back end-year flexibility moneys; yet, if the recommendations of our report were implemented, such a step would be impossible—in the future, Scotland would have its own bank account including EYF moneys.

It is a commonplace among commentators these days to note the partisan nature of contemporary Scottish politics. However, this initiative has from beginning to end been cross-party, consensual and co-operative among the participating parties. I agree with Robert Brown's recollection of the long home-rule tradition that many of us are proud to stand in. It is in that spirit that I recall more than two decades ago, as the claim of right was bringing forth the Scottish constitutional convention, learning from Donald Dewar that Scots prefer cross-party consensus when it comes to constitutional change. Donald's inclusiveness shaped the first Scotland Bill, and this second Scotland Bill has been inspired by the same principle of cross-party working together to do the right thing by the nation.

Fourteen years ago, the first Scotland Bill got the powers of this place right for the times; this second Scotland Bill can get our finances right for the future. Both bills have set a framework and both bills have begun a journey. If enacted, the bill will deliver the most far-reaching transfer of financial powers from London since the creation of the union. Let me highlight why I believe that it deserves support.

First, the bill will lead to a real budget because, in the future, all Scottish political parties will have to make decisions about raising money as well as about spending it. No longer will Holyrood politicians of any persuasion be able to indulge in a lazy London blame game.

Secondly, the bill will expand the powers of the Parliament to invest in the nation's future. Such powers could help to pay for the Forth road bridge, fund a major housing programme or support far-reaching decarbonisation. They will ensure that, in tough financial times, we continue to invest for our future.

Thirdly, the bill will allow our successors to make important choices. For example, on the future of Scottish universities, should not our successors have the right to consider a graduate tax? On the scourge of alcohol, should not our successors have the power to shape a proper pricing solution? When it comes to the climate change targets that we have set, should not our successors have the ability to create new financial incentives? Those who support the bill today will put that power into this Parliament's hands. The bill is right for the times, right for the Parliament and right for the people of Scotland.

The committee's recommendations fundamentally strengthen the bill's commitment to consultation, co-decision making and future co-operation. That is good for Scotland and good for the United Kingdom. The report is not a "Take it or leave it" ultimatum, but a menu for dialogue.

I also pay tribute to the previous UK Government for embarking on the process in partnership with this Parliament, and to the current UK Government for living up to its respect agenda. It is long overdue that the Scottish Government has come on board. The SNP was big enough to think again in 1997, and it is time for it to do so once more.

The Parliament is, as Donald Dewar said, about shaping our future. Divided though we be on the destination, the bill serves Scotland better and deserves support from all parties. It is, quite simply, in the national interest.

It is time to back the bill.

15:30

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I am a nationalist; I believe in independence. However, others have said that devolution is a process and not an event, and the same is true of independence. It has become clear that the Scotland Bill is one step in the right direction, but it does not go far enough, as far as I am concerned.

The committee recognised some of the bill's shortcomings but not, unfortunately, all of them. I will start with the areas of the bill that the committee has got right. There are bits of the report that clearly say that the whole committee agrees with a provision.

There is no doubt that the SNP has engaged with the process. We have done so fair-mindedly and openly, given the fact that we do not agree with the end point that the unionist parties have.

It will not be a surprise that I—and the SNP as a whole—support the devolution of responsibility for control of airguns. We campaigned for many years for the Parliament to control airguns. I well remember being told by members in other parties that it was unworkable and unnecessary, so I welcome their conversion to the cause.

Likewise, I am delighted that the Parliament will gain the powers that are needed to make our roads safer. The committee was correct to recommend that the bill's provisions on speed limits and drink driving limits be extended.

Although I welcome those parts of the bill, there are other policy areas on which the bill could, and should, have been more ambitious. An obvious example is the Crown Estate commissioners. The bill's proposals are extremely limited and do not reflect the importance of the Crown Estate commissioners' activities to Scotland's future—especially with regard to renewables. On the weight of the evidence that the committee received, the UK Government's proposals fall far short of what is required. I am glad that the committee recommended a review of the current

situation with all options on the table. Based on the evidence that the committee heard from a wide range of sources, my preferred option would be for the Crown Estate to be fully devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

The most heated debate during the committee's deliberations was over the financial aspects of the bill. That said, there was agreement on some important aspects. Most notably, the committee was united in its view that the revenue and capital borrowing powers are welcome in principle but too restrictive. The limits that have been placed on both forms of borrowing are arbitrary and too low. No expert to whom the committee spoke could explain why the limits had been set at the level in the bill—nor, indeed, could UK ministers.

I fully endorse the committee's recommendation that the borrowing powers be extended and I particularly welcome the finding that the Scottish Government should be able to issue bonds. Having proper borrowing powers would be a huge boost to the Government's and Parliament's ability to invest to improve our economic performance and manage our finances.

However, it is not only about financial accountability. It is about having the economic levers to stimulate growth. That is the great weakness in the bill. That brings me on to the most problematic and, indeed, dangerous aspect of the bill: the income tax proposals. Unfortunately, on that matter, there is little room for agreement. The proposals are flawed and require major surgery. I will not rehearse the arguments on deflationary bias and counter-cyclical measures, as I am sure that at least the members of the committee, if not the public, have heard enough of that. Suffice it to say that the Parliament should think long and hard about tying itself so closely to a single tax that evidence shows is declining over the long term. There is a real danger that, if we do that, we will be caught in a vicious circle in which our budget will fall but we will be unable to take the necessary steps to reverse the fall.

Robert Brown: Given that the member described the income tax proposals as "dangerous", I am somewhat surprised that the issue does not feature in the Government amendment and that it does not propose to strike them from the bill, or something.

Brian Adam: The Government sincerely hopes that the result of the election will drive the UK Government to reconsider the proposals and that the concerns about that particular proposal will be addressed at that stage.

Instead of putting all our fiscal eggs in one basket, we should be seeking control of as wide a variety of economic levers as possible, so that we can address the economic needs of the Scottish

people. I firmly believe that the proposals that the Scottish Government put forward were sensible. They would give us a broader range of powers and, indeed, were very much in line with the proposals of the much-loved-by-Liberal-Democrats Steel commission. I find it disappointing that the Liberal Democrats, in order to seek agreement with those who do not want to make the same degree of progress, chose to tie themselves to the much less ambitious plans when the Steel commission proposals on financial matters had been adopted as a compromise position or as a staging post to independence by the Government. It is disappointing that Mr Brown and his colleagues were unable to support those proposals as part of the way forward.

It is still possible for the Parliament to work together and to play its part in making the bill better. We have already made some improvements to it through the committee's recommendations on issues such as speed limits and borrowing, but we must go further. Perhaps the most important recommendation of the committee was that the bill should return to the Parliament after the election so that a decision can be made on the legislation in its final form. Politics has undoubtedly played a significant part in the decisions that have been made, but that will be an opportunity to reconsider the legislation and demand the full and proper economic powers that the Parliament needs if it is to deliver for the people of Scotland.

15:37

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I regard it as a privilege to have served on the Scotland Bill Committee in the past three or four months. The committee did a very thorough piece of work and its report stands as a clear statement and analysis of the arguments of the day. That will be seen in the years to come.

I have said before in the chamber that it would be strange if the Scotland Act 1998 was perfect in every respect and would last for all time. It was, as we now know, mostly right in the way it divided the devolved and reserved functions between the Parliaments, but the Calman report and the bill that followed from it formed the first major review of the workings of devolution in more than a decade.

The bill addresses the big weakness of the 1998 act, which others, in particular Murdo Fraser, have mentioned—the weakness that not enough financial responsibility or accountability for what we spend was invested in the Parliament. That will be rectified by the bill, in a major adjustment to devolution. Significant new powers will come to the Parliament, and what is more, the bill sets a framework for the further devolution of powers,

which undoubtedly will happen in the years to come.

The bill places Scotland firmly within the broad family of devolved Administrations of quasi-federal or federal nations, and in the mainstream of the constitutional arrangements worldwide. I make that point because we have been fed a diet for a long time, both in the chamber and more widely in Scotland, that somehow we are not a normal country. Well, we are. What is more, we have also been fed a diet—I am afraid that Brian Adam added to it just a few moments ago—that we have no significant economic levers at our disposal. The evidence to the committee—I stress that it was evidence—gave the lie to that. The evidence shows that we have highly devolved spending autonomy in Scotland. We have near total autonomy, and more than almost all other federal or quasi-federal nations. The evidence is also that making good use of that autonomy over spending is almost always more significant in creating economic growth than is having devolved tax powers per se.

Fiona Hyslop: The member makes an important point about the degree of spending autonomy that we have in Scotland. Does he agree with the bill's proposals on the proportion of revenues? Currently, Scotland has 7 per cent. The bill will take it to only 15 per cent of the revenues of Scotland being under the control of this Parliament. Does he believe that that is sufficient or, like Wendy Alexander, does he believe that the proportion should grow to include, for example, excise duty and other arrangements?

Peter Peacock: I do not think that Wendy Alexander said anything about excise duty, but I will deal with the very points that Fiona Hyslop makes.

The bill's provisions will add to our existing powers over spending—which are important for economic growth—a wider basket of tax powers. We already have powers over council tax and non-domestic rates. Contrary to what has been said, with income tax coming to us, we will have a stable and buoyant tax that grows in line with growth in the economy as a whole. In addition, stamp duty and the landfill tax will be devolved to us. We have asked for the aggregates levy to come to us now, and the air passenger duty is to come to us in the future. We will have increased borrowing powers, and the committee has argued for the UK Parliament to include the issuing of bonds in that framework. The bill also contains a framework for the further devolution of new taxes in the way that Wendy Alexander described, which we could use in relation to climate change and so on.

In addition, the committee has not ruled out our having access to the higher tax bands in the

future. That would not come without challenges—increased risk and volatility come with that—but we have not ruled it out for the future. Neither has the committee ruled out, in specific circumstances and under clear rules, our having limited access to corporation tax. Corporation tax is no magic bullet for promoting economic growth, as it is sometimes portrayed. It is complex in its administration, and the proposal raises fundamental competition issues between the rest of the UK and Scotland, in that it could create a race to the bottom in taxation rates. Cannibalising our tax income would be to no one's benefit.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Peter Peacock: I am afraid that I cannot, because I am short of time.

If the UK wants to look at that as part of wider UK regional policy, Scotland should be at the table in the discussions and we should keep that option open. Overall, the bill will result in our having a growing basket of tax powers and will improve the governance of this country and our accountability over time.

As others have said, the committee has sought to scrutinise and improve the bill. That has come as a surprise to some people, who thought that we would simply rubber-stamp its proposals. There are still some extremely tricky issues to resolve, not least of which is the grant reduction mechanism that Fiona Hyslop mentioned, which will apply when Scottish income tax kicks in. How much better it would have been if the Scottish Government had engaged in the dialogue on that and had used the resources of the civil service to help us work through the complex issues to which the mechanism gives rise, but we are still awaiting a single bit of evidence from the Scottish Government on how to improve that set of highly technical and complex measures.

The committee was not put off by that and has drawn up key principles, which the next Scottish Government will have to address in great detail to ensure that the arrangements that are introduced are fit for purpose. While the Scottish Government sat on the sidelines, the committee engaged with the real issues.

I could go on at great length about the deflationary bias, which does not exist, and the exaggerated claims that have been made about economic growth, but I do not have time to do so. I want to conclude by paying tribute, as others have done, to Wendy Alexander for the huge effort that she has put into the process. She has led by example in the rigorous scrutiny that has been undertaken. It is fitting that her final speech to the Parliament should be on the Scotland Bill. She has played a hugely significant part in shaping the current governance of Scotland. I hope that the

arrangements that will be put in place from today will help to shape the future governance of Scotland. She is to be congratulated. I hope that the Parliament will support the motion.

15:43

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

As many of my longer-serving colleagues in the Parliament will be aware, I am another of those Conservatives who has long believed that the Parliament should have greater fiscal responsibility. The problem that I have when elections come around, to which Wendy Alexander referred, is that I find myself competing against politicians whose only *raison d'être* is to tell everyone how much more money they will spend and on whom they will spend it. In that environment, it has always been difficult for the more responsible fiscal attitudes of people like me, who believe that we should take a significant degree of responsibility for how that money is raised, to be expressed.

That is why I am delighted that the bill makes that proposal, which will give us the opportunity to move on. It is essential that whoever governs Scotland concerns themselves in the longer term with how we will create wealth and how we will exploit it effectively to ensure that we have properly funded public services and appropriate levels of investment from within the country and from outwith it.

Ian McKee: Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: I suppose so, yes.

Ian McKee: I am very grateful to the member for giving way so graciously.

I have been impressed by the arguments made by the Conservatives in this debate about their conversion to a referendum to ask the people of Scotland whether they approve of certain constitutional changes. Why does the member not believe that there should also be a referendum in England for the same changes, as powers are being moved from MPs to MSPs?

Alex Johnstone: I do not believe that there should be a referendum here. The unionist parties in the Parliament will subject themselves and their views to the scrutiny of the Scottish people on 5 May, and the people will decide how to vote on the basis of this and other issues.

I will move on. The reason why I am, as I have said, a supporter of greater fiscal responsibility is that, particularly in my party but also beyond it, people are genuinely concerned about how a past Scottish Government might have used such powers. There are those who are concerned that, if a Scottish Government had tax-raising powers, it would simply use them to raise tax. Of course,

those of us who have a broader understanding of economics realise that increasing the rate of tax does not necessarily increase the amount of revenue that is raised. That would be a huge danger for Scotland. I have discussed that issue with people who are seriously concerned about giving the Parliament borrowing powers. Who would not be concerned when we see how irresponsibly borrowing powers were used by the previous Westminster Government during the past 13 years?

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: I have to make some progress.

The problem that we have in Scotland is that we do not have our hands on the lever. Until this point, we have not been trusted to take responsibility in case we make the wrong decisions. The Parliament is now mature. Our Government should be mature. We are now at the point at which we should, rightly, be considering extending our position. That is why it is necessary for those of us in Parliament to find common ground and move forward. From what I have heard of the SNP's position today, I am delighted that SNP members might actually find common ground with the rest of us at 5 o'clock.

If we are to move forward, we must ensure that decisions that are made here impact on the growth of the economy of Scotland. Of course, as I am standing on this side of the chamber, I am not just talking about growth of the public sector. We want to see private sector growth and wealth creation, and we want the Government to be motivated to work to achieve those.

Fiona Hyslop: Can the member point to anything in the Scotland Bill that will help to promote growth in the private sector?

Alex Johnstone: There are already opportunities that the Government could take and which are critical to achieve growth in the wealth-creating part of the economy.

The major change that the bill will make is that the people of Scotland will, in future, cast their vote based on what is best for them in terms of the revenue that will be taken from them and how it will be spent. Too often in the past, votes in Scotland have been cast on the basis of what will be spent and what will be spent on the voter individually. In future, Governments will be accountable to this Parliament for how revenue is raised.

A moment ago, I spoke about the people who are genuinely afraid of those powers. It is important that we take everyone in Scotland forward with us, including the SNP with its

ambitions, and those others who are inclined to drag their feet. Common ground must be found.

I warn the Government about one other aspect of the bill. I am delighted that the report supports the proposals to move only the powers to regulate airguns. In the past, I have heard the SNP Government demand the movement of firearms regulation to this Parliament. Firearms legislation in the United Kingdom is second to none. Its achievements in ensuring the proper regulation of firearms are worthy of praise and should be continued. Common regulation north and south of the border is important to many of our rural industries, and we should defend it at all costs. I welcome the fact that the committee's report does not vary from the proposals to limit the measure to airguns.

15:50

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): I express my thanks to Stephen Imrie and the clerking team to the Scotland Bill Committee: they were outstanding in the support that they gave to every committee member, and they are a credit to the Parliament. My thanks and appreciation also go to Euan Lloyd of the SNP central unit for the support that he gave to Brian Adam and me throughout the period in which the committee met.

It is fair to say that the Scotland Bill process was difficult, but despite our differences—on income tax, for example—the committee was united on a number of key areas. I do not have enough time to go through all the recommendations, but I emphasise that the whole committee agreed that in the next session of the Scottish Parliament we should consider a further legislative consent motion following the final deliberations on and amendments to the bill at Westminster.

The final say on whether we approve the bill will, therefore, come in the next session of Parliament. It is right and proper that this Parliament has an opportunity to consider and examine whether the recommendations that the Scotland Bill Committee worked so hard to produce have been heeded. That will be the real test of the Westminster Government and of whether it has listened to what the committee has said.

I welcome the proposals for further powers for the Scottish Parliament. In particular, I support the devolution of airgun legislation, on which, as Brian Adam said, we in the SNP have campaigned for many years. Although I believe that all firearms legislation should be a matter for this Parliament, devolving airgun legislation is a step forward.

It is important to say that Brian Adam and I were very clear—and made it clear from the beginning—that we would work with the committee to do what we could to improve the bill and to

ensure that the committee's report was as robust as it could be. Despite some comments to the contrary, I think that few would dispute that Brian Adam and I made such a contribution.

In particular, the committee recommended that the capital and revenue borrowing limits should be increased. It is fair to say that the original figures were plucked out of thin air by the Treasury and the Scotland Office. They could give no reason for choosing their figures for capital funding in the bill; there were assertions that it was perhaps to do with the cost of the Forth bridge. However, I think that the committee's recommendations on increased limits for capital and revenue borrowing will assist the Scottish Government in the future. The committee was unanimous in the view that those limits should be increased.

The committee also recommended that powers to set corporation tax should be extended to Scotland, or that that should at least be considered if such powers were given to any other part of the United Kingdom, particularly Northern Ireland, where the situation is currently being examined. Although I have argued and will always argue that Scotland needs the right to set corporation tax, it is very welcome that the other members of the committee have come some way towards the idea that if other parts of the United Kingdom are allowed to set corporation tax, Scotland should be too.

Robert Brown: Does Tricia Marwick accept that that is not quite what the committee recommended? It said that there should be a framework for the devolution of corporation tax, if it was to be considered for other parts of the UK, with rules around it that recognised the race-to-the-bottom issues that the committee identified.

Tricia Marwick: I do not think that we disagree with each other. We are saying exactly the same thing—only, you have used about 30 seconds of my time to say it.

It has been constantly and consistently asserted that the bill will bring much greater financial accountability to the Scottish Parliament. From the time of Calman, right through the time of the Scotland Bill Committee, it has been asserted that this Parliament will be responsible for raising 35 per cent of what it spends, but that is simply not true. The figure of 35 per cent from Calman has been considered, and SPICe—at my instigation, I have to say, not the committee's instigation—asserted that the figure was nearer 30 per cent. However, that figure of 30 per cent included council tax, which is not the responsibility of this Parliament. If we strip out the council tax, the true figure is nearer 25 per cent. If the powers in the bill are all that they should be, I can see no reason why people should have to hype them up.

I have a really important point that I wish to finish on. HM Treasury and the Secretary of State for Scotland claimed that the estimate for setting up a Scottish taxpayer base would be £45 million—a cost that the Scottish Parliament will have to bear. The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland said that the cost could actually go up to £150 million. The Liberal Democrat secretary of state defended the figure of £45 million, but refused my invitation to agree to cap the figure if he was so confident about it. This Parliament must be very careful to tie down the Treasury and the Scotland Office, or we might find that the cost of implementing the tax powers will be much higher than anybody ever expected. ICAS was very clear that it was not the first time that the Treasury has plucked figures out of thin air.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must finish now.

Tricia Marwick: This is one of those occasions. I urge colleagues all across the Parliament to ensure—even if they care about nothing else—that we do not get ripped off for costs once again.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that if three of you run over time by 20 seconds, I lose one minute for the final speaker.

15:57

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I have here a newspaper clipping from the *New York Times*. Perhaps unusually, members might think, it covers a political meeting in Stow in my constituency in the Borders. The public meeting was described as “Radical and dangerous”. Four thousand people were present, and Afghanistan and the powers of the Scottish Parliament were discussed. I can give members a clue as to the time of the meeting: most of the people arrived at Stow by train. The story was about Gladstone in the Midlothian campaign of 1879. As Robert Brown said, the Liberal Party and its successors have had a consistent thread: in our movement there has been a settled will that there should be a Scottish Parliament within the United Kingdom, and that it should be a legislature with the requisite financial powers to allow it to carry out its functions. This Scotland Bill, like its predecessor and like the other constitutional discussions that Wendy Alexander mentioned, is consistent with the approach of our movement.

Margo MacDonald: Will Jeremy Purvis take an intervention?

Jeremy Purvis: If I have time towards the end of my speech, I will certainly give way to Margo MacDonald.

As well as that settled will, throughout the period—and more acutely now—we have seen that great political seducer, nationalism, appealing to the weak spot in any political view. It says either, “You are better than others,” or, “Others are better than you because you are being held back by someone else—London.” Those are the sentiments that I have heard expressed most regularly here in all the time that I have been a member of this Parliament. From the minister’s opening remarks, that seems to be the issue.

I think that I heard somebody say “rubbish” from a sedentary position behind me. However, I will give an illustration from an answer to a parliamentary question. The question was on the European social fund and the European regional development fund, and I received an answer yesterday from Jim Mather. The European Commission has suspended €41 million-worth of European structural fund programmes in Scotland. It did so on 22 December because of the Scottish Government’s lack of management of the programmes.

The issue has to do with the powers of the Parliament, the resources that come through the Parliament and the budget process, but we found out about it only because I asked parliamentary questions. If the Treasury had suspended payments, I think that we would have heard about it on 23 December—the day after. It is not about the issues that are at stake; it is about where the political areas lie. That is the SNP’s approach to London.

During the past three or four years the Scottish Government has taken a footloose approach to the constitution and the economic model that we should adopt. Three years ago, the national conversation started, with five mentions—in ministerial blogs and speeches—of Iceland as the country whose economic and political models we should follow. The Government has gone very quiet on that now.

I have never had an issue with the Government suggesting that we follow the Icelandic model, but I have an issue with the Government going quiet on the matter. If the Government thinks that Iceland is the economic model, and if it wants to be honest with the people of Scotland, it should continue to say that Iceland is the country that we should follow. If the Government is saying that we should have all the powers that Iceland has, it must also say that we should have all the risks.

Stewart Stevenson: Yes.

Jeremy Purvis: If that is the SNP’s view, why has no Government minister mentioned Iceland in two and a half years? I will give way to a former Government minister.

Stewart Stevenson: Can the member give us the figures for GDP per head of population in Iceland and in the UK? I will give him a clue: it is higher in Iceland.

Jeremy Purvis: I welcome the fact that in the SNP election campaign we are going to hear that Iceland is the country that we need to follow.

There was a similar situation in relation to Ireland, up to the point at which the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism described the Irish Government as “incompetent”. Since then, the Government has been silent on Ireland. All we are asking is that if the Government thinks that we should follow other models, it should be consistent.

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. It is not clear what Iceland has to do with the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): If the member had been out of order I would have ruled so. He is not.

Jeremy Purvis: I am grateful, Presiding Officer.

The Scottish Government’s use of the powers that it has illustrates the SNP’s approach. The Government treated the Parliament shabbily in relation to its tax-varying powers. A full Finance Committee inquiry found that the Government’s treatment of the Parliament in that regard had been unacceptable. There is also the example of the Government’s actions on European structural fund and ERDF money, which I mentioned.

Probably most disappointing is the choice way in which the Government has used the office of the chief economic adviser, which is illustrated by how the Government presented data to the Scotland Bill Committee. SPICe said that the Government presented “skewed” information. Of course, the committee found that the Government’s arguments on the deflationary impact of the bill were not accurate, and it said so categorically in paragraph 66 of its report.

The bill is a good one. Its approach is consistent with the approach that Liberal Democrats have taken all along. As far as the electorate is concerned, a touch more honesty from the SNP on the models that we should follow would be welcome in the forthcoming campaign.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: From now on members must stick to their time limits.

16:03

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate. This might be my final opportunity to speak in a Scottish Parliament debate, although I

hope to speak in the members' business debate on co-operatives later.

It is arguable that the bill has had the longest period of pre-legislative scrutiny in history. I was going to say that we have been talking about it since 1999, but I defer to Jeremy Purvis's greater interest in history and what has gone before.

The bill is unique and the bill process has been unique. I thank Wendy Alexander for convening the Scotland Bill Committee and I thank the members of the committee and the officials who supported its work. The committee produced a good and thorough report. In another role, I must consider and absorb it and take forward a number of the points in it.

It is important that there has been a more consensual tone in the debate than I expected, particularly from the Scottish Government benches, given some of the comments that I heard in another place only a few days ago. Then, the London wing of the SNP seemed to be arguing that because the bill was not fit for purpose and would not do any of the things that the SNP wanted, it would give the bill a hard time and was not entirely sure whether it would support it. I am sure that the minister will have been on the phone or will have communicated in whatever way the SNP communicates between Edinburgh and London to ensure that, when the bill is next discussed, the more consensual tone that has been taken here will be noted.

I will highlight a couple of areas that will need further scrutiny and in respect of which it is important to have a further LCM. That applies to some clauses that are not related to the Calman commission, particularly on the work of the Advocate General for Scotland's expert group. Not all members, here or in another place, think that we have had the opportunity to scrutinise those things properly. It is right and proper that the committee recommended that we should look at a further LCM.

Fiona Hyslop: I watched the debate in the United Kingdom Parliament on Monday. I think that the Advocate General finally agreed to share his initial draft clauses as a result of interventions by the SNP and the Labour Party. I hope that those draft clauses can be improved, but that provides a good reason why, as Cathy Jamieson says, a further LCM will need to be considered in the next parliamentary session.

Cathy Jamieson: Indeed.

I do not want to throw cold water on what has been a reasonably comradely debate so far, but it has been suggested that the UK Government will bring the next stage of the Scotland Bill to the chamber at Westminster earlier than might have been expected, which would make it difficult for

the second LCM debate to take place. I hope that, on leaving the Parliament today, all parties—the Scottish Government and those who have connections with the upper echelons of the UK Government and the Secretary of State for Scotland—will use their good offices to get on the phone and tell the UK Government that that would not be a particularly clever idea and that it would certainly not be in the spirit of this debate.

I will say something about air weapons. I heard what Alex Johnstone said, and welcome the fact that the Conservatives here, at least, seem to accept that it is the will of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish people to have powers over air weapons devolved. Some of Alex Johnstone's colleagues in the UK Parliament do not seem to agree with that. However, I sound a note of caution. I have consistently raised the point that those powers must be meaningful. There is no point in transferring a power if nothing can be done with it. That is why it is important that whoever forms the next Scottish Government continues to work with the Home Office, in particular, on its review of firearms legislation so that there is not simply posturing on an important issue for the sake of it.

As I said, this may be my last opportunity to speak in this chamber and I particularly want to make this point. We have talked a lot about greater powers. Of course, greater responsibilities go with greater powers. That will mean members taking a different approach in the next session to scrutinising the financial settlement and what is being done with it. It will also mean that members must be prepared to scrutinise in a different way. Members will have to be bold enough to say that there are things that are done well in Holyrood, but the structures, procedures, committee processes and how the budget negotiations are done may have to change to reflect a different setting and different responsibilities.

We have had the opportunity to have a good debate. I am conscious of the time and I will end by making the point that I have had less time to talk about a whole bill than I had to talk about one clause in another place. However, I thank people for giving me the opportunity to work on the bill.

Wendy Alexander is now back in her seat. I put on record my thanks for everything that she has done to drive these matters forward, not just over the past few years, but in all the time that she has been involved with them as a Labour politician.

16:09

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): It has been interesting listening to all the different points of view. As Brian Adam said, there are some good aspects of the Scotland Bill Committee's

consideration of the bill. There are also some worrying and some contentious aspects.

We have heard talk today, and we heard a lot of talk previously, about what went on when the academics appeared at the committee. I will talk about an issue that has not been given much consideration. I have concerns about the way in which the committee was put together and the way in which it worked. While I do not wish to personalise the issue, the Parliament should ponder it.

The first thing that gave me concern was the fact that the committee appointed as its independent advisers those who were directly concerned in creating the bill. Asking those whose work underpins the bill to serve as independent advisers was not just bad practice—it inhibited the committee from carrying out its function. Those people should have been giving evidence, so that the MSPs on the committee could openly probe the thinking behind the bill, test its limits, feel its scope and use that evidence and the evidence presented by other witnesses to frame their thoughts on the legislation.

I have heard others say today that Wendy Alexander did very well as convener of the committee. I am sure that she did, but I feel quite strongly that instead of being convener, Wendy Alexander should have been able to make herself available to give evidence to the committee. We hear over and over that Wendy was one of the architects of the Calman commission. In fact, Pauline McNeill said today that it was Wendy who brought it about. It would have been useful for the committee to have heard evidence from Wendy Alexander.

Then, of course, there were Jim Gallagher, the former civil servant who was secretary to the Calman commission and probably the principal author of the report, and Professor Ulph, who was a member of the Calman commission panel of economists. They were both employed by the committee to provide advice and criticism of their own work. That is problematic. Knowing the genesis of proposed legislation is as important as testing its parameters. The committee lost that opportunity when it decided to appoint people whom it should have called as witnesses.

No minister, in the Scottish Parliament or the UK Parliament, sits on a committee scrutinising a bill that that minister has originated. The Scottish Parliament's standing orders explicitly prohibit a minister in charge of a bill from sitting on the committee that scrutinises it. They also prohibit the sponsor of a member's bill from being a member of a committee while it scrutinises the bill.

The principle underpinning those restrictions is to ensure that the scrutiny of legislation is

impartial, that committee members are as free of bias as possible and that the committee feels free to call as witnesses everyone and anyone who seems to it to be appropriate, to give informed evidence on a bill's provisions.

Committees have to serve the Parliament and help it to be better informed. We should never be in a position in which we can be subject to the criticism that a committee is being used as a vehicle for one faction to run legislation through it unchallenged. In a single-chamber Parliament, that is a particularly vital responsibility. It is one that the Scotland Bill Committee failed to discharge.

In common with many others, in my party and beyond, I have great concerns about what I believe to be the damaging effects that the Scotland Bill could have on Scotland if it is passed in its present form. There would be a deflationary impact on Scotland's public spending—that is a major issue.

Another major issue, and one that is just as important for the long-term health of Scotland, is that legislation that is passed in such circumstances cannot serve anyone any good, no matter which side of the debate they are on. I ask the Parliament to reflect on those points so that they can be further considered in the next parliamentary session, after 5 May.

16:14

Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab): When we discussed the Scotland Bill previously, some feared that our parliamentary committee would do nothing more than rubber stamp the bill that is currently going through Westminster. That was an underestimation of the committee convener's tenacity and her track record on the issue. As other members have said, the committee's report is a fitting legacy of the 12 years for which Wendy Alexander has served in the Parliament in a variety of roles.

Whatever else people think of the report, it would be incredible if anyone believed that it reflected a committee that was inhibited. The last people who will think that the committee was inhibited are those in the Westminster Government who now have to face the challenges of an intensive dialogue as a result of the committee's work. I am glad to say that the report is far from a rubber-stamp job. The committee has decided to test the Westminster Government's sincerity by challenging the provisions in the bill and recommending expansion of them. Further, the committee has done sterling work in exposing the shallowness of the exaggerated claims on fiscal autonomy. Although it might suit some to attempt to make a link between tax evolution and

growth, the committee has shown that there is little to justify that as an automatic assumption.

Back in the early days of the Parliament, I remember some SNP members, some of whom are now in high office, becoming rather animated when I described devolution as a process rather than a full stop. The language seems to have changed considerably, which I welcome. Twelve years into the devolution journey, in the light of experience, the Scotland Bill is refining that process and the Parliament is demonstrating that it wants a say in how that refinement takes place.

The committee has demonstrated that through important recommendations, not least of which is that on the power to vary higher rates of income tax. If we believe that we can grow our economy and we have genuine aspirations for individuals to advance their economic activity, that recommendation is vital. The committee's recommendations on the aggregates levy and air passenger duty would give breadth and flexibility to our tax-raising powers and our ability to influence critical sectors of our economy. Importantly, the committee has kept the door open with regard to corporation tax and has wisely recognised the need for action on the matter that involves all the devolved nations.

In an uncertain world, the committee is absolutely correct that the Scottish budget should not take an immediate hit if tax receipts fall below what is forecast. Economic shocks come in many forms and often without notice—the turmoil in the middle east and the current price of oil are just two examples. It is clearly right that there should be a more substantial short-term annual borrowing capacity, and the figure of £1 billion seems perfectly reasonable to me.

The committee's report should form the basis for intensive dialogue between the next Scottish Administration and the Westminster Government. As I said, that dialogue will go a long way to confirming the shape and substance of the working relationship between London and the devolved Scottish Parliament. We are moving forward the process of devolution and our constitutional arrangements. The report helps us to do that in a thoughtful and constructive manner. Every political party that has an interest in Scotland's economic enhancement and in allowing Scotland to find solutions for its priorities should now give whole-hearted support to the report. All parties should start to look not only to the future interests of the Parliament, but to the shape of our devolved settlement and to think more about what is in the interests of the people of Scotland and less about what might be in each party's short-term electoral interests.

16:19

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Bad news: we have had Wendy Alexander's last speech in the Parliament, although I do not expect that this will be mine, which is the second part of the bad news. I, too, congratulate Wendy Alexander on what has been a distinguished and often interesting—sometimes for the wrong reasons—career. I also extend my congratulations to Cathy Jamieson on leaving this place. They are two of the six female members who will voluntarily stand down at the end of the session.

It is worth saying that the committee has turned out better than I feared but has achieved less than I had hoped. Murdo Fraser and Linda Fabiani have discussed the committee's approach. In that regard, the 2,000-year-old Latin phrase, "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?"—who will guard the guards?—shows that that is not a new issue for politicians.

Robert Brown suggested that this is the last major debate of the session—I note that we are not packed to the rafters—and said that we strengthen a federal structure for the UK. On Tuesday night, I was at a dinner in Newcastle, sitting with many of the Liberal Democrat politicians who run that city. I will not name names, as what they told me was unattributable, but it was clear from that discussion that the asymmetric federal structure that we have, if we have one at all, leaves those Liberal Democrats much less excited than their colleagues in this chamber.

Wendy Alexander said that the committee was the first specialist committee to study a bill—I think that she meant that it was the first specialist committee to study a UK bill—and reminded us that the UK Government has announced that EYF will be clawed back. Does that not precisely illustrate the difficulties that arise from being in continual thrall to the Treasury?

Peter Peacock talked about states. States across the world have many ranges of power. In the United States of America, they have power over sales tax, corporation tax and so on. There have been talks about income tax, but I do not think that we have seen much in the way of proposals about how the UK Government might implement what is in the bill.

I am always wary of geeks bearing gifts, when they are Labour Party geeks. However, Guido Fawkes, one of the most prominent bloggers, has today reported that the Labour Party itself is £36 million in debt.

The committee's substantial report contains 225 paragraphs of conclusions and recommendations. Three of them are on Antarctica—I will say little more about that. However, insolvency and health

regulation receive only four paragraphs each. I think that they are more important than those eight paragraphs suggest. Scotland has a different approach to bankruptcy and a different set of terminology for the various stages of financial difficulties that individuals and companies can experience. We have absolutely no guarantee that the UK insolvency service will be able to adapt its processes and resource itself to take over what is done by the Accountant in Bankruptcy in Scotland. There is little doubt that the case for that has not been made.

Robert Brown: Has Mr Stevenson read the letter from the Law Society of Scotland, who should know a little bit about this matter? It takes the opposite view, because of the technical difficulties of the current situation.

Stewart Stevenson: There are many technical difficulties that cross boundaries. The question is, is it possible to work within them and are there distinct advantages to having our own system, which is capable of being adapted more rapidly than it would be if the powers were returned to Westminster? We can work rapidly when we require to do so; it is more difficult otherwise.

With regard to the regulation of health professions, the General Pharmaceutical Council believes that having displaced powers in that regard creates no problem. It does not believe that there is any need to centralise the powers in London.

Jeremy Purvis talked of Gladstone's Midlothian campaign. When I heard Gladstone speak in Midlothian—well, not quite. However, my Liberal family discussed the Midlothian campaign at lunch once. I recall that the issue of Irish home rule split the Liberal party and that most of its members joined the Tories. Plus ça change? Perhaps.

In relation to the parliamentary question that Jeremy Purvis referred to, he should of course have informed the chamber that there will be no effect on projects that are being funded by the Scottish Government and that the issue is simply one of getting the money out of Europe and into Scottish hands.

This has been a debate about principle, on which there is, fundamentally, broad agreement. On the issue of tactics, however, there is much less agreement.

Today's debate is not the end of the matter; we all wish to debate the issues further at a later date. We certainly hope that that debate will lead to something that suits Scotland's needs even better.

16:25

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I associate myself with those who have thanked

Wendy Alexander for what she has done. I am sure that she will do more in the future; she is not off the hook.

I will turn the debate on its head. What is the reason for staying in the United Kingdom? As far as I am concerned, there is only one reason—that doing so provides better governance and delivers better public services than a Scots sovereign Parliament would for the Scottish people. That is the reason why we are here. Unless the people who promote the union at all costs can guarantee that position, they stand on no firmer ground than the idealists who say that the Scots could do as other nations have done.

Does any MSP present really believe that they are somehow inferior to deliver the most suitable and customised set of policies for the people who they are and the people whom they represent? I doubt it very much.

I do not want to believe that sovereignty does it all and that we will automatically do it all because we are sovereign—that is not the reason. The reason comes from what sovereignty would do for us once we exercised it on our own behalf. Sovereignty releases creativity and ambition. To be frank, the ambition that we heard from the Government was too limited for my taste. We heard more ambition from some people who are supposed to oppose the onward march of self-government.

I will take no more time for my speech. I simply ask MSPs to think on whether we are bound to do less for Scots if we govern ourselves, according to our own criteria and in fellowship with the people with whom we have shared the United Kingdom. We can maintain the social union, but we must change the political union in favour of the people. I identify myself with the open-mindedness of Tom McCabe.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Your time is up, Ms MacDonald.

16:27

Margaret Mitchell: The debate has been wide ranging. Some colleagues have argued strongly that, to serve the Scottish people better, the Parliament must be given more fiscal powers. I disagree and share the view of Tom Miers, which is that Scotland already has autonomy on the most important policies—for example, it has unlimited leeway to reform the main public services. However, the political will to pursue the radical reforming agenda that would serve the people of Scotland better is lacking.

I respect the fact that others hold a different view. I acknowledge the work that Wendy

Alexander has done in her time as an MSP and I wish her well for the future.

The unionist members who favour the fiscal powers that the Scotland Bill Committee recommended argue that they will strengthen the union. However, political commentator Iain Macwhirter firmly believes the opposite. His comments on Radio Scotland's "Newsweek Scotland" last Saturday morning must surely ring alarm bells among all who care about and want to maintain the union with the rest of the UK. He said:

"Since the Calman report was first published two years ago, I mean, I've had to pinch myself, because I still can't quite believe that even as the SNP appears to be losing political momentum the pace of home rule has been stepped up."

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland has raised legitimate points about the unintended consequences that could result from confusion about who precisely is a Scottish taxpayer. The cost of creating a register of Scottish taxpayers has been estimated at between £45 million and £150 million—that depends on how the term is defined. At a time of austerity and threats to front-line services, the public deserve the right to decide whether such money would be well spent. It has also been argued that another unintended consequence would be the adverse effect on the Scottish economy as businesses desert Scotland in fear of higher taxes.

So, let us put all this in perspective. Regardless of how convinced any one of us may be that our view is correct, no one—not me nor any other elected parliamentarian—has all the answers. In the words of Dr Nicola McEwen, the co-director of the institute of governance and a senior lecturer in politics at the University of Edinburgh:

"this has been an elite-based debate almost academic in some ways ... When one of the strengths of the original devolution settlement was that it had the legitimacy of a popular majority, a referendum".

There is a precedent for my amendment: the referendum on whether the Scottish Parliament should have the 3p Scottish variable tax power. The fiscal powers that are now being considered and supported in the LCM are even more significant than that. They are wide ranging and—as the Scotland Bill Committee found—have potentially unintended consequences.

A fundamental democratic principle is at stake here. I hope that this evening's vote at decision time is one of which the Scottish Parliament is proud, where conviction triumphs over partisan politics. In the words of Edmund Burke:

"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men"

—and women—

"do nothing."

I call on members to give the LCM legitimacy by voting for my amendment. Not to do so may not be evil, but it certainly represents bad decision making.

16:31

Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): I, too, pay tribute to the work of the Scotland Bill Committee and those who worked so hard on it. Clearly, the convener, Wendy Alexander, deserves special praise. I associate myself with the remarks of previous speakers about Wendy's contribution not only to the committee but to the wider work of the Parliament. I pay tribute also to my colleague Robert Brown, who was not only a member of the committee but a key member of the Steel commission. He chaired many of its meetings. In many ways, he is the constitutional guru of the Liberal Democrats in Scotland. I acknowledge the role of David McLetchie on the committee for the Conservatives and of Murdo Fraser, whose long and consistent support of the policy has helped to bring all of this to where we are today. We are now in a strong position and about to take a major step forward.

We have to remember that up to and including the 2007 election, the only party that supported stronger powers for the Scottish Parliament—not independence but stronger powers—was the Liberal Democrats. The co-operation between the Labour Party, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats is a remarkable and rare co-operation, and led to the creation of the Calman commission. The commission made clear, strong and unanimous recommendations to give more powers to the Scottish Parliament. The work of the commission led to the Scotland Bill, which will carry those new powers swiftly into legislation.

The proposals carry an overwhelming majority in the UK Parliament and a large majority in the Scottish Parliament. They are groundbreaking because they reflect the first substantial legislative push to deliver new powers to the Scottish Parliament, including tax-raising powers. In some areas and in time, I would like to see more powers given to the Parliament, including more tax-raising powers. As Robert Brown has said, home rule is a noble Liberal cause. Home rule in a strong federal UK within a stable and peaceful Europe is the long-established policy of the Liberals and Liberal Democrats. That tradition is consistent and long held—from Gladstone right through to David Steel and Jim Wallace.

Margo MacDonald: I pay tribute to the work that Nicol Stephen has done in the Parliament, but why do we have to wait for a stable Europe? Do we not have to deal with the world as it is?

Nicol Stephen: In this modern world, it is crucial to devolve as much responsibility as possible to local communities. Co-operation—working together—is also central. Like other Liberal Democrats, I strongly support the need to work together in Europe.

I contrast the consistent and long-held position of the Liberal Democrats with the position of the SNP. What is its consistent policy in this regard? It is one of flip-flop. Members should remember that the SNP refused to be part of the constitutional convention to create the Scottish Parliament. It then changed its mind, saying that it was for it.

SNP members refused to be part of the Calman commission, to strengthen the powers of the Parliament. Worse than that, they undermined the commission's work at every opportunity with selective and misleading statistics. However, today they have changed their minds and say that they are for it. I am genuinely bemused by that. I do not support nationalism—in fact, I strongly oppose it—but why in other parts of Europe are the nationalist parties at the forefront of campaigning for more powers for their communities when here they turn their back on all of that? They say that it is independence or nothing, but even then they flip-flop and, in this Parliament, drop their flagship policy of holding a referendum on independence, without even bringing it to the chamber, which is the democratically elected voice of the people of Scotland.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Nicol Stephen: I do not have time.

For me, the most important by far of the new powers are the tax-raising powers. It is no secret that they were strongly opposed not only by the SNP but also by the mandarins in the UK Treasury—curious but clear bedfellows. That is why it was so vital that the UK Government strongly backed this Parliament's overwhelming support for the work of the Calman commission. That support has remained solid and united, from a UK Labour Government to the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. I am pleased that the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, along with the Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Moore, have been able not only to support these proposals but to deliver them in legislation.

To me, the notion that the Parliament should have responsibility for raising a substantial proportion of the £30 billion that it spends each year is self-evident. The bill will deliver that. I am certain that, in time, we will go further in strengthening the powers of the Scottish Parliament, but what is being delivered today is a significant and substantial step forward.

As these may be my final words in the chamber, I end by saying how proud I am that my last speech is on the issue of more powers for this great Parliament. It was not easy for the Scottish leaders of the Conservative party, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats—of whom I was then the Scottish leader—to work together to ensure that the Parliament developed and grew stronger. However, that was very important and a big achievement. It is not always easy to be a member of the Parliament, nor should it be. However, it has been a great privilege and honour for me to speak and to work in the chamber. I will miss it very much.

Ian McKee: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Today we are discussing a motion with two interesting amendments. Can you provide the procedural reasons why the mover of one amendment was given only four minutes in which to sum up, whereas members who lodged no amendment have been given six minutes? It seems quite unfair that someone who lodged an amendment should have less time to speak than members who did not.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Effectively, that is a matter for the Presiding Officer. When making such decisions, he bears in mind the party strengths in the chamber.

16:38

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): This is a tale of two conversations. The first is the so-called national conversation, which the First Minister launched with great fanfare in August 2007 and described as

“the start of the next, and most dynamic phase, of Scottish constitutional reform.”

However, the national conversation is no more. It is reduced to a mere whimper of irrelevance.

Thankfully, there was a second conversation, between the parties in the Parliament that represent the overwhelming majority of our fellow Scots, are committed to sustaining Scotland's place in the United Kingdom and are equally keen to ensure that our constitutional settlement is right for Scotland, is fit for purpose and promotes accountable and good government on the matters for which we are responsible. Our conversation led to the establishment of the Calman commission and its thorough review of devolution to date, which was taken on by the outgoing Labour Government—to its credit—and has now manifested itself in the Scotland Bill that the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Government have brought to Parliament.

Moreover, unlike the futile and wasteful national conversation that is no more, the process has had the endorsement of this Parliament at every stage.

Some say that there is no democratic mandate from the people for the Scotland Bill, but I can assure members that there is. Careful research discloses that we have passed the Salmond test, which was articulated by the great man himself on 9 December 2009 in this Parliament. He asked my colleague Annabel Goldie:

“does Annabel Goldie accept the proposition that, given the unity of which the Conservatives are now part with the Liberals and Labour, if people in Scotland think that the Scotland Bill is good enough, they can vote for one of those three parties, but if they think that we can do rather better, they should vote for the Scottish National Party or the Green party? Does she accept that as a proposition for the forthcoming election and will she accept the result if that is the division of opinion?”—[*Official Report*, 9 December 2010; c 31364.]

Of course, Annabel Goldie said yes. What was the forthcoming election? It was the one that we had last year. What happened in the election? The Scottish National Party got 20 per cent of the vote, and the parties who supported the Scotland Bill got nearly 80 per cent of the vote. Therefore, we have passed the Salmond test with flying colours, and let us hear no more of that kind of nonsense.

I want to highlight three criticisms of the financial provisions of the bill and the refutation of them in the report, which is based on the evidence that we gathered. First, let us consider the alleged £8 billion deficit that was held up as demonstrating a so-called inherent deflationary bias in the income tax proposals. It was rightly described by the Secretary of State for Scotland as a nonsense figure based on a set of assumptions that were explicitly ruled out in the white paper.

Interestingly, when we look forward—it is the future with which we are concerned—an analysis prepared independently by the Scottish Parliament information centre's own researchers for the committee demonstrated that if the Scottish Government model was started in 2011-12 and extended over the four-year period of the spending review, under the bill's proposals we would be nearly £2 billion better off. That is an independent assessment using the Scottish Government's own methodology. The claim that there is an inherent bias or flaw is complete nonsense.

Neither is there an inherent inflationary bias. The overall objective is to equate the level of grant reduction with an accurate estimate of income tax receipts in year 1, so that we have a position of neutrality and a level playing field on which to move forward. That is why we have to get the grant reduction sums right at the outset and why we set out in the report the principles on which they should be calculated.

We also had the claim that there is a direct connection between the devolution of tax powers and economic growth. At its most absurd, it was

claimed by the First Minister in a speech to the SNP conference—where else?—that

“with economic powers we could grow the Scottish economy by an extra 1 per cent a year”.

One would have to make such a statement at an SNP conference, because they are the only people stupid enough to believe it.

Be that as it may, the poor professors who were cited for that absurd proposition came in for further misrepresentation in official Government publications about the linkage. Interestingly, if we carefully read the evidence submitted to the committee, we see that there has been a significant shift in the position of the SNP Government and its pin-up-boy economists. Economic growth is now referred to as economic performance, and sustained annual increases in GDP have now become one-offs. Finally, we had an acknowledgement from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth that

“a large measure of it depends on what you do and what policies you take forward”.—[*Official Report, Scotland Bill Committee*, 8 February 2011; c 440.]

How true—that was self-evident from the start, but it is a long way from the blustering assertions of Mr Salmond.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

David McLetchie: No, thank you.

For example, if we want to impose a special tax on our largest retailers—as the SNP wanted to do—within the existing powers of this Parliament, the chances are that we will put jobs and new investment by those companies at risk. However, if we want to reduce corporation tax for all businesses in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK, as the Conservative and Liberal Government at Westminster wants to do, we create an environment that encourages investment and job creation, albeit at some revenue cost. What matters is what is done and by whom, not necessarily the level of government that carries it out.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

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

The Scottish Conservative party supports the motion and looks forward to further positive dialogue with the Government. Like others, I pay tribute to Wendy Alexander for her outstanding contribution. The Scotland Bill owes much to many people but, as others have said, she deserves particular praise. As she is about to stand down from this Parliament, I wish her, Brian and her children health and happiness in the next phase of their lives.

16:44

Fiona Hyslop: I, too, pay tribute to Wendy Alexander, whom I shadowed in 1999 when she was the Minister for Communities, and to Peter Peacock, whom I shadowed when he was the Minister for Education and Young People. I share the desire for equality to allow women to choose their own future, and I wish Wendy Alexander well in that regard. I would like to extend that choice to the rest of the nation and allow everyone to choose their own future, but we might disagree on that point.

As I said in my opening comments, the Government's position is clear: we believe that only independence will allow Scotland to reach its full potential. However, we recognise that others in the Parliament and in Scotland hold other views. Since we took office, we have initiated and encouraged a national debate on Scotland's constitutional future in the national conversation, through the Government's white papers, with the UK Government on the bill and now in the committee and its inquiry. I point out to Pauline McNeill that the committee states:

"Both governments—UK and Scottish—have provided substantial amounts of information and evidence to the Committee at various stages of its work."

I refer those who want to find out more about the arguments, proposals and framework for full financial responsibility to the following Scottish Government publications: "Fiscal Autonomy in Scotland: The case for change and options for reform"; "An Oil Fund for Scotland: Taking forward our National Conversation"; and "Your Scotland, Your Voice: A National Conversation".

I am happy to acknowledge—as I did in my opening remarks—that the committee made valuable recommendations to improve the bill. I was especially happy that many of its suggestions reflect the positions that the Scottish Government has advanced throughout the development of the bill and the committee's consideration of it. However, I have reiterated the Government's view that the bill needs to be improved, especially to provide incentives for economic growth. We believe that further improvements and amendments are needed to provide the financial responsibility that Scotland needs.

Wendy Alexander said that the Parliament needs opportunities to propose a graduate tax, environment taxes and alcohol duties. However, those are not in the bill, although they could be. Indeed, as it stands, all of those would require the agreement of the UK Treasury—despite people's best wishes, that agreement does not exist in black and white from the Treasury.

Liberal Democrat members have talked about the arguments for home rule and the Steel

commission. Tavish Scott's evidence to the Calman commission talked about a range of taxes. We have a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition UK Government, and the Conservatives, as Alex Johnstone said, believe that Scotland should pay its own way. They understand the importance of those provisions. Why are the Liberal Democrats so limited in their proposals, given the opportunity that we now have?

Jeremy Purvis: As Robert Brown clearly indicated, the bill is a very strong taking forward of the proposals of the Steel commission, of which I was a member.

Paragraph 3.34 of "Your Scotland, Your Voice" states:

"Scotland would continue to operate within the sterling system until a decision to join the Euro by the people of Scotland in a referendum when the economic conditions were right."

Under the Government's proposals, would interest rates, which affect every business, every house and every mortgage, ever be—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Purvis, this is getting a bit long.

Fiona Hyslop: It is, indeed. The member will have plenty of opportunity to find out more about the proposals in the publications that I cited.

Today's debate is not the end of the story for the Scotland Bill, never mind the Scottish Parliament; it is, however, a milestone in our efforts to secure a Scotland Bill. David McLetchie was correct to quote the First Minister, but he should perhaps have checked the *Official Report* more carefully, as the quotation comes from a debate in December 2010. Indeed, it is very important that the public have the opportunity to influence the strength of the bill, as the choice is clear: is it about more financial responsibility or is it about implementing a new funding mechanism to provide accountability? I think that we should be seeking accountability, but it is not enough to grow the economy. I will come back to that in a second.

We believe that the Scottish Parliament having responsibility for poverty and welfare, energy and the environment, taxation, jobs and the economy is the best way forward if those decisions are to be taken in the interests of the people of Scotland.

In my opening remarks, I talked about some of the committee's positive recommendations. On the financial side, we agree that improvements are needed. We agree with the committee's proposals for doubling the revenue borrowing limit, for improving the flexibility of the capital borrowing regime and for seeking earlier capital borrowing powers and the power to issue bonds. We also agree that some of the non-financial aspects—particularly the European convention on human

rights arguments—need to come back to the Scottish Parliament in a legislative consent memorandum, as Cathy Jamieson said.

On the other hand, we are disappointed that there is no proposal in the committee's report to give the Scottish Parliament a formal role in commencing the financial provisions, in particular. That is important, because the lack of detail on crucial issues at the heart of the bill—such as the exact mechanism for adjusting the block grant and the operation of the no-detriment policy—is serious indeed. As I said to Robert Brown, the Scotland Office's proposals were only a five-page document and came with the caveat that the mechanisms were just illustrative. That is a very important reason why we need to reconsider them.

Tricia Marwick made an important point about the cost of implementation and administration for the UK Government's proposals. Alex Johnstone talked about accountability, but the issue is the cost.

Robert Brown rose—

Fiona Hyslop: I am tight for time.

If the Parliament is to bear a cost of £145 million, we must ensure that we question that. It is a dangerous precedent.

We are examining the bill's financial proposals and, in particular, the committee's acceptance of its income tax proposals. They are one of the flaws that must be addressed in improvements.

Peter Peacock talked about income tax being stable. The problem with the committee's report is that it has completely removed VAT from its analysis of the relationship between income tax and other taxes.

Since 1965, tax in the UK as a share of GDP has grown by 6.2 per cent but income tax has grown by only 0.9 per cent. Between 1978-79 and 2009-10, income tax grew by 2 per cent, public spending by 2.3 per cent, fuel duty by 3 per cent, corporation tax by 2.6 per cent and North Sea revenues by 3.1 per cent. That is why there is an automatic deflationary bias in the income tax proposals and they must be improved to ensure that the Parliament can continue the spending that it needs to improve society.

The committee's key conclusion is that the bill is unfinished business and that the Scottish Parliament should consider it again in the next session. The Government is of the same view.

We pay tribute to all those in the Parliament and wider civic Scotland who have joined the Scottish Government's pressure for improvements in the bill. We welcome the support of all parties and the support for a further LCM—Cathy Jamieson in

particular made that point—to consider changes to the bill before it can be passed for royal assent.

The most important thing to happen now is that the UK Government does not merely note, consider or even seriously consider the Parliament's views: it must act to change the bill. In agreeing to the motion or the Government's amendment, members will make sure that their successors in the Parliament can ensure that the UK Government has fulfilled that obligation.

16:52

Pauline McNeill: I acknowledge a number of excellent speeches in the debate.

As the sun sets on this session, the report will be one of the most important of that period, as it represents further progress on the Scottish Parliament's powers, which is in Scotland's interest. As Nicol Stephen said in his closing speech for the Liberal Democrats, it feels like a big step forward. It certainly feels that way to me, particularly if the committee's recommendations are adopted. Like Margo MacDonald, I acknowledge the contribution that Nicol Stephen has made to the debate and the Parliament.

I have always had faith, as I said in the previous debate on the bill, in the individuals who were appointed to the committee: Wendy Alexander, David McLetchie, Robert Brown and Peter Peacock. I also acknowledge Brian Adam and Tricia Marwick, even though I have a difference of opinion with them. Today, they have made a constructive contribution to the debate and, in fairness, having read through all the *Official Reports*, I can see that there were some long and difficult meetings. I believed that those individuals would be robust in their analysis of the taxation and non-financial powers, and they were.

Wendy Alexander is right that some people thought that the process would fail. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why the SNP is belatedly trying to appear a little bit more constructive. When I asked her, the minister did not acknowledge David McLetchie's important point that, if the bill had been in place in 2010-11, Scotland would have been better off. If she had acknowledged that point, I might have been persuaded about her ability to be—

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way on that point?

Pauline McNeill: If the minister would like to confirm that Scotland would be better off, as the report says, I would be happy to hear that.

Fiona Hyslop: If the provisions were extended from 1999 to 2014-15, the deflationary bias would be £10 billion rather than £8 billion. Surely to

goodness, the cuts from a Tory Government should not be an excuse for the bill.

Pauline McNeill: I have heard enough. The minister had her last chance to be constructive. The Calman commission reported that the Scotland Act 1998 was just about right. The Parliament has spoken on this important constitutional matter to Scotland on three occasions, and on all three occasions the minority Government has chosen to ignore the will of the Parliament. I am therefore not persuaded, but if the minister wants to be more helpful, she could welcome the progress towards the principle of the Parliament being more accountable for what it spends.

Murdo Fraser, in an excellent contribution, illustrated the absurdity of the complaints against the committee for pressing witnesses on their opinions and their written work. We must base our conclusions on facts and evidence. It is not good enough for the Scottish Government to make it up to suit its arguments. I agree with Murdo Fraser that the coalition should be congratulated on taking the work forward. However, we will not support the amendment in the name of Margaret Mitchell, because we believe that there has already been a great deal of consultation and scrutiny.

Robert Brown, as ever, made an excellent contribution to the debate. I am happy to endorse the Liberal Democrats' commitment to the claim of right and their record on home rule. I also congratulate Robert Brown on his contribution to the committee's work. He says that the establishment of a joint Exchequer committee highlights how mature our relationship has become, and the direct relationship with HMRC will be necessary in order to achieve the desired ends.

Wendy Alexander pointed out, rightly, that party-political consensus is what the public expect, and the 240-page report is probably an indication that she had a hand in putting it together.

Brian Adam said that the bill is a step in the right direction. He talked about the necessity to legislate on airguns. I have supported the devolution of that to Scotland and I wrote to the Home Office minister on that subject in 2007.

Peter Peacock, another outstanding politician, highlighted that we have a normal country in that we have high devolution in relation to spending. As he said, there is no silver bullet for economic growth. Also, the committee did indeed push the boundaries by looking at corporation tax and considering that Scotland should have parity if the UK decides to go down the road of devolving corporation tax.

Alex Johnstone said that people might be afraid of the powers. They should be no more afraid of a Scottish Government exercising them—perhaps depending on the complexion of the Government, of course—than of the UK Government doing so.

Tricia Marwick rightly emphasised the points of unity for the committee.

Jeremy Purvis, in what I thought was an enjoyable and usually entertaining speech, emphasised that we do not hear much nowadays about Iceland and Ireland and that there are no modern examples of how fiscal autonomy has helped those countries.

Cathy Jamieson said—she is right—that the Parliament has to be bold enough because we will be setting a different agenda. When the budget process comes around, we will be responsible for setting the rate of tax, and she was right to say that we have to live up to that challenge. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order. There is too much noise.

Pauline McNeill: I was disappointed by Linda Fabiani's series of buts; she is so worried about this and so worried about that. She said that she thought that the committee would be inhibited. I am staggered by that. The committee recommended a doubling of the borrowing powers, extending the powers on speed limits, revisiting the tax bands, and pushing the parameters of corporation tax. There is not much on which the committee did not push the boundaries.

As Tom McCabe said, the report is not a rubber stamping of the Scotland Bill, and I believe that the committee has made the bill remarkably better and much improved.

Stewart Stevenson is another good parliamentarian and was a good minister. I have not seen eye to eye with him on the constitution, but I welcome his contribution nonetheless.

I find that it is always Margo MacDonald who turns these debates on their head towards the end. She talked about those who support the union at all costs. Well, I am not one of those. She was right to say that we all come to our conclusions for our own reasons and that we must all respect one another's point of view. I support strong devolution because I happen to think that it is the best solution for the Scottish people, but I agree with Margo MacDonald that, regardless of the constitutional settlement that we wish for the country, providing greater social justice and improving the quality of life is what we should all be about. That is why I am here today, moving and summarising on the motion.

It has been an excellent debate, and I am sad that many of the members who have spoken in it are standing down. We have all paid tribute to them. The work of the Scotland Bill Committee has made a tremendous contribution, and I hope that it will be taken on board when the bill goes through the Westminster process. As members would expect, this Parliament—whatever its future composition—will have the last word, and the Government of the day will have to rise to the challenge of bringing about stronger devolution for the better of the country.

The Presiding Officer: Before we come to the next item of business, a commitment was made to come back to the chamber on the point that Mike Rumbles raised about the order of speakers in the Scotland Bill debate and the time allotted to them. I can only say that, as is set out in standing orders, the selection of speakers and the allocation of speaking times in any debate is a matter for the Presiding Officer alone.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on local services, if the amendment in the name of Kenny MacAskill is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Michael McMahon will fall and that, in relation to the debate that we have just had on the Scotland Bill, if the amendment in the name of Fiona Hyslop is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Margaret Mitchell will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-8120.2, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, which seeks to amend motion S3M-8120, in the name of Robert Brown, on local services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)

Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

Abstentions

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (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)
 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)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)

Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (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 62, Against 18, Abstentions 45.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Therefore, the amendment in the name of Michael McMahon falls.

The next question is, that motion S3M-8120, in the name of Robert Brown, on local services, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, 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)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

Abstentions

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 106, Against 18, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that Scotland and policing have changed significantly since the existing structure of policing was introduced over 35 years ago; notes the Scottish Government's consultation papers on police and fire services reform and agrees that, given the significant financial challenges, such reform is necessary to protect and improve local services and to strengthen and improve local accountability and engagement; agrees that reform can only happen if it gives local communities and local elected members a greater say on local priorities and services, and notes that the expectations and requirements of health and social care have similarly changed significantly since existing structures were introduced and that reform is needed to deliver integrated services that are sustainable and appropriate and that make best use of resources focussed on the needs of local populations.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-8114.1, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S3M-8114, in the name of Iain Gray, on the Scotland Bill, 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)
 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)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

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)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (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)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (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)
 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)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Abstentions

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 46, Against 78, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-8114.2, in the name of Margaret Mitchell, which seeks to amend motion S3M-8114, in the name of Iain Gray, on the Scotland Bill, 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)
 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)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

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)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (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)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (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)
 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)
 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)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Abstentions

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 47, Against 77, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-8114, in the name of Iain Gray, on the Scotland Bill, 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)
 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)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (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)
 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)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 McMahon, 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)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

Abstentions

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 121, Against 3, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, further to motion S3M-7550 passed on 9 December 2010 supporting the general principles of the Scotland Bill as introduced in the House of Commons on 30 November 2010, the Bill be considered by the UK Parliament; invites the UK Government and the UK Parliament to consider the amendments and proposals made in the report of the Scotland Bill Committee, and looks forward to considering any amendments made to the Bill with a view to debating them in a further legislative consent motion before the Bill is passed for Royal Assent.

Fenwick Weavers Society

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S3M-8024, in the name of Willie Coffey, on the co-operative model—born in Fenwick, 14 March 1761 and still flourishing. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated.

That the Parliament celebrates the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Fenwick Weavers Society in the Kilmarnock and Loudoun village of Fenwick as a significant milestone in the development of co-operative enterprises in Scotland and throughout the world; welcomes plans to recognise the founding of the society, which was recorded in the signing of a charter in Fenwick Parish Church on 14 March 1761, in a range of projects organised by the modern-day Fenwick Weavers Society in co-operation with East Ayrshire Council and with the support of a wide range of funders; notes that the projects will include the building of a commemorative wall on the spot in Fenwick where the weavers held their parliament and by the signing of a modern Fenwick Charter, to take place in the same church on 14 March 2011; further notes that the Fenwick Weavers Society has been described as "the oldest example of distributive Co-operation of which there is documentary evidence" and also as "probably the pioneer of what is now described as the 'Co-operative supply association'"; highlights that among those signing the Fenwick Charter will be Scots from all walks of life including Scotland's growing co-operative sector, representatives of UK co-operative bodies, including Co-operatives UK and the Co-operative Group, the president and director general of the International Co-operative Alliance and a representative of the MONDRAGON Corporation, a co-operative group founded in 1956 that now has over 85,000 employees and plants in 18 countries, the largest business group in the Basque Country and seventh largest in Spain; applauds the fact that the worldwide co-operative movement, of which the early roots are in Fenwick, now brings together over one billion members, providing in excess of 100 million jobs, and considers that, in addition to being an important part of Scotland's history, co-operative enterprises offer Scotland a viable, efficient and accountable means of organising to produce goods and services for their members, for the wider Scottish community and for export.

17:08

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I welcome this opportunity to highlight the campaign for recognition of the Fenwick Weavers Society and its contribution to the development of the co-operative model. I welcome to the gallery guests from the modern Fenwick Weavers Society. I mention in particular Iain MacDonald, the former director-general of the International Co-operative Alliance.

Because some of the founders were not available on 14 March 1761, today is actually the 250th anniversary of the first signatures on the charter that set up the Fenwick Weavers Society. To echo those events, and with the society's agreement, the First Minister today signed a copy

of the new Fenwick charter. Members who will not be attending Monday's event will have an opportunity to sign the charter after the debate.

When we last debated this subject, the campaign was getting into its stride. The two Johns—John Smith and John McFadzean—and the Fenwick committee, were working hard to draw attention to the events of 1761. Now, almost three years later, the 250th anniversary is upon us and the campaign has made great progress. Unfortunately, as members might be aware, the Co-operative Group overlooked Fenwick in its current advertising campaign. I am sure that those of us who are attending Monday's event will want to take that up with the group's representatives.

The campaign has succeeded because at its core is real respect for the history of Fenwick and of Scotland. There is also a commitment to implementing the principles that were set out in the original charter that was signed in 1761, and that is reflected in the modern charter, which opens with the words:

"We, the undersigned, honour the actions of the sixteen weavers of Fenwick who, in the sanctuary provided by Fenwick Church, put their names to a charter, which set up the Fenwick Weavers Society in a co-operative venture on 14th March 1761."

The initiatives to mark this important anniversary include the development of a village heritage trail, which demonstrates how Fenwick's history reflects wider social and economic changes. The trail illustrates the context in which the Fenwick Weavers Society was born and operated. It is a valuable reminder that when people face challenges, hardship or oppression, they can respond positively—and with some ingenuity, into the bargain.

Over the past 250 years, the legacy of the Fenwick weavers has played a significant part in shaping our world. We can trace the idea of a formal co-operative, founded on a clear statement of values and principles, as it spread from Fenwick throughout Scotland to the UK and further afield. We know that in 1777, a co-operative was set up in Govan, and then others were set up in communities all over the west of Scotland. By 1830, there were 300 co-operative societies in existence.

David Dale, the founder of the New Lanark mill and the father-in-law and business partner of Robert Owen, was undoubtedly a factor in the spread of the Fenwick idea. Dale was born in Stewarton, only four miles from Fenwick, and was just 22 years old when the Fenwick charter was signed. He was a weaver to trade and, together with some Fenwick residents, he was a member of the Secession Church. As a pastor in that church, he engaged with communities all over the west of Scotland. David Dale undoubtedly valued the

democratic and co-operative developments that were taking place around him. It was his decision to put New Lanark under Robert Owen's management that gave Owen the platform to promote his ideas.

By the mid-19th century, with an ever-growing number of co-operatives, the movement was ready to move on to the next stage. At that point, not only does Rochdale enter the story, but quickly thereafter, so too does the development of co-operative wholesale societies in both England and Scotland. By that time, the Fenwick Weavers Society was winding down as power looms in places such as New Lanark replaced the weavers. Despite that, Kilmarnock and Loudoun continued to play their part in the development of co-operatives, with societies in Kilmarnock, Galston, Newmilns and Crosshouse all active in the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society.

Given that history, it is right that over the next few days Fenwick should be the centre of attention for the co-operative movement. The modern-day society has succeeded in attracting leading figures of today's worldwide co-operative movement. I look forward to joining the society in welcoming Pauline Green, the president of the International Co-operative Alliance, together with Charles Gould, the current director-general, and the many other guests who will join the local members of the society on Monday in Fenwick to mark the contribution that was made by those 16 pioneers. It is particularly fitting that Mr Lezamiz of the Mondragon corporation in the Basque country will also join us on Monday. Other members may wish to take up this point, but I see Mondragon as being a further stage of development in the co-operative model, and one that we should certainly be looking to bring home to Scotland.

With its early growth built on manufacturing, Mondragon has developed a wide range of co-operatives, including its own financial and educational institutions. Scotland could certainly learn from that as we rebuild our economy in the wake of the banking crisis.

In 2009, Scotland celebrated its year of homecoming to mark the 250th anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns. 2011 marks a year of homecoming for the co-operative movement, as it revisits the true roots of the movement: the point at which the revolution really began when 16 weavers in a small Ayrshire village signed up for what is now recognised as the world's first formal co-operative.

17:14

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Willie Coffey on bringing the debate to the chamber. It was four years ago that we

celebrated in this chamber the outstanding work of local amateur historians John MacFadzean and John Smith from Fenwick, both of whom are in the gallery this evening.

They uncovered the evidence that the world's first co-operative was established in the village in March 1761. Here we are again, at another important milestone: namely, the 250th anniversary of the founding of the co-operative. Who could have imagined when the 16 weavers and apprentices signed the founding charter in Fenwick parish church on 14 March 1761 that that would herald the beginning of a journey that 250 years later has seen the establishment of a worldwide co-operative movement that today has over 1 billion members and has resulted in the provision of over 100 million jobs?

As a result of the signing of the charter in Fenwick, those weavers were able to control the trade within the area and hence protect themselves and their families from the unpredictable and often challenging economic times. Over the next decade the co-operative grew to include the bulk buying of food to be sold to members of the co-operative and other Fenwick villagers. In addition, there is evidence of a co-operative savings scheme—the 18th century equivalent of a credit union.

Further, the charter set out the principles of the society, which were honesty, faithfulness to one another, fair pricing, majority decisions, regular contributions to the poor fund and an admission charge of 2/6 to be used for the good of the society and the people it aimed to help.

Those remain good principles for us all to follow today. So, it is with great pleasure that I join with others in the chamber this evening to celebrate the monumental achievement that is the co-operative movement that started in Fenwick over two centuries ago.

I look forward to joining other members of the Parliament and members of the Fenwick community next Monday, 14 March, at a service in the same church where those 16 weavers signed their charter 250 years ago, when a new charter will be signed to commemorate their achievement, which is a fitting tribute to this historic anniversary.

17:17

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I congratulate Willie Coffey on bringing this debate to the chamber at this historic time of 250 years after the creation of the Fenwick Weavers Society, which is the oldest example in the world of a distributive co-operation for which there is documentary evidence. The creation of the society was a remarkable event, which was based on the idea that solidarity between those who live

together can be developed for their best interests and those of their families and the community in which they live. Indeed, the weavers society served as a model for others in more industrial communities and, as we know, the idea spread to many parts of the world.

It is interesting to consider the Fenwick weavers in the context of how people respond to crises, because the issues that they faced in the 1760s were a Britain at war and a Scottish economy that was affected by import restrictions and so on, which was also very much the experience of Robert Burns slightly later. In the end, they, too, supported emigration to try to free themselves from the yoke that they were under, which is what Robert Burns wrote about in trying to show up the landlords who tried to stop people escaping from that kind of oppression.

That situation happened again and again. Indeed, the kind of communities that Robert Owen was involved in setting up in the new world, in Pennsylvania, and those that Welsh idealistic socialists set up in Patagonia were very much in the tradition of trying to create a co-operative community that could stand up for itself and make its way in the world.

The Fenwick idea has had many elaborations in later times, not the least of which, as is mentioned in the motion, is the Mondragon Corporation. It was founded in the wreckage and carnage of the Spanish civil war in the Basque Country in an area that had been devastated economically and had a closed economic system. Don José María Arizmendiarieta got together some young men, who got themselves a technical education and, in 1956, became involved in the production of—I understand—small heaters of German origin. As the process developed, they created their own bank, social security, colleges and universities. Today, there are 256 co-operatives in the Mondragon Corporation, which have worldwide reach.

Don José María recognised that innovation and education were at the heart of the movement, as I guess the Fenwick weavers did. He said:

“However splendid the present might be, it is destined to fail if it turns its back on the future.”

He thought that, through co-operation and solidarity, innovation would enable workers to meet the challenges of the ever-changing world. That is a huge testament to the ideas that began in Fenwick so many years earlier and were carried forward elsewhere in Scotland and in England.

I am delighted to support whole-heartedly the motion and an idea in which I have been interested for 30 years. I visited Mondragon at last in October and saw that it benefited from ideas that had stemmed from our country and many

others in creating a model in which capital is controlled in a democratic fashion for the benefit of all. I congratulate Willie Coffey again on lodging the motion and I wish him and the Fenwick Weavers Society well for the future.

17:21

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which shows that I am a member of the Scottish Co-operative Party group of members of the Scottish Parliament.

I congratulate Willie Coffey on securing this debate on a subject that is close to my heart. This is likely to be my final opportunity to speak in the Scottish Parliament, so I particularly thank him for affording me the opportunity to leave this place speaking about something about which I care passionately—indeed, one of the first issues that I raised when I became an MSP, when I tried to ensure that the Scottish Parliament gave members and staff the opportunity to join a credit union.

I pay tribute to John Smith and John McFadzean, who are in the gallery, to my long-standing—I will not say “old”—friend Ian Macdonald, and to Charles Sim, who is a stalwart of the credit union movement in Ayrshire and more widely.

When members talked about the issue in a previous debate, which does not seem long ago, we were conscious of the amount of work that would have to be done to ensure that there would be a fitting celebration for the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Fenwick Weavers Society. I know that the people mentioned have been driving that work forward, as has Jim O'Neill, who is a former Co-operative Party councillor in East Ayrshire Council—I should give him a mention.

In the spirit of co-operation, I tried to table an early day motion in Westminster that was identical to Willie Coffey's motion, but I got a call from the table office to tell me that the limit is 250 words, which was unfortunate—Willie was too long-winded for Westminster. I must make the motion more succinct, so that a suitable motion can be tabled to mark the occasion.

Of course, co-operatives are not just about something that happened in the past. As I have said in previous debates, we can all fondly remember our mothers', aunties' and grannies' divvy numbers, but how many of us can proudly produce a co-op membership card today? If people do not have a card, I hope that they will take it on themselves to find out how to become a member of a local co-op or the Co-operative Group.

At a meeting just the other day, it was pointed out to me that, if the Co-operative Group across the United Kingdom was listed on the stock exchange, it would be not just in the FTSE 100 but in the FTSE 30, because it is one of the top trading organisations. That is a lesson for us, given the values and principles of the Fenwick weavers' charter, which Margaret Mitchell mentioned, which were honesty, faithfulness, fair pricing, majority decision making and regular contributions to the poor fund. Co-operation was not simply an add-on; it was not about people kind of co-operating after they had done everything else in their life. Fundamentally, it was a different way of doing business, organising society and looking after people.

If there is any message that we ought to take from the 250 years since the Fenwick Weavers Society started, it is that we should look back, take lessons and consider how we can put those lessons into practice. We can do that by ensuring that we have a different vision for co-operatives that fits the 21st century and looks ahead to the 22nd century—a vision in which people genuinely own land and retail services in common ownership and in which there are other ways that they can own the energy that we all need in our houses, housing itself, or a range of other things. That would be the real test.

I am running out of time, but I want to mention a very small co-operative in the picturesque village of Straiton, which is in what will soon no longer be my constituency of Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley. It is an example to everyone. When the villagers' local corner shop closed down, they decided that they would not simply let it go and that they would form their own co-operative, which is exactly what they did. That approach is being replicated in communities throughout Scotland.

Presiding Officer, I know that you have been generous in giving me an extra 30 seconds because this is my last speech in the Parliament, so I will not try your patience. I thank everyone for their support for the co-operative movement during the 12 years that I have been an MSP. I am sure that, in the next session, members will take the messages of the Fenwick weavers and deliver on them for people throughout Scotland.

17:26

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): I am pleased to be able to contribute to this debate ahead of the events that are planned for next week. I am also pleased that I will attend those events, and I am eagerly looking forward to them.

I, too, congratulate Willie Coffey on securing a second members' business debate on the Fenwick Weavers Society. His continued interest in the

matter is to be applauded. Indeed, the cross-party group on co-operatives was born following the previous debate. I am pleased to have been a co-convenor of that group since its creation.

I reserve a special mention for the two historians, John McFadzean and John Smith—the two Johns—who unearthed the documents that revealed that Fenwick is the birthplace of the co-operative movement. Their research ultimately ensured that next week's anniversary will be properly honoured, but it would be wise if they avoided Rochdale for the foreseeable future. The co-operative there thought that it had the honour of being the oldest.

It is incredible that a movement that has spawned almost a billion global members was a product of 16 weavers in a small Ayrshire village who sold oatmeal at a discounted price. Those 16 weavers were not only pioneers; they were incredibly courageous. Rob Gibson mentioned landowners. Landowners back then did not much like the thought of self-sufficient workers acting in an organised fashion.

In 1761, life was, of course, very different from and much more difficult than it is now. That is not to say that life is not difficult now, but at least we do not have to contend with the threat of engaging in a duel in a town square or perhaps another Jacobite uprising. That is why it is all the more remarkable that, against such a backdrop, men were willing to look beyond their own families and help their neighbours. For the period, the words that have been committed in ink on their document are inspirational. They bound the signatories to be

"honest and faithful to one another ... and to make good and sufficient work and exact neither higher nor lower prices than are accustomed".

The soon-to-be-established Fenwick weavers trail will act as a fitting legacy of next week's 250th anniversary celebrations. The Heritage Lottery Fund is to be commended for its generous contribution, which has made the trail possible. I understand that the old parliament wall is to be restored, which will be a fitting tribute to the weavers who met there. They often had to post a look-out during meetings to ensure their safety. It would, of course, be remiss of me not to highlight the roles played by East Ayrshire Council, Co-operative Development Scotland and the Scottish co-operative group for helping to fund a feasibility study, which ultimately made the trail possible.

As I said, I am a co-convenor of the cross-party group on co-operatives, and I am a member of the Borders Machinery Ring co-operative. From a past life, when I was chairman of the Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability, I have experience of trying to bring farmers together. The foundation conducted research among local farmers, which revealed that many of them wished

to diversify and were willing to share resources. We engaged them with numerous land managers and other farmers, and we audited some of their ideas, interests and skills. That led to the establishment of the Borders farm venture groups. We had initiatives such as the James Hutton trail in east Berwickshire—Hutton being the father of geology—and the cliff-top discovery tours at St Abb's Head. That is just a wee example of the success that can be achieved and of the progress that is still being made in the co-operative movement. The Borders Machinery Ring has now started the Borders Sports Ring, to give better buying power to sports clubs.

The village of Fenwick, the Fenwick Weavers Society and, importantly, the 16 weavers, will all be deserving recipients of what, I am sure, will be a fine celebration next week, when I look forward to signing the charter in Fenwick church.

17:30

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I, too, begin by congratulating Willie Coffey on securing today's debate on the 250th anniversary of the establishment of Scotland's first co-operative, the Fenwick Weavers Society. I should also declare an interest as a co-convener of the Scottish Parliament's cross-party group on co-operatives. I am a founder member of three co-operatives, a regional member of the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society and a member of a credit union.

I take this opportunity to salute Cathy Jamieson on her final speech in our Parliament today. I thank her for her hard work and her shared sense of purpose, and indeed her friendship, in seeking the best for southern Ayrshire, as she and I have both done over the past 12 years.

Today, co-operative and collaborative working, which was first formally established in 1761, has developed into a worldwide business model. Some co-operatives now exist to make profit for their members; others exist and benefit their members on a not-for-profit basis. Mutualisation is a further type of co-operative. It is fascinating and important to note that all that began in Ayrshire, in Fenwick—only about 10 miles from the place where Robert Burns was born two years earlier.

The date of 1761 tells us that the concept was yet another example of the development of social and economic ideas that was taking place in Scotland at that time—it was very much part of the Scottish enlightenment. Those ideas are now worldwide in their application, nowhere more so than in Scotland—SAOS and co-operative development Scotland being the principle advocates of co-operation in Scotland today.

For my part, I was a founder member of a lamb marketing co-operative that was established in the 1980s, and more recently I created the Ayrshire Farmers Market co-operative. Both those co-operatives are still working well today. I helped to create and chair the Scottish Association of Farmers Markets to further the development of farmers markets across Scotland, and I am very proud that about 80 free-standing farmers markets are now operating across Scotland. Many of them are co-operatives, built on the founding principles of 250 years ago, and they have supported the creation of at least 300 to 400 new jobs in rural Scotland over the past 10 years.

Much food production and marketing throughout Scotland is carried out by co-operatives, with significant amounts of milk, pork, beef and lamb being dealt with in that way. The model is also used in Europe. Many people would argue that greater co-operation is still the way forward for giving primary producers more negotiating power when dealing with supermarkets, which are perhaps the modern-day equivalent of the early landowners who, by their actions, inspired the Fenwick weavers to work together.

I, too, shall be going to Fenwick on Monday to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the formation of the Fenwick Weavers Society, and I am very much looking forward to the event. Again, I give my support to Willie Coffey and congratulate him on securing the debate.

17:34

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Congratulations to Willie Coffey on securing this members' business debate and speaking so eloquently about the success of that pioneer, the Fenwick Weavers Society.

In what will be my last speech to the Parliament, I wish to offer some strategic ideas for today's co-operative movement. The Fenwick weavers were not just followed by Robert Owen and his New Lanark experiments; in the early 19th century—around 1810—the Rev Henry Duncan of Ruthwell set up what became the Trustee Savings Bank, which was the financial pendant to the rise of the Scottish consumer co-operatives that handled up to 25 per cent of retail in some areas. Since then, the co-op movement has had its challenges. In recent years, the Co-operative Wholesale Society only just survived an attempt to make it private in 1997 by the 30-year-old city whizz kid Andrew Regan. That occupied the courts for a fairly long period, but after that trauma recovery began.

The Trustee Savings Bank was less fortunate, as it was swallowed by Lloyds in 1995 at the beginning of that mutual-into-bank mania that ended in tears, particularly for the Scottish banks

HBOS and the Royal Bank of Scotland. Those are now the virtual possessions of the United Kingdom Government, although in no way do they behave like mutual institutions. When I leave the Parliament, I will go through a transition in my finances, not least by moving my savings—not a spectacular amount, but I love them dearly—from HBOS to the Co-operative Bank, the expansion of which is needed. We were told by Lord Adair Turner that HBOS went out in 2007-08 with an investment spree that turned his Financial Services Authority white-faced with horror. The biggest of the state-owned banks, the Royal Bank of Scotland, has just paid its boss, Stephen Hester, a £7.8 million bonus. Surely it is time to change to a bank that is owned by its members.

There is a slight problem because, as we have been reminded, the co-op movement has its own political party, which is affiliated to the Labour Party, yet in Scotland the radical cause is spread across several parties that have broadly similar social commitments to mutuality. I make a plea for common action that extends across political parties, trade unions and community groups and is aimed at creating a powerful mutual banking, insurance and house finance system. Perhaps the best honest broker in such a reorganisation might be the overall well-respected Scottish Trades Union Congress.

I come from a family with a long co-op tradition. My grandfather, George Steven Harvie, was bailie of Motherwell and chair of the Dalziel Co-operative Society. He obviously exercised some sort of co-op prerogative by marrying Christine Notman, who was a co-op milliner. She was my grandmother. My grandfather was a Lloyd George liberal in his politics, but he voted Labour to support his friend the Rev James Barr, who was, interestingly, the first member of Parliament to move for outright dominion status for Scotland—not just home rule but, in effect, independence.

We need a new Henry Duncan and new versions of the Fenwick Weavers Society. By giving up on the Hesters and the Goodwins, we can come out on the right side of the balance sheet. In yesterday's *Financial Times*, my friend Professor John Kay alluded to Hester's famous slight on those people whom he said wanted to go back to Hovis banking. Professor Kay said that that desire is not nostalgic and that people want healthy wholemeal bread and healthy wholemeal banking rather than fast bucks. So forward, friends, to the great ideal of another colleague of mine, the Glasgow novelist Alasdair Gray, and enrol me for my divvy in his Scottish co-operative wholesale republic.

17:38

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): It gives me great pleasure to speak in the debate. As other members have done, I congratulate Willie Coffey on securing this debate on the celebration of the Fenwick Weavers Society's 250th anniversary. It is right that so many members have not only stayed behind tonight but spoken in the debate so eloquently and articulately.

The story of the weavers is a fantastic one, and we owe a lot to John Smith and John McFadzean for rediscovering it and doing so much to bring it to life. This is the second debate on the Fenwick weavers in the current session of Parliament. It is a fascinating story and it is right that so many people will gather on Monday to sign the charter and to commemorate the event. As a co-convenor of the cross-party group on co-operatives, I certainly look forward to that.

It is not only the historical significance of the Fenwick event that is important but what the Fenwick Weavers Society was about. As Margaret Mitchell and Cathy Jamieson said, we must remember the values that the weavers espoused and the way in which they went about establishing their organisation 250 years ago. Not only did they contribute to a spirit of bringing the community together, they showed how people should conduct themselves—what was right and what was wrong. That was developed in their strong sense of the importance of education in the community, not only 250 years ago but in the years following. That was shown by the setting-up of a local library, which was significant because it demonstrated that the Fenwick community thought that it was important not only that people could feed and clothe themselves but that they could be educated to go on and better themselves. There are some excellent examples of that in the Fenwick story.

Bringing the issue all the way forward to 2011, the importance of co-operatives today and the extent to which they are important to communities show how much we owe to the forebears of the co-operative tradition who lived 250 years ago.

At the weekend, I attended an event at the West Whitlawburn Housing Co-operative in my constituency, which involved the opening of a new sports pitch. I should say that, as the dignitaries waited to open the pitch, the young kids were dying to get on to the park, which was great to see. That housing co-op has been able to improve the housing stock and branch out into other areas. It is the first technology co-operative in the UK, and it has improved the sporting facilities. That shows us what co-operatives can achieve and how they can benefit the community.

It is right to celebrate what happened in Fenwick 250 years ago, but we should also use this debate

as a platform to re-emphasise the co-operative movement's message and take it forward.

It is also right to draw attention to the fact that this debate marks Cathy Jamieson's final contribution in this chamber. She has been an excellent MSP and a minister over the past 12 years and has contributed superbly to the development of this Parliament. It is only fair also to point out the contribution that Christopher Harvie has made. I have always enjoyed his unique historical insights, which we heard again tonight. I thank him for that.

I congratulate Willie Coffey again, and I congratulate those in Fenwick who have been at the heart of the 250th anniversary events. I look forward to Monday coming.

17:43

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): I, too, congratulate Willie Coffey on securing the debate and thank everyone who has contributed for their interesting, supportive and personal remarks.

Two members are making their final speeches to the Parliament today. I join James Kelly in acknowledging the contribution of Cathy Jamieson who, as a minister and a member of this Parliament, has always been courteous and thoughtful. The chamber will miss her.

It will also miss my colleague, Christopher Harvie, an academic, clear thinker and author—"No Gods and Precious Few Heroes" was the book that turned me on to what has happened in Scotland over the years and is the real reason why I am here.

The Fenwick weavers were my kind of heroes—ordinary folk who did extraordinary things and just happened to change the world. They made a fantastic contribution not just to the co-operative movement but to Scotland's history and the rich historical legacy of Ayrshire—their co-operative society fits well among the other jewels in Ayrshire's crown.

The society is of global significance. I take Jim Hume's point that somebody will have to break the news to Rochdale, which is not just a day late and a dollar short but 83 years short. If the 16 weavers of Fenwick who signed the original charter that set up the Fenwick Weavers Society in March 1761—83 years before 1844—could see how the co-operative movement has developed and grown in the subsequent 250 years into the movement that it has now become, with a billion members worldwide, I am sure that they would be amazed and justifiably proud of their vision. Once they engaged with that, they would see the audit trail

and understand why the movement was an unstoppable phenomenon.

As we have heard, the phenomenon is alive and well and is growing, whether that is shown by the shop in Straiton or the new book by David Erdal, which reminds us all of the movement's potential and which goes into detail on the Mondragon Corporation, which Rob Gibson talked to me about when I first entered the Parliament in 2003 and had mentioned before then. His enthusiasm has been vindicated by the current momentum.

I regret that, because of other commitments such as attending the convention of the Highlands and Islands, I cannot attend the ceremony in Fenwick on Monday to mark the 250th anniversary of the charter's signing. However, I am delighted that Adam Ingram, who was in the chamber earlier and who is an Ayrshire man, will be there to represent the Scottish Government.

I was privileged to have the opportunity today to sign the new charter, which acknowledges the Fenwick weavers' place in the co-op movement's history. The First Minister's name is on that charter, which has been well photographed and which I am sure will be broadcast to break the news to Rochdale, perhaps even before Jim Hume gets to people there.

The early beginnings of the co-op movement and the co-op values and principles were wonderful. The principles are honesty, fairness, decision making, frugality, working in the common good and a sense of common purpose. The pendulum is swinging back to those fundamental principles, which work. The generation that includes the gentleman who tried to privatise the co-op movement will find itself tsunamied away by the movement returning and claiming ethics. John McFadzean and John Smith remind us of and allow us to rediscover the movement's roots. That gives us the common proof that adds weight to the fact that current authors such as David Erdal are beginning to rediscover, capture and reload into the psyche the clear guidelines for emulating our predecessors.

In the modern day, I am delighted to acknowledge that co-operative principles underlie the purpose of "The Government Economic Strategy", which seeks a successful Scotland that all can share and in which all can flourish. The co-op sector is an important contributor to helping us to achieve those goals and particularly our growth aspirations for the economy.

The co-op sector in Scotland is thriving and growing—Scotland has about 430 enterprises that are commercial co-operatives, co-owned or mutuals. I noticed that the number of co-operatives in one little part of Spain was 256. As part of the computer fraternity—like my good

friend Stewart Stevenson—I know that that is a binary number. The next numbers are 512, 1,024 and 2,048. The potential for such development in Scotland is valid, as the pendulum is swinging back in that direction.

John Lewis's results, which are in the papers today, show that the partners in that company are all benefiting from success. There are organisations such as First Milk, Tullis Russell and the Arup engineering group, but also newer co-operatives such as Boyndie Wind Farm Co-operative, which was set up in Banffshire in 2005; the Edinburgh Community Energy Co-operative, which was formed in 2007; and the more recent East-Kilbride based Clansman Dynamics, which was bought out by 30 employees and which has a turnover of £7 million. In 2010, a new co-op was formed—Scottish Bee Services, which involves a Perthshire consortium of beekeepers. So, we have lots to which we can look forward. On top of that, in Co-operative Development Scotland, we have the basis to help more co-ops to come through to fruition.

I want to focus in on the issue that worked its way through the debate from John Scott's contribution and into Christopher Harvie's speech: collaboration and the co-operative work that generates new co-operatives. David Erdal has also described that. We need to do this work in a solid way while also ensuring sound constitutions so that co-operatives last and keep fresh so that they can help future generations. We want co-operatives to be the powerful new mutuals in all areas of endeavour, including finance. I am thinking of Hovis banking, which Christopher Harvie and I believe has a genuine place in all this.

In Scotland, we have the ability to write books that say that there are "No Gods and Precious Few Heroes", but we do not have to look far back in time to find ordinary folk who have stepped up to being just that. Scotland can contaminate the world with contagious ideas. The weavers of Fenwick did that. We can look forward to more of that happening in Scotland as more contagious ideas go forward.

Meeting closed at 17:51.

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