



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 6 November 2012

Session 4

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## Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 6 November 2012*

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

### Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Good afternoon. Our first item of business is time for reflection, which will be led by the Rev Dr Dane Sherrard, who is the minister of Luss parish church.

**The Rev Dr Dane Sherrard (Luss Parish Church):** I live in Luss, on the banks of Loch Lomond, so imagine my surprise when I received a letter with the backing of the WWF, which invited our village to become Scotland's first green pilgrimage city. I composed my reply. Yes—we have a proud pilgrimage heritage that goes all the way back to Kessog in the year 510. He was martyred 10 years later, which led to pilgrimage to his burial place that continued right up to the Reformation. We also have excellent green credentials. Luss sits in Scotland's first national park—an area that was chosen because of its natural beauty and the care that has been devoted to it by farmers over the centuries. However, is Luss a city? No.

I replied expecting to hear little more, but back came the reply: the WWF knew where we were and it wanted us to be one of 12 inaugural cities around the world. "City" was not used to denote size, but to signify relationship; in this case the relationship between faith community and secular authority. The WWF believed that Luss had something to offer.

So, last November we travelled to the inaugural event, which was held in Italy under the patronage of the Duke of Edinburgh. We found ourselves in a company of cities that took our breath away: Jerusalem, Assisi, Trondheim and St Albans. I found myself sitting beside the Sikh who is responsible for the Golden temple at Amritsar in India, where volunteers feed upwards of 100,000 pilgrims every day. There were cities from Africa, China and Japan, and municipal authorities and faith representatives from the 12 specially chosen cities, including our Scottish village.

We learned that the programme had been established because the WWF realised that if conservation were to succeed it needed to have faith groups on board. Eighty per cent of all the folk in the world belong to a faith group and seven per cent of all the world's land is under the control of such groups.

Each city has made commitments about how we will work with others to green our pilgrimage places. Argyll and Bute Council has become our partner and as such will share expertise and experience with partner green cities throughout the world. We shall also try to ensure not only that the 750,000 visitors who come to our village each year become pilgrims, but that while they are with us are helped to walk gently on God's earth.

We will learn from Amritsar and Trondheim, and from Louguan and Jerusalem, and they may learn something from Luss.

## Topical Question Time

14:04

### Freshlink Factory (Closure)

#### 1. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what support will be provided to staff at the Freshlink factory in Shettleston, who have been told that the factory is closing and moving its business to England. (S4T-00097)

**The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing):** The Scottish Government will do everything that it can through its partnership action for continuing employment—PACE—initiative to help those employees of Freshlink who are facing redundancy. Through providing a tailored package of skills development and employability support, PACE aims to minimise the time that people affected by redundancy are out of work. Delivery of PACE support is led by Skills Development Scotland, with partners that include the Department for Work and Pensions and Glasgow City Council.

I will visit the Freshlink factory on Friday with Councillor McAveety and PACE officials. We will meet employee representatives and the management of the company to discuss the tailored package of support for employees that our local Glasgow PACE team stands ready to deliver.

**John Mason:** I thank the minister for his reply and for the fact that both the Government and Glasgow City Council are putting so much effort into helping the employees now that the decision has been made. Can the minister confirm that considerable assistance was offered to Freshlink by Glasgow City Council, the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise and Clyde Gateway among others, but that the company has shown little enthusiasm for finding a solution that would let it continue in Glasgow?

**Fergus Ewing:** Yes, I can. John Mason is aware of that because he, Drew Smith, Margaret Curran, Councillor McAveety, Bailie Liz Cameron and I all worked on the stakeholder group that met on four separate occasions. The First Minister himself chaired the last stakeholder meeting.

I can advise members that the offer that was made to the company to retain its presence in Scotland was at the maximum allowable level for regional selective assistance. That was accepted by all stakeholders from different parties who worked together to try to persuade the company to stay in Glasgow. Unfortunately, those efforts were unsuccessful, but that was not because of the offer, which was at the absolute maximum.

To answer John Mason's other question, we recognise that Clyde Gateway does excellent work, which will most certainly continue with our support.

**John Mason:** I thank the minister for the reassurance, especially about his continuing support for Clyde Gateway, which has been one of the players. When the minister meets the management on Friday, will he discuss how the workforce will be dealt with over the coming weeks? One or two constituents who have come to me are very uncertain about when their end date will be and are therefore not able to apply for another job in case they would lose their redundancy payment. Can the minister reassure us that that will be on his agenda?

**Fergus Ewing:** It certainly will. The plant is expected to close completely in early 2013. Both myself and Councillor Frank McAveety, with whom—as John Mason knows—I worked very closely in co-chairing the group, will be present. We will certainly have a dialogue with the management of the company to ensure that its full support is provided in respect of the PACE activities. That full support and attitude of full co-operation are extremely important in ensuring that the PACE activity is as efficacious as possible. That is one of several reasons why I will visit the factory and speak to the management on Friday.

**Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab):** I thank the minister for the engagement and discussions that he has had over many months with me and others on the projected closure of the Freshlink factory.

The minister will be aware that at a meeting that the First Minister attended, and which was held only a few days before the announcement, there was talk of a new option being on the table and, in particular, there was the prospect of a renewable energy project. Will the minister confirm when the Scottish Government was informed that the company had decided to close the factory and say whether he felt that ABP Food Group took seriously the offers that were being made to it?

Secondly, can he confirm whether any of the resource that was identified to support ABP to stay in Shettleston could now be used to support the workers in the community that ABP is leaving behind?

**Fergus Ewing:** The company's decision that it was not prepared to accept the package that had been offered was made in the course of last week. I would have to check precisely when, because I do not wish inadvertently to mislead Drew Smith. However, it is reasonable to say that the company was fully aware of all elements of the package, including the offer that would have involved a renewable energy scheme. I think that the company understood the nature of the offer and

was interested in it but—as Drew Smith knows—its argument was that the perceived gap between the cost of remaining in Glasgow and providing new premises and the costs that it would incur by switching production to Yorkshire was too large. I think that everybody accepts that those were the reasons that the taskforce gave and that it continued to give.

To answer absolutely Drew Smith's second question, I say that the company was fully aware of the nature of the offer—the offer that, of course, Glasgow City Council contributed to and worked extremely closely on. I record my thanks to every single member of the taskforce, including people from the city council, and the workforce representatives, many of whom will, sadly, lose their jobs.

Every offer and every effort will be pursued to ensure that those who are made redundant—the Glasgow workforce—find other jobs. I am comforted by the fact that of those who have received PACE support in the past, nearly three quarters have gone on to find alternative employment. That is a high figure. It is a good figure; it is acknowledgement of the quality of all the components of support that the PACE team provides. Its full contribution, with all the stakeholders that work with it, will be devoted to securing every effort to help those who are losing their jobs to find other jobs. We have some time in which to do that, so I assure Drew Smith and all other members that all urgency will be devoted to meeting that objective.

## **Student Loan Applications**

**2. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to resolve any backlog in student loan applications. (S4T-00104)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** The Student Awards Agency for Scotland has processed approximately 150,000 applications, including the 105,405 students who applied by the guarantee date, which is 99 per cent of applications received so far. Applications continue to arrive from students who are seeking support for year 2012-13. Indeed, the Student Awards Agency anticipates about a further 7,000 late applications between now and March 2013.

As of this morning, 1,272 late applications were waiting to be processed, with more applications arriving at the rate of around 50 a day. In order to clear outstanding applications, the Student Awards Agency is utilising overtime working, the contact centre opening hours have been extended and staff have been redeployed to help in the effort.

**George Adam:** Will the cabinet secretary confirm that this is the last year of the current system for applying for student support and that any lessons from this year will be learned in time for the new system's going live next year?

**Michael Russell:** I did, indeed, announce a new and simplified student support system on 22 August, which will come into effect from next year. That will replace with just four levels of award the literally dozens of confusing combinations of bursaries and loans that are currently available. It will also, by providing non-income-assessed support, remove the need for approximately 20,000 students to provide evidence of their household income.

Meanwhile, David Wallace, who is the deputy chief executive of the Student Loans Company, will at the invitation of SAAS work with it to review the processes for dealing with late and incomplete applications, with a view to further improving those improvements.

**George Adam:** The cabinet secretary has outlined some of the main issues that have contributed to the backlog. Does he agree that the key steps are to continue to encourage students to apply by the guarantee date in order to ensure that their applications are processed before their course begins?

**Michael Russell:** That is absolutely crucial. Mr Adam is right to identify the guarantee date and late applications as key issues. The introduction of the guarantee date, which ensures that students' applications are processed before their course begins, is a significant improvement. More than 100,000 students have taken advantage of that innovation—as I said earlier, that number is 105,405 students. However, it is also true that in September—a matter of weeks before courses start—new applications were still arriving at SAAS at the rate of 600 to 700 a day.

The guarantee date has operated for three years. We give it wide publicity on the SAAS website, in documentation and in the 300-plus visits that the Student Awards Agency undertakes to schools and other institutions. We will go on encouraging students to get their applications in in good time. I am always happy to look at what more we can do to ensure that that takes place.

**Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab):** The issue is not just late applications. The cabinet secretary has had correspondence from one of my constituents, Mr Nick Hortin, whose son has been threatened with a review of his place on a course at the University of Reading. Mr Hortin says that his son was not a late applicant. However, as of 1 November his problem had not been solved.

Difficulties sometimes arise that must be faced. Nicola Mable, from Jedburgh, was offered a place

at Heriot-Watt University only on 5 September, but has because of delays had to give up her place. She is a single parent and could not afford the uncertainty. That is the human cost of problems that have been known about for months.

**Michael Russell:** That was not a question, Presiding Officer, but let me deal with the facts that Mr Henry raised. First, every university and college has discretionary and emergency funds, which should be accessed by any student who makes a late application or who has difficulty. Secondly, when members write to me about individuals—I do not recall Mr Henry raising those cases with me—I ensure that immediate action is taken.

The issue is always that the application form is received in time and, if it comes late, that it is complete. In the case of complex applications, further information is sometimes required.

The two key points are these: first, that discretionary and emergency funds exist; and secondly, that when members raise issues with me—or indeed, when individuals raise issues with me, as happens more often as a result of the rise of social media—matters are attended to quickly. That will always be what I require of the Student Awards Agency for Scotland and it will always be what SAAS does.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** This is not the first time we have had problems with SAAS at this time of year. Does the Government intend to ask whether, at this juncture, additional resources can be made available for the phone system, so that fewer problems arise in the first place?

**Michael Russell:** That was a helpful question from Liz Smith. I am determined to ensure that SAAS has the maximum resource available to it, within the current restrictions that exist throughout the public sector. As I said to George Adam, we are utilising overtime working and the contact centre's opening hours have been extended. In addition, the review that SAAS has requested from David Wallace of the Student Loans Company will consider issues such as Liz Smith raised.

It is important that we acknowledge that there have been difficulties in the past. I draw attention to the worst difficulty that arose in the matter of student loans, in October 1997, when there was a backlog of 40,000 applications. Then, of course, the education minister—one Brian Wilson—had to order a review.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** Surely students should not have to contact the cabinet secretary to get their awards processed. Is his message that the blame for the debacle lies with students themselves?

**Michael Russell:** As ever, Mr Findlay misrepresents what has been said. I do not know whether he does not hear it clearly or simply wants to misrepresent it.

The message is that timely application is most important, that the guarantee date helps students and that this year the Student Awards Agency for Scotland has dealt with a record number of applications in record time. Where there are difficulties, I insist that they are dealt with. Where systems can be improved, they should be improved. That is the message. I hope that it was heard clearly and that Mr Findlay will repeat it to his constituents.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I acknowledge the steps that SAAS has taken recently to deal with the backlog. However, the letter from the cabinet secretary to the convener of the Education and Culture Committee appeared to lay at the door of students the blame for late, incomplete and ineligible applications.

The cabinet secretary talked about access to discretionary and emergency funds. The National Union of Students Scotland has made the point that the problems with SAAS are such that students have been unable to access such funds. The cases that Hugh Henry mentioned appear to underscore NUS Scotland's call for an inquiry into the issue. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that he is happy to implement an inquiry? Does the support of David Wallace constitute an inquiry?

**Michael Russell:** The support of David Wallace constitutes a review, so that we can get the system working better. That is what we need to do. I am pleased that Robin Parker of NUS Scotland said that the steps that are being taken are good steps. They are good steps.

I am not blaming anyone; I am trying to ensure that the system works as well as it can do. I am trying to show the flexibility of this Government when matters are drawn to its attention, in that when people need help, they get help from this Government. I would have thought that that is something that the whole of Scotland would welcome; that is, the whole of Scotland except—as usual—members on the Labour seats.

## Flu Vaccinations

**3. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether the uptake for flu vaccinations in 2012 is on target. (S4T-00109)

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** The Scottish Government has set a target of 75 per cent for the final uptake rate for over-65s and under-65s at risk for influenza vaccination. We do not set interim targets for uptake. As in previous years, the Scottish



Government is running an extensive public information campaign throughout the flu season. The rates of uptake are closely monitored by Health Protection Scotland.

**Mary Scanlon:** I thank the minister for his reply. This year, the annual flu campaign was launched at Jags for jags at Partick Thistle by the health secretary one day earlier than last year's campaign launch, yet the vaccine uptake to week 43 is currently 8 per cent lower for over-65s and 5 per cent lower for under-65s and at-risk groups. However, what I find even more concerning is that the national health service staff uptake rate was 30 per cent last year. I appreciate that the target is 50 per cent for this year. What is being done to encourage more NHS staff to take the vaccine and what work is being done to more fully understand why we have such a low uptake generally?

**Michael Matheson:** I thank Mary Scanlon for her question. I recall the launch of the campaign at Firhill. As a Partick Thistle fan, I was jealous that the cabinet secretary got the opportunity to launch that campaign there with some of the players.

Over the past three years, uptake of the influenza vaccination in Scotland has been increasing; last year, it was over the 75 per cent level for those aged over 65. We have been making good progress in increasing the number of people who are making use of the vaccination programme.

Mary Scanlon made a specific point about uptake among NHS staff. I agree that there is a need to make sure that more of our health service workers who work with patients access the vaccination programme. We have asked all our NHS boards to ensure that they have a member of nursing staff within each hospital who will be responsible, as a champion, for encouraging colleagues to make use of the vaccination programme. We have also hosted a couple of events for those local champions to assist them in the work in their areas. We will review that in March to see what has worked and what more we can do in the coming year to increase the number of healthcare workers who make use of the vaccination programme.

**Mary Scanlon:** I appreciate the emphasis on NHS staff, particularly given that they work with vulnerable patients. However, I was surprised that there did not seem to be any information for care home staff. I feel that the population of care homes could be at risk if staff do not get the vaccination. Is anything being done in that regard?

**Michael Matheson:** It is important to recognise that at board level, we now have our local immunisation co-ordinators. Their role is to examine uptake in their board area among segment groups—whether they are carers or

people who work within the care sector—and to encourage them to make use of the immunisation programme. The co-ordinators are considering what they can provide at the local level to increase uptake of the vaccination among the various groups so that we can continue to increase the overall rate of uptake for those who are eligible for the vaccination programme.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind):** This is when the tone of the debate probably gets lower. Is the minister aware of the chat in any surgery that he cares to go into, where people will be saying to each other, "Are you in for your jag?" "No—I got the flu because I got the jag." There is a commonly held belief that people have to endure a bout of flu if they get the jag.

**Michael Matheson:** I am conscious that sometimes such rumours develop. I am informed that the vaccine is not a live vaccine and should therefore not result in a person's developing the flu. If I can use myself as a human guinea pig, I say that I had the flu vaccine last week and do not have the flu this week.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** You look well.

**Margo MacDonald:** You're no a guinea pig.

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** I am saying nothing, minister.

## Permanence and Adoption

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-04682, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on permanence and adoption. I call Aileen Campbell to speak to and move the motion.

14:25

**The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell):** This is national adoption week, and the British Association for Adoption and Fostering is running its 15th annual campaign to raise awareness of the benefits that come with adoption. Those benefits improve the life chances not only of children, but of adoptive parents. This year's theme is rule yourself in, a call to encourage people to think of themselves as possible adopters as opposed to ruling themselves out because, for example, they think that they may be too old, they live in the wrong place, they are single or they have a partner of the same sex. It is a simple campaign to get folk to realise that they can make come true the dreams of children and young people who are in need of a family who love them.

Parents are the biggest influence and the most important educators in a child's life. Children who experience a secure, loving and nurturing home environment are far better able to withstand life's challenges and achieve their full potential. Getting it right for every child means that every child deserves that environment, regardless of their circumstances. Our challenge is to achieve that for the children who, for whatever reason, cannot be looked after by their birth parents.

The Parliament has consistently and correctly put aside party politics on this agenda. Together, we have learned of the importance of the early years, of secure attachments and of play and touch. We have also learned the value of strong and plentiful relationships in developing the self-control, risk awareness and resilience to cope with setbacks that we all need to help us through life. This time a year ago, the then minister, Angela Constance, told Parliament about the Government's commitment to improve the timescales and quality of decision making for children who are looked after by local authorities. The report on care and permanence planning by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration focused minds when it revealed that the longest that it took for a child to be placed with an adoptive family was 10 years and 10 months—an unacceptable figure, but at the extreme end of the scale.

In response, we stated our intention to do what we could to shorten the length of time that it takes

to find a permanent home for a child. We said that we would do that in partnership with the looked-after children strategic implementation group—LACSIG—and other partner organisations through a shift in care planning towards fewer placements for children, an early permanence decision for every child and a system that puts the child at the centre of service design and delivery. It was clear to us that that is a long-term ambition that we need to get right, which means ensuring that the pace of change is correct to avoid driving forward a change process that unintentionally creates dangerous consequences for our most vulnerable children and young people.

Today's debate allows me to outline the distance travelled since last year's national adoption week in the Government's activity and allows the Parliament to do our bit to raise awareness of adoption. Last year, LACSIG hit the ground running by identifying the need for better planning and decision making for children in care. Through its care planning hub, LACSIG co-ordinates the activities that are detailed in the Scottish Government's care and permanence plan, which was published in 2011, all of which are designed to support the agencies that are responsible for care planning. The care and permanence plan seeks to build a system that is proactive, identifying and responding to the needs of children as early in their lives as possible. It is a system in which multiple agencies work together to support and sustain placements, reduce disruption and keep placement moves to a minimum.

Many other organisations and professionals are involved in making timely and considered placements for children—it is not just the domain of social workers. We rely on the children's hearings system and panel members, lawyers and sheriffs, court officers, health professionals and the many voluntary organisations that work with children. Therefore, to bring about the improvements that we all want to see, a range of approaches will be required and we will need everyone who is involved in the system to commit to that change.

I will outline the progress that has been made so far on care and permanence planning. The Scottish Government-funded centre of excellence for looked-after children in Scotland is now just over a year old. CELSIS has a dedicated care and permanence team and is staffed by a range of experienced professionals from the social work, research and legal sectors. Their job is simple: they work closely with the individual local authorities and their partners to make improvements to the local decision-making systems. The team is focused on practical, on-the-ground change, trouble-shooting when things go wrong and, more important, supporting

comprehensive redesign of the care system one area at a time. With all that we know about what works with regard to early intervention, concurrent planning and the need for speedy decisions, the team is uniquely placed to offer the sort of intensive, system-wide support that is needed to bring all that together and to help transform the care experience of every child.

I am pleased to report that the team is already in place and that it is working with seven local authorities on a range of specific improvement projects. For example, the team has successfully engaged with a local authority on managing contact. In addition, the team has concentrated its efforts on working with professionals such as social workers and their managers, panel members and so on through focus groups.

So that others can benefit from what is learned during each project, the team holds regular regional permanence events for practitioners and leaders. Six events have already been held to allow professionals from different regions to meet and to help us to focus efforts on what will really make a difference. We have listened carefully to the valuable and often candid feedback from those events, and it is helping us to shape what we and the permanence team do next. The team has identified good examples of best practice, which it intends to highlight and promote in practice exchange events.

In addition, children's panel members, social workers, lawyers and voluntary organisation workers have told us what the guiding principles should be for policy and practice concerning our looked-after children. Collectively, we should have much more ambition for our looked-after children, and should always strive for permanence for older children and those who have disabilities, are in sibling groups or are from minority ethnic communities. We should intervene in a child's life at the right and earliest point, and should ensure that what is offered to them is the best support that they can get to enable them to stay in their family when and if that is possible. We need to work hard to provide the right support for practitioners to help them to make what are often extremely difficult decisions confidently. We must work to create a shared understanding of what putting a child at the centre of service design and delivery means for social workers, panel members and the judiciary.

Perhaps the most consistent and overriding request is for strong leadership at all levels of public life and across the wider corporate family. Since coming to my current post nearly a year ago, I have taken my responsibility as a corporate parent very seriously. In this chamber, we are all corporate parents and have an opportunity, not least in today's debate, to provide national leadership from Scotland's Parliament to ensure

that we do things better for our looked-after children. I hope that members from across the chamber will engage with the corporate parenting training that is available next week.

If we are to achieve our ambition to make Scotland the best place in the world for a child to grow up, our children must feel loved and special in order to have a sense of trust and confidence in themselves. We know that secure attachments are necessary for a child to thrive, and that a child with secure attachments will do better at school and is likely to be good at making friends, forming relationships later in life and coping with life's events. That is an essential component of our work on the early years. One of the biggest risks to the wellbeing of any child, especially our most vulnerable children, is the impact of insecure attachments. After all, a poorly attached child becomes a poorly attached adult, whose footprint on public services throughout their life will be large and expensive.

It is timely that CELCIS, having been commissioned by LACSIG, will shortly publish Scotland's first comprehensive study into how attachment theory is taught and used in practice to assess and plan the care of looked-after children. We intend that to have a direct impact on practice across Scotland, by sharing the lessons of projects such as the Jeely Piece Club in Castlemilk, Change is a Must in Perth and Kinross, and Seamab School in Kinross-shire. We need to be in a position in which every teacher, social worker and health professional understands attachment.

Another part of our ambitious plan was the launch of Scotland's first national adoption register. We did that during adoption week last year in partnership with the British Association for Adoption and Fostering. The register provides opportunities for children to be matched with families from across Scotland rather than just with families in their local area. So far, 19 local authorities and all four voluntary adoption agencies are referring children and approved adopters to the register. Ideally, referrals are being made no more than three months after a child's plan for adoption has been agreed.

Over the short life of the register so far, 135 children and 139 families have been referred to the linking service. Currently, we have 82 children who have been linked to 47 families. Fourteen children have already been matched for adoption by the register. That is 14 more than would otherwise have found a safe, stable, nurturing and permanent home. While that is a modest start, the register is nevertheless becoming an important tool to achieve early permanence for those who are referred to it.

I would like all local authorities to use the register. The children and young people bill proposes that agencies are required to make referrals for any child who is not found a home after three months. However, there is a need to do more to ensure that the approved families and children on the register are a match for each other. It is important to consider that children who are referred to the linking service find it much more difficult to find a family by virtue of their age, medical needs or developmental uncertainty, and some need to be placed with their siblings. Those issues all present challenges to the chances of a child finding a permanent home. That is why the work of the register has been expanded to help manage the expectations of prospective adopters and help them see the real child who can benefit from adoption.

I look forward to meeting tomorrow some of the 75 families who attended Scotland's first two national adoption exchange days, which BAAF organised. The exchange days are events at which prospective adopters are invited to come along and learn more about the children in their areas who could be adopted. I understand that the events have been a real eye-opener for those taking part, who have valued the opportunity to speak directly to social workers and foster carers who know the children well. I also understand that more such events will be held.

However, the register can do only so much, and it can support only families who have already been approved to adopt. If we are going to provide secure homes for more children, we badly need to find more adopters. The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 introduced more opportunities to adopt, particularly for single people and same-sex couples, but we are not seeing significantly more people coming forward.

A key aim is to spread the word to those people who may not see themselves as prospective adopters and encourage them to rule themselves in. The main criterion for people to adopt in Scotland is the ability to provide a safe, loving and nurturing home in which a child can flourish and maximise their future life chances. I urge anyone who can offer such a home to contact their local authority or local voluntary adoption agency this week, and I urge all members in the chamber to do what we can to spread the message across our constituencies.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Does the member accept that, along with the need to encourage new people to see themselves as potential adopters, there is a need to ensure that we rectify some of the problems in the system that are discouraging those who have already put themselves forward either to adopt or to foster and encourage them to remain in that position,

although they have been through experiences that just turn them off the whole process?

**Aileen Campbell:** I take on board entirely Liam McArthur's point, but in that regard it was interesting to listen to a call-in programme in which people expressed the realisation that they had to remind themselves that some of the questions and processes are designed to put the child at the heart of the decision and to ensure that a family is correct, in order for the child to have a safe and nurturing home. I understand Liam McArthur's point, but we need to balance that view with the need to ensure that the child is at the centre of the policies and processes that we put in place.

As part of what we outlined in the debate last year, we asked local authorities to submit their adoption service plans earlier this year. The plans outline how adoption services are planned and delivered, and should evidence that every authority has a clear plan to raise the number of young people afforded permanence or adoption. Two themes emerged: that adoption activity has increased over the past few years and a number of local authorities are taking steps to improve permanence planning; and that Scotland as a whole could recruit more adoptive parents.

A number of research studies have found that personal qualities such as emotional resilience and positive, realistic motivation are more likely to predict successful adoptive parenting than age or family structure. Despite that, many authorities have maintained age-based criteria, with the upper age limit for adopters of young children ranging between 40 and 45. We also discovered divergences in the way in which plans were prepared. I will work to find the best and most constructive way in which to work with local authorities around achieving consistency, while respecting local decision making and looking at delivery and improvement. Some authorities are doing better than others, and I want to ensure that we learn from the best and support those authorities that need a bit of assistance.

As I have said, each and every member in the chamber is a corporate parent to more than 16,000 children and young people who are looked after by local authorities. Through no fault of their own, they find themselves in a position whereby their birth family could not care for them unsupported. They are Scotland's most vulnerable children and they are the responsibility of all of us. We should care for those children and have the same expectations for them as if they were our own. I have had the pleasure of meeting many looked-after children and young people, who are inspirational, resilient and articulate. We should all be proud of them and what they can offer to our country. It is up to us to ensure that they can always realise that potential.

I am confident about the work that we are doing to implement this agenda. It is moving in the right direction. I also have confidence in the work of LACSIG and CELCIS, which will be enhanced by other areas of activity across Government to help children and young people in Scotland. We recently launched the national parenting strategy and we finished our consultation on the children and young people bill.

We accept that there is much to do and more to achieve, but it is right to celebrate the 15 years for which BAAF has been working to highlight adoption, and to recognise the importance of adoptive parents and potential adoptive parents in realising positive outcomes for children in Scotland who need our care and support.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that this is National Adoption Week; congratulates the work of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering in raising awareness of adoption via its campaign, Rule Yourself In; acknowledges that there is an increase in the number of children being adopted, including those from care; welcomes the Scottish Government's recently launched Parenting Strategy, which includes commitments to all of Scotland's parents, including corporate parents, as well as the proposals contained in the Rights of Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, and agrees that the work to support a collaborative multi-agency approach to improving the quality of decisions in respect of permanence planning should continue.

**The Presiding Officer:** We have a wee bit of time in hand, so members who take interventions will be compensated for the time.

14:40

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the debate on adoption and permanence. It is appropriate to be having such a debate during national adoption week.

It is vital for us to use this opportunity to discuss how we can improve the adoption process, improve the support that we give to our most vulnerable children, and improve the support that we give to adoptive parents. We must look at ways of encouraging people to become adoptive parents, of sharing good practice, and of supporting social workers, adoption panel members, children's hearings panel members and others and the important work that they do.

As corporate parents, we all need to work together towards those aims and objectives. I hope and anticipate that today's debate will be consensual and constructive, and I should say at the start that we support the Government's motion. Our amendment is proposed as a constructive suggestion. We need to work together, because we know that the scale of the challenge that faces us is stark. As the minister has just said, there are

16,000 looked-after children in Scotland at the moment, and that figure has increased every year since 2001. It is at its highest level since 1981.

We know that, between 2010 and 2011, there was a 2 per cent increase in the number of children who were on child protection registers. The number of children who are in residential care has remained fairly static during recent years, but an increasing number of children have been looked after in community settings by foster carers, prospective adoptive parents and kinship carers. There is therefore a growing need to increase the number of parents who are willing to adopt, to increase the number of foster carers, and to improve the adoption process.

We know that children thrive in stable and supportive environments, and that permanence gives children long-term stability. As the minister said, our policies must be child centred and must put children's needs first. I therefore join the minister in paying tribute to the British Association for Adoption and Fostering for its work in raising awareness of adoption and for its national adoption week, which is in its 15th year, as well as the rule yourself in campaign. I am pleased to see that a host of events and activities will take place across the United Kingdom to raise awareness of the rewards and challenges of adoption.

I was pleased to see that a number of events will happen in Scotland, including talk to us about adoption drop-in sessions, one of which will take place at the St Enoch shopping centre in Glasgow on Thursday. I am also pleased that Barnardo's Scotland is hosting adoption information evenings in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen. That type of event is an ideal opportunity for people to meet Barnardo's staff and find out a bit more about what adopting with Barnardo's is like. I hope and anticipate that those information sessions will be well attended.

I was also pleased to see that the campaign is using social media as a means of raising awareness and interacting with those who might be interested in adopting. The national adoption week website encourages people to participate in the discussion by joining BAAF's chief executive David Holmes on Wednesday from 7pm to 8pm for a twitter question and answer session on adoption.

Such positive work should be welcomed, because we need to encourage more people to consider becoming adoptive parents and foster carers. I am sure that we have all had contact with parents who have adopted children; I know a number who have done just that. I am sure that, like many others, they were frustrated at the processes that they had to go through and how long they took, but they are now delighted to be supporting a child in a loving environment.

**Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP):** How long does the member think it should take to adopt? It took me six years.

**Neil Bibby:** Six years is clearly a very long time. Becoming a foster carer or adoptive parent is not easy, and nor should it be. Candidates need to go through long and rigorous assessments and sets of checks to ensure that children will be safe and nurtured. We want to ensure that the appropriate checks are in place, of course, but permanency needs to be established sooner rather than later. Lengthy delays in decision making and establishing permanency are frustrating for adoptive parents, and they can be damaging and confusing for children. We know that preventing such delays is easier said than done, as adoption plans can be contested and sometimes there can be challenges in placing children until the final order is made, but we must listen to what parents and people who work on the front line say about how we can address such issues.

The minister mentioned the children and young people bill. I welcome the move to ensure that carers receive appropriate recognised training, but we caution the Government that any training should be at an appropriate level. Similarly, we welcome the move to limit the number of children whom any foster carer can care for at one time, but we cannot be so rigid in the application of the regulation that children from multisibling families need to be split up for no other reason than that the family exceeds the regulatory number. The wellbeing of children must always be our prime concern.

The Scottish Government's plans to enshrine the getting it right for every child approach in legislation with the children and young people bill and to have a named person for each child are also welcome, as is the seeking to improve information sharing and planning in relation to individual children. That will help with the early intervention that is needed.

Early intervention is crucial. We know that, in July 2011, there were 80 unborn children on child protection registers. Previously, some local authorities did not place unborn children on child protection registers—they did not place children on those registers until they were born. The revised national guidance states that unborn children should be placed on child protection registers if that is required. That is a welcome step, and it is to be hoped that it will lead to children being placed in permanent care more quickly.

Early intervention is also crucial because we know that identifying adoptive parents for older children is a major challenge. It can be difficult to find adoptive parents for boys over the age of five and for girls over the age of eight. It is also difficult

to find adoptive parents for children with special needs, who will often be the most damaged from their life experiences.

It should not be forgotten that parents will often require on-going support even after a child has been adopted or fostered. There are good examples of such care. Barnardo's provides a post-adoption support service, and I know that a number of adoptive parents and foster carers have found that service to be very useful. Therefore, we welcome the Government's commitment in its national parenting strategy to developing good practice in providing support to adoptive parents before and after a child is placed with them.

Sharing good practice is key—the minister mentioned that—and that is one of the major themes in the helpful briefing that Barnardo's Scotland provided for the debate. Barnardo's Scotland has made a number of important points and suggestions. It has raised concerns about inconsistency in the evidence that local authorities gather in the decision-making process, and it believes that local authorities and the Scottish Government must collect more robust data on the process, including data on the times that are taken to place children and the reasons for delays. It has pointed out concerns that no aggregated data or evidence is routinely collected that could help to identify areas of good practice.

I know that the minister will carefully consider the points that Barnardo's has made, as I am sure that we all appreciate that data collection is crucial to understanding the problems and helping to improve outcomes. Sharing good practice is also important, because the recruitment of prospective adoptive parents is not always uniformly positive across Scotland. Some authorities struggle to identify potential parents.

Barnardo's Scotland made an important point about support for social workers. As a son of two retired social workers, I should probably declare an interest here, but there is no doubt that social workers are caring and dedicated professionals who do an important job in often challenging circumstances. Resources are important in this debate, and it is concerning to hear of social workers with increasing case loads and of their concerns about the pressures that that places on them in trying to meet the needs of children and families. We must aim to ensure that social workers are adequately supported and properly resourced and, along with thanking adoption panel and children's hearings panel members for all their hard work, we should thank social workers for all the work that they do all year round, which often goes unrecognised.

The problems of looked-after children and the adoption process have been with us for many generations. Solving those problems will not be

easy, but we must do whatever we can because we know that, if we can give children a stable, loving and supportive environment, they will thrive and flourish. We must do what we can to ensure that children get the best possible start in life in a stable and supportive environment, to share good practice and to support adoptive parents and people working on the front line. As corporate parents, we must do all that we can to help Scotland's most vulnerable children.

I move amendment S4M-04682.1, to insert at end:

"further notes the publication of the consultation responses to the Bill and agrees to give them full consideration as it progresses, and believes that more robust data collection at a national level and adequate support for social workers is critical to ensuring success."

14:51

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Like Neil Bibby, I, too, welcome this debate and this year's national adoption week. It is absolutely right that we join others in attempting to raise awareness of the benefits of adoption both for children and, as Neil Bibby suggested, for adoptive parents too. This year's theme—rule yourself in—is very appropriate, given how often people simply do not see themselves in that role.

I welcome the chance to discuss further the complex issue of improving Scotland's care and adoption services as, regrettably, too many of Scotland's most vulnerable young people are still being denied the best start in life. While the Government's motion is perhaps a little light in acknowledging those difficulties, I am grateful to the minister for bringing forward this debate and I will be happy to support her motion later this afternoon.

As the minister acknowledged, the issue enjoys cross-party support and I think that the Parliament has had a reasonably good track record on covering it over recent times. Earlier this year, the Education and Culture Committee reported on its findings following an inquiry into the educational attainment of looked-after children. Unsurprisingly, the need to improve the process of fostering and adoption in Scotland came out strongly during that inquiry, not least as it is a critical factor in increasing permanency for some of our most vulnerable children and young people.

On the back of that inquiry, and given the concerns that were raised with us by a wide range of different organisations involved in the sector, the committee identified a clear need to look more specifically at the decision making around whether children should be taken into care. That inquiry is under way, and I think that it is absolutely right that our committee has made it a priority to ensure that the voices and views of those who are directly

affected—looked-after children, who have been through, or are going through, these processes and those with experience of adoption—are heard loud and clear.

I am grateful for all the insightful contributions that have been made to the committee's work so far, but what is clear from those—and, indeed, from all the evidence over recent years—is that we are collectively continuing to fail in our corporate parenting responsibilities. Attainment levels for looked-after children, particularly those who are looked after at home, remain far too low. It is clear that the problems start at the earliest age, often prior to birth, as Neil Bibby acknowledged. Children 1st points to the years zero to three as critical in terms of "good attachments" and child development. The NSPCC appears to agree:

"Attachment and permanence in the early years provides a secure and protective foundation from which a child can grow and develop".

That demonstrates that poor outcomes are not inevitable.

Plenty of things can be, and are being, done across Scotland. I join the minister and Neil Bibby in putting on record my gratitude and admiration for all the good work that is being done by many individuals, agencies and organisations. Many of the issues and situations with which they are confronted day and daily are unimaginably difficult and sensitive, but those are made no easier—and too often are made worse—by the structures within which they are forced to operate.

My amendment, which I am happy to move, picks up on the points made by Barnardo's Scotland in its briefing paper. Barnardo's believes that

"Far too many looked after children are waiting too long ... enduring multiple short-term placements"

and developing complex needs as a result. All the evidence shows that permanence is critical to a child's sense of wellbeing and security and, in turn, to their life chances.

Last year's SCRA report highlighted the many delays that still occur in the system, from the process of identifying children at risk right through to the point of adoption or another permanent solution. That has an impact on the children, as I know from experience of cases in Orkney, but it also has an impact on the willingness of those who have come forward to foster or adopt to remain with the process in good faith.

I certainly do not suggest that decisions in the area are ever easy or straightforward. The decision to remove a child from their parents' care will never be taken lightly. However, when it is clear that delays in obtaining a permanent home are deeply damaging for a child, and when

research suggests that delays actually reduce the chances of permanence ever being achieved, it seems that the correct balance is still not being struck.

Barnardo's suggests a number of developments to improve decisions on permanency and adoption, including the establishment of a national risk assessment framework to aid decision making in all local authority areas and to increase consistency across Scotland. There is still a great deal of inconsistency regarding how and what evidence is gathered to aid decision making. Barnardo's emphasises the need to ensure that decisions are clear and are based on objective evidence and that all evidence that is gathered is used to inform the process. I am certainly no fan of a one-size-fits-all approach, but I recognise that improved data collection on things such as the time taken to place children and the reasons for delay could help to identify areas of good or bad practice.

Sadly, it is felt that, all too often, a lack of resources plays a key part in decision making, which means that more expensive options are used only as a last resort. However, the minister was absolutely right to argue that the long-term costs to the individual child and to the wider community of leaving a child in a chaotic and damaging environment far outweigh the cost of that early intervention. That is another area in which the Government must ensure that the widespread consensus on the importance of early intervention translates into sufficient resources and action.

That said, I acknowledge that important developments have taken place recently. I welcome the new parenting strategy and the progress towards introducing the children and young people bill. In particular, I welcome the plans to recognise the role of kinship carers and the efforts to increase the use of Scotland's adoption register, although there have been concerns about the confidentiality of information and about which body has responsibility for that at the various stages.

Scottish Liberal Democrats have welcomed the proposal that the bill will increase entitlement to pre-school education. I pay tribute to the minister for extending entitlement to looked-after two-year-olds, as I believe that early education has a vital role in tackling the attainment gap that persists in Scotland and which is responsible for the continuing cycle of poverty in too many communities. A child's development at 22 months can serve as an accurate predictor of educational outcomes at 26 years. Just last week, *Save the Children* published new research showing that children who grow up in poverty start primary

school with development levels that are far behind those of their more affluent peers.

That is why Scottish Liberal Democrats wish to work with the Scottish ministers to extend the pre-school provision to more vulnerable two-year-olds. The UK Government is extending free early education to 40 per cent of two-year-olds, with a focus on children from poorer backgrounds. There is certainly cross-party consensus that the same approach should be taken in Scotland. I urge the minister to support those efforts so that two-year-olds in Scotland are not left behind their counterparts south of the border.

I congratulate the Government on introducing this debate on an issue on which it is widely acknowledged that we still need to up our game. I look forward to the Education and Culture Committee contributing to delivering those improvements, which I hope can be the lasting legacy of this adoption week.

I move amendment S4M-04682.2, to insert after "from care":

" , but recognises the damage that multiple placements can have and the need to secure permanency quickly and at an early age".

14:58

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):** I am delighted to take part in this debate on permanence and adoption during national adoption week, and to commend the work of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering to raise awareness of adoption and to encourage more people to consider becoming adoptive parents.

My husband and I became adoptive parents more than 40 years ago, at a time when early adoption was fairly common in a society that frowned on illegitimacy and did not encourage single parenting. We were desperately keen to become parents and approached adoption somewhat selfishly, I suppose, seeking the babies that nature did not allow us to produce ourselves. We were so fortunate because both of our children came into our lives as tiny babies, just weeks old. They went straight from the maternity hospital into foster care and were placed with us as soon as possible after the adoption papers were signed by their birth mothers, at about six weeks. After a probationary period of about three months, our children became legally ours before they were six months old.

We have never ever doubted that we made the right decision. Our lives were transformed and we are eternally grateful to the birth parents who were brave enough to accept that adoption could give their babies a better start in life than they could offer at that time.



I am sure that we are not perfect parents—I doubt that such a thing exists—but we have given our children love, security and the stability and discipline required for them to achieve their potential. I am delighted to say that they are now well-balanced, happy and successful adults who are secure in the knowledge that we are still there to give help and advice when they want it, and that we can depend on them when we need their help.

**Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** I am delighted to hear Nanette Milne's story, which I had not appreciated before. She has just made an important point about discipline, which we parents know our children need. I wonder whether one of the problems of the corporate parent is that it is incredibly difficult for somebody other than a natural or adoptive parent to provide the necessary level of loving discipline, which is incredibly difficult to work out.

**Nanette Milne:** That is a good point, with which I agree. Every child needs to know its limitations, as well as what is right and wrong.

Our children grew up in the knowledge that they were adopted. Both had two or three classmates who were in the same position because, at that time, there were more than 2,000 adoptions in Scotland every year. That contrasts with the position two years ago, when more than 15,000 young people were in care and there were fewer than 500 adoptions—an adoption rate of only 2.9 per cent.

The change in society between the 1970s and today happened quickly and dramatically as it became the norm for single mums to keep their babies, as more and more marriages ended in divorce and as a much freer lifestyle led to substance and alcohol abuse among young people, many of whom found themselves unemployed and unable to give their offspring the safe, secure and stable environment that they needed to thrive.

I was a medical adviser to Voluntary Services Aberdeen in the early 1980s. By then, the few children whom we were placing for adoption were older. Some were physically damaged by their early life experience and most were psychologically damaged by it. The situation has grown worse. The numbers of looked-after children now overwhelm the resources of many of the councils that are responsible for them. Only a small number of those children are adopted. Last year, only 273 of them were living with prospective adopters—a figure that has changed little over 10 years.

Since 2005, permanence orders have been available as an alternative to adoption, enabling stable long-term placements by giving the local authority the right to determine where a child will

live until the age of 16, while the parents retain other parental rights and responsibilities, which they share with the local authority. However, as Barnardo's Scotland says in its briefing for the debate,

“far too many children are waiting too long for a decision on their future, and endure multiple short term placements, developing complex needs as a result”.

Barnardo's has a wish list of developments that it considers would improve decision making on permanence and adoption. To me, they seem worthy aspirations and worthy of repetition, even though Neil Bibby and Liam McArthur have already mentioned them. They include a national risk assessment framework for decision making, to be used by local authorities that are considering removing a child from home, which would ensure consistency throughout Scotland. Decisions to remove a child should be evidence based, which is not always the case at present.

Barnardo's also stresses the need to collect more robust data on the decision-making process. That should include the time that it has taken to place a child and the reasons for delay when any occurs. It seems strange that such data is not routinely collected when it could be used to identify good and bad practice.

Most worryingly, Barnardo's believes that resources—rather than the best interests of the child—too often influence council decisions. Children may be left in chaotic and damaging home conditions because removing them, particularly into residential care, is seen as too expensive even though, in the long run, not removing them will cost the public purse more and is likely to leave the children irrevocably damaged.

None of us would disagree that the focus must be on the child's wellbeing and what he or she needs to thrive and reach adulthood having achieved maximum potential in physical, educational and emotional ability. Early intervention and planning, with clearly stated timescales for moving towards permanence, are crucial to the child's likelihood of reaching that maximum potential. It has been shown time and again that, the younger the child when removed from an unsatisfactory home environment, the greater the chance that they will do well in later life. I welcome the Government's commitment to multi-agency planning in pursuit of that aim.

Unfortunately, there are not enough foster carers to cope with the number of children who would benefit from living with a foster family, nor are there yet enough potential adopters to give those children the permanence that they need and deserve. I hope that the national adoption register will move that forward, given the promising initial results.

If the decision is made not to remove a child from the family setting, or if a child is returned home after a temporary removal, there is currently not enough family support available at the times when it is most needed, such as at weekends or during out-of-office hours. Social workers do their best, but they are overworked with case loads that make it difficult for them to give proper support to families and children who are entrusted to their care.

Local and central Government need to ensure that there is adequate resourcing of social work services for young people, because proper care at that time is likely to pay huge dividends as those children grow up in terms of their wellbeing and future contribution to society.

Unfortunately, the number of children who become looked after has risen dramatically in the past two decades, and far too small a proportion of those children go on to become adopted. A culture shift towards giving more permanence to looked-after children and towards encouraging adoption is now beginning to happen, and I hope that the Scottish Government's recently launched parenting strategy, together with the forthcoming rights of children and young people bill, will result in many more children being able to grow up in the safe, secure, loving and stable environment that they deserve and to which they are entitled.

This debate is likely to be fairly consensual, and in that spirit Scottish Conservatives will be happy to support the Government's motion and the Labour and Liberal Democrat amendments.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** We come to the open debate. Speeches should be of six minutes, but there is a little time at this point in the debate for interventions.

15:06

**Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP):** In the past year and a half, the Education and Culture Committee has undertaken a considerable amount of work on issues such as kinship care, the early years and, in particular, the educational attainment of looked-after children.

During our in-depth inquiry on the latter subject—as Liam McArthur mentioned—it was apparent that children who are categorised as looked after at home have the poorest educational outcomes, while the exam results of those who are looked after away from the parental home are approximately 10 times better. That is testament to the good work that is done by all those who work with those children. Decisions that are made early on in a child's life greatly affect outcomes, and it is therefore imperative that those decisions are the right ones.

As a result of our inquiry, the committee agreed to focus a new inquiry on the decision-making processes that are involved in determining whether a child should be removed from the family home and taken into care, and—crucially—on identifying whether those processes are delivering the best outcomes for children and their families.

As part of the inquiry launch, I met a group of foster carers at Barnardo's fostering and adoption service in Edinburgh. It was important that we began our inquiry as we intended to continue, by meeting not only people who know about the decision-making process but those who have direct experience of the results that it produces.

I will use the opportunity of today's debate to cover some of the early—and, I believe, relevant—issues that are emerging from the evidence that we have already received, which points to inconsistencies in decision making, decision makers placing too great an emphasis on the cost of care, and delays in the system.

The committee is determined that the inquiry will hear from real people with direct experience of decision making on whether to take children into care, including foster carers, parents, social workers, staff in residential homes, children with experience of care, members of child protection committees and others.

We have already received a large number of written submissions in response to our call for evidence. Many complex issues are discussed in the submissions, and some of the evidence identifies existing barriers to good-quality early decision making.

It is clear from the submissions that there is a degree of inconsistency in decision making throughout the country and that thresholds for intervention vary among the professions and local authorities. We are told that there are shared common values, but not common standards of training, knowledge and practice. That may be particularly true in the area of neglect, perhaps partly because it is such a difficult thing to prove.

A related issue may be the difficulty that local authorities have in retaining competent, experienced and qualified staff in front-line childcare practice. There is, we are told, a clear lack of professional or financial advantage for social workers to remain in the field.

Invariably, as with everything else, a common theme in the evidence that we have received so far is resources. Many submissions have drawn the committee's attention to the impact on decision making of the availability of placements and the cost of removal. I am sure that many people do not think of me as naive, and I do not want to sound naive, but—to be frank—why are the costs of taking a child into care a barrier? Is the focus

too much on pounds as opposed to the bigger picture?

Curiously, none of the written evidence has provided any estimate of how much is spent on the overall child protection system, and to date we have not been able to ascertain whether current spend is adequate and providing value for money.

There are areas that the committee will consider further, particularly in light of the Scottish Government's preventative spending agenda. I am clear that difficult decisions should be made in the best interests of the child and not because of a lack of resources. I know that that view is shared across the chamber, despite the difficulties that the point produces.

Another barrier that has been highlighted to the committee, and one that I suspect resonates with many people, is about the speed of decision making and the length of time that it can take for final decisions to be reached for a looked-after child. The reasons that are given for delays are numerous and, I am sure, perfectly legitimate in many cases. They include an overly optimistic approach taken by some professionals and children's hearings towards reuniting children with their birth parents, decisions being made based on pressure from parents in preference to reports from professionals that recommend removal from the parental home, and general tensions between the rights of the parents and the rights of the child throughout the decision-making processes.

I am acutely aware that those are complex issues and that overly simplistic solutions will not suffice. Nevertheless there is clear evidence that many consider that it is currently taking too long for children to reach permanence. We have already identified some of the reasons for that.

Those are some of the main barriers that have been highlighted to the committee so far, and I expect others to be highlighted as the inquiry progresses. However, it is gratifying that, although barriers to progress were identified, we have so far received no evidence that suggests that the system is broken, even if improvement is required. That is encouraging and it shows that, although there are challenges to improve the system to ensure that it delivers in the interests of children, there is a willingness to look critically at how to improve outcomes.

The challenge for the Education and Culture Committee, MSPs, Government and all decision makers is to remain positive and constructive and to strive to improve the system.

Full implementation of getting it right for every child has been mentioned time and again as being key to improving the decision-making process in the question of whether to take a child into care. Of course, the Scottish Government has

announced that it is looking to legislate on the GIRFEC approach.

I believe that the committee's inquiry is, therefore, timely. It will shine a light on how decisions are made, whether they differ across the country and between agencies, and the extent to which resource constraints form part of the decision-making process. It will take place immediately prior to the Government introducing a bill that will touch on those issues. In my view, that allows for better scrutiny, which potentially means better legislation.

I hope that, down the line, the work of the Education and Culture Committee, the policies that are being pursued by the Government and the combined effort of local authorities, professionals, foster carers and adopters leads to more informed and clearer decision making and—what we ultimately all want to achieve—better outcomes for some of our most vulnerable children.

15:12

**Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the creation and inception of national adoption week, an important week in the calendar for Scotland.

At one time, an education department in the central belt of Scotland had a tight line that said, "Every child is special." The speeches that we have heard today reflect the true understanding of the fact that every child deserves to be treated as special and is entitled to receive love and support, to feel secure in their environment and to know that there are adults around who will support and help them to be all that they can be in this life. If there were no other reasons to justify the Government placing a priority on adoption and fostering, that fact would be sufficient in itself.

For those who need additional, worldly reasons, however, I point out that just under two years ago Audit Scotland reported that £250 million is spent annually on local authority residential care for our children. It acknowledged that the service that is received is not always of the best quality and that it is difficult to demonstrate that value is achieved from that spend. It was a shock to realise that the yearly cost to the public purse per child is £150,000.

Although there are no statistics for Scotland—as others have said, we need to remedy that—statistics for elsewhere in the UK suggest that children who come from a care background are 13 times more likely to end up in our prison population and that 27 per cent of prisoners who are currently in custody in England come from a care background, as do half of all prisoners who are under 25.

Those statistics are shocking in themselves and there is no doubt that children should not have to go through the experience of care and end up with that result. It is a failure on our behalf; it is a failure on society's behalf. The efforts of the Government and those engaged with national adoption week are therefore to be applauded.

Much has been said about the considerable bureaucracy that delays children being taken into care and on to some kind of permanent arrangement. There is no doubt that those bureaucratic processes need to be revisited. The example that Richard Lyle gave of waiting six years to offer a stable home environment to a person who requires that support is in itself shocking and needs to be dealt with.

I cannot let today go by without acknowledging the McKenzie family, a South Lanarkshire family who offered themselves as foster parents. They desired a baby or toddler, but eventually a troubled teenager was given into their care. Unfortunately, that teenager eventually assaulted the mother of the house, who died as a result.

I highlight that case not to cause any caution among those in the chamber in taking this issue forward, but for two reasons. First, it is important that we take due consideration of the kinds of threats and challenges that we face in dealing with troubled children. Secondly, delaying the removal of a child from a difficult background results in a troubled young adolescent who someone somewhere has to manage. A delay of 10 years, as mentioned previously, only contributes to those difficulties.

Much has already been said about the more than 16,000 children currently in our care. Some 2 per cent of those are under a year old, 19 per cent are under four years old, 37 per cent are between five and 11 years old, and 42 per cent are over 12 years of age. Yet, although we have more than 16,000 children, adoption is still maintained at a relatively low number. Those children cry out for a stable background, support and some kind of direction in their lives. The points that Nanette Milne made and Nigel Don reinforced described the kind of life raft that those children require—and require urgently. It is beholden on us to find a way through the morass that keeps those in need from the circumstances that can support them.

National adoption week is important, because it focuses on and raises awareness of the needs of children and the requirement for more adults in our society to come forward. I encourage the minister to achieve robust data to oversee the decision-making process, not only to move children on quickly but to ensure that the adults who come forward and offer their services have the right risk assessment done for the kind of relationship that they are entering into and get the support that they

need to deal with children who have come from challenging, difficult and sometimes damaged backgrounds.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please come to a conclusion.

**Graeme Pearson:** I support the Government's motion and Neil Bibby's amendment, and I look forward to hearing more contributions from others in the chamber.

15:19

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** I also welcome this important debate in Parliament during national adoption week. I commend the minister for her comments that encouraged as many people as possible to rule themselves in as potential adopters.

We owe it to the young people who are waiting for a loving home to address some of the myths about adoption. It is worth repeating that being on a low income, unemployed, older or single does not rule someone out as a potential adopter.

I was concerned by the minister's comment that information that the Scottish Government received from local authorities revealed that some authorities are still putting an age cap on potential adopters. Given that so many professional women are having babies naturally from the age of 40 onwards, it seems unfair and illogical to rule out people aged 40 and above as potential adopters. I am pleased that the minister recognises that and plans to take action on the matter.

It is worth saying that, although a successful adoption might be the ideal solution for some children, it is important to get the right placement for the child, as the example given by Graeme Pearson illustrates. We cannot rush the process, as that might lead to more damage being done. The interests of the child must be paramount.

These are difficult issues. I commend the excellent speech by my colleague Stewart Maxwell, the convener of the Education and Culture Committee, in which he outlined some of the evidence that has already come in for our forthcoming inquiry into the best time to intervene. How do we get the balance right between supporting parents in difficulty and realising early enough that no amount of family support can turn things round for a particular child in a troubled family?

We know that, for children who require a placement outside the family, it takes too long to establish permanence. It has already been mentioned that in March last year the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration published a report on care and permanence planning for looked-after children, which found that for most

children it took more than two years from the first involvement of services to adoption or a permanence order. The shortest time for achieving permanence was 12 and a half months and, as has been said a number of times, the longest time was a staggering 10 years and 10 months, which is completely unacceptable, particularly given that all of the 100 children studied for the report were under four years old and that 44 per cent were assessed as being at risk either before or at birth. That is all very worrying, but I am pleased that the minister recognises the concern and is taking forward actions to address the issue.

The Scottish Government's response to the SCRA report was ambitious and robust. As the minister said, the Government established the centre for excellence for looked-after children in Scotland—CELCIS. I welcome the fact that the centre has established a permanence team to look at how decisions can be reached more quickly.

I note concerns expressed in the briefing from Barnardo's that decision making by local authorities is inconsistent and often based on poor information. I hope that the CELCIS work will address that.

Barnardo's also points out that GIRFEC is not being properly and consistently applied by all our local authorities. It is right that the Scottish Government enshrines GIRFEC in law through the children and young people bill. It is also right that the Scottish Government plans to work with local authorities on the use of permanence orders and that it has promoted, and indeed insisted on, the use of the national adoption register more widely as a way forward in the children and young people bill.

I welcome the Government's commitment to promoting the use of foster carers as adopters and as permanent long-term carers. The Education and Culture Committee took evidence from the Fostering Network Scotland during its inquiry into the educational attainment of looked-after children. It is worth noting that the network pointed out that school attendance is almost 20 per cent higher for foster children than it is for looked-after children who remain at home with their parents.

It is worth adding that educational attainment is only one good reason to achieve permanence at an early stage. As other members have said, attachment is vital. Establishing a loving bond with a caring adult is vital in ensuring good mental health, happiness and success throughout life. For that reason, I welcome the debate and I particularly welcome the minister's revelation that CELCIS is conducting a world-leading study into attachment, which is at the centre of the issue that we are discussing.

15:24

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate during adoption week.

During my time as a councillor in North Ayrshire, I sat on the adoption panel, so I know first hand how challenging and complex the process can be at the local level. With that in mind, I will focus first on the issues that North Ayrshire Council is experiencing and the trends that it is witnessing before I go on to touch on kinship care.

In North Ayrshire in 2010-11, there was a significant increase in children who were approved for adoption or permanent fostering. Although only four were matched in 2009, 17 were matched in 2010, and 12 were matched in 2011. There was a similar increase in children who have been matched permanently with foster carers, with matches rising from three in 2010 to 10 in 2011.

There are many reasons that lead to a child being put up for adoption, and the children come from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances. However, North Ayrshire Council notes that there has been a worrying trend in the number of children who have become looked after and accommodated due to parental substance misuse and the subsequent neglect to which that can lead. It is therefore clear that the issues of adoption and permanence cannot stand alone. Our strategies need a multifaceted approach that not only makes the adoption process seamless and stress free for the child, but tackles the deep-seated issues that have led to a child being in that situation in the first place.

The issue is not unique to North Ayrshire—adoption services all over Scotland are struggling to find adoptive parents, in spite of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 having been amended to include a wider range of people who are allowed to adopt. Since that change in 2009, North Ayrshire has seen a steady increase in unmarried and same-sex couples looking to adopt. Although we are starting to see the benefit of that improvement, we need to do still more to promote adoption. I welcome the work that is being done in adoption week, but that effort must continue throughout the year.

The increase in the number of children who are available for adoption and the cost of matching them to suitable families is an additional pressure on the scarce resources of local authorities that face further budget cuts from the Government this year. We have to protect the most vulnerable people in society; we have to get it right for every child, particularly where we have corporate responsibility. Children should not suffer because of cuts in the services that are designed to protect them. As Barnardo's Scotland points out, social

workers already have large case loads and are overworked, so local government and central Government must work together to ensure that they are properly resourced.

We must also look at kinship carers and how we can best support them by recognising the contribution that they make in reducing the load on the adoption system. At the start of 2012, more than 3,000 children were in kinship care. It is estimated that that number will increase because kinship care is now the first port of call for looked-after children. Although there are no official reasons to explain the rise in kinship care, it may be due to the increasing number of children who are up for adoption, an adoption system that is cumbersome and underresourced, demand exceeding the supply of people who are willing to adopt or foster, or that social services recognise that in most cases it is considered better for the child's wellbeing if they are placed with close friends or family.

However, if we are to make more use of kinship care, we must ensure that proper support and training are in place. In 2011, Citizens Advice Scotland found that some kinship carers had to take time off work or give up employment altogether, and that 55 per cent of kinship carers who could receive kinship care allowance were unsure of their eligibility and were not claiming it.

I argue that all family members who care for another's child or children should receive support and training because, no matter why they are looking after a child, they are giving the same care as foster carers and adoptive parents. We need a realistic policy objective to help all family members who care for another's child, and we need to give them the proper support that they deserve. Ultimately, the child must come first, so if a family member can help they should be assisted in doing so. Apart from reducing stress for the child, that approach takes pressure off the adoption system. We must also have more robust data collection nationally and adequate support for social services.

15:30

**Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** I am very pleased to take part in this debate on permanence and adoption. It is particularly pleasing to be involved during national adoption week.

I am interested in all matters that relate to adoption. I listened to a phone-in programme on the issue on Monday. Many callers were concerned, in one way or another, about the time that the adoption process takes.

I say at the outset that when bureaucracy is in place for no good reason and leads to frustration,

everything that can be done should be done to minimise and cut the red tape. However, we need to appreciate that every child who is available for adoption, without exception—it is a strong claim to make, so I repeat it: without exception—has experienced some kind of traumatic event that led to their being available for adoption in the first place. Therefore, the red tape that I am talking about is in no way the vital and necessary time that is spent in assessing prospective parents and their circumstances to ensure that they can properly look after a child who needs to be adopted.

A child might have been abandoned as a baby. That is not unheard of, particularly in the context of overseas adoption. A child might have been abused by a birth parent and taken into care by the relevant authorities. In one way or another, the child is in a fragile state and is very much in need of the protection that is afforded by a loving parent who can offer the long-term stability that is essential to all children, whether they are adopted or not.

The worst thing that can happen to a baby or child who is to be adopted is the system being rushed. The system must ensure that proper in-depth knowledge is gathered, so that when a placement is made, the first and last principle is the wellbeing of the child. Even though the process requires the patience of Solomon, the child must come first at all times.

My wife and I went through the patience mill; it is a hard mill to get through. From the start to the end of the process, we waited three and a half years to adopt our daughter, Lucy. The time and processes that were involved in checking that we were suitable parents, for the long-term wellbeing of our daughter, were vital in many ways. There are home visits, background reports and police reports. All are done with one intention: to ensure that babies and older children who have had at least one bad experience in their short lives—and perhaps a few—do not have another.

Our daughter was only two when we adopted her. Until then, she had lived in an orphanage, but I have to say that she was an extremely well-behaved and happy baby, and still is—she is coming up for 12, but she is still my baby. My wife and I agree that people who put themselves forward to adopt an older child, who perhaps has what is commonly referred to as “baggage” and has had a traumatic experience at a young age, and who make such a child part of their family—what a goal; what an achievement!—are living saints.

It is clear from all the studies that the earlier a child is permanently placed with a family, the sooner the child begins the process of secure

attachment and integration, and family belonging takes effect.

Again, my focus is on the child in that regard, so I suggest that everything possible be done to build up a bank of prospective parents who have been approved so that as soon as it is practically possible to do so, a child can be placed when they have been recognised in law as being available for adoption.

The wasteful delay in dealing with cases has the potential to turn prospective parents away from adopting, and it is in the child's interests to ensure that the process is as speedy as possible. That delay also has an impact on the prospective parents and their existing families. While we seek to create a positive and fresh new life for each adopted child, we must not forget the positive effects on their new family and parents. Those parents take great pride in their adopted child's achievements—as if, in fact, he or she is their own child—from their first step or first words to the passing of school exams; so much so that it would be impossible for anyone to realise that the child was adopted. That is the ultimate accolade for any family, in my view.

I am pleased to help to raise awareness of adoption and I am sure that the debate can only bring positive outcomes for all the individuals who benefit from adoption—the child, the parent and the extended family. A caring and loving home is what every parent wants for their child and for adoptive parents to offer that chance is something to be recognised.

This Parliament is at its best when it discusses matters such as these—when we all come together. I commend the motion to Parliament while offering thanks to all those who put themselves in the position to adopt.

15:37

**Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I am honoured to speak in the debate. As Gil Paterson said, this is one of those debates that shows Parliament in its best light. I particularly commend Neil Bibby and Liam McArthur for how they moved their respective amendments. As a member of the Education and Culture Committee, I also welcome Stewart Maxwell's comprehensive summary of the work that the committee has been doing on the subject.

It seems only a short time since we last debated adoption and permanence. I remember hearing the speeches of Gil Paterson and Richard Lyle then. Also today, we heard from Nanette Milne. If anyone is looking for examples of positive outcomes from the adoption process, they need look no further than this chamber. It has been

moving to hear those members talk about their personal experiences.

The stated aim of the Scottish Government is for Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow up. That is a bold and ambitious statement—rightly so. There is no doubt that in the past we have, despite our understanding of the poor education and life outcomes for looked-after children, failed despite our efforts and the best will of the professionals involved. As Liam McArthur mentioned, this is just a nut that we have not been able to crack; we have not been able to get to the nub of the problem and to start to make a real difference for our looked-after children.

The cabinet secretary has mentioned the many projects that are now on the way and the organisations that have been galvanised into tackling the problem, including CELSIS, LACSIG and many of the third sector organisations in the field such as the Aberlour Trust, Children 1st and Barnardo's.

There have been so many excellent speeches with useful information that it is difficult to find a new slant on the discussion, but I want to highlight a recent report from Who Cares? Scotland. It has conducted a survey of young people that aims to provide supporting information from children in care and care leavers for the proposed children and young people bill. It covers young people's experience of being in care in Scotland. We have talked a lot about the professionals, but it is interesting to hear the voices of the young people this afternoon. Who Cares? Scotland offers independent advocacy for children and young adults. It conducted a survey of 116 young people in care and care leavers to gather their views on the children and young people bill. It wants the voices of children and young people to be heard in the consultation and the deliberation processes that aim to deliver better outcomes for them, and it has commented on a number of areas that are relevant to today's debate on permanence.

Young people were asked what they thought would have made their lives better before going into care; 13 per cent mentioned communication and preparation. Many felt that they had no idea what going into care would mean for them and their families, and 16 per cent mentioned that support before going into care would have been of great help. In addition, the young people said that they would have benefited from

“more support to prevent having to go into care”.

There is a feeling among those young people that they should have been given support a bit earlier.

The young people want to be communicated with and to have a better understanding of what to expect in the future. The report quotes one young person who said:

"It was all too quick and I never got the time to pack my things. I would have liked more time to prepare and also to be told that going into care was an option as it was all a shock to me when it happened. I never got to say goodbye to my friends either which I didn't like."

Who Cares? Scotland also asked the young people what they thought would have made their lives better while they were in care. Twenty-eight per cent of them mentioned the care environment and 11 per cent mentioned being listened to. As a word of caution to the Scottish Government, the minister and all the professionals who are involved, I note that only 1 per cent of the young people mentioned early intervention. Although I absolutely agree with early intervention and think that it is the right way forward, perhaps we need to communicate the message better to our young people.

It is interesting that the care environment was of such importance to the young people. They mentioned things as simple as the fact that they were not allowed to charge their mobile phones in their bedrooms because of health and safety concerns. As a mother of a teenage son, I can imagine what stresses that must have caused for the young people involved. The importance of the care environment became evident to the Education and Culture Committee when we visited a children's unit in Glasgow. We were concerned that the young residents whose permanent home it had been for a number of years, and whose permanent home it was likely to remain until they left care, could still be subjected to disruption and upset from emergency admissions to that home.

The young people were asked who had had most influence on their lives. Neil Bibby mentioned that the work of social workers is key, and it is interesting that the young people cited social workers as providing the most important relationship outside their families. They also mentioned the roles of advocates and care workers. They felt that advocates had more time in which to get to know them to spend with them. It is evident that all the professionals who are involved with the young people have key roles to play, and we need to get that right if we are to get it right for young people.

15:43

**Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab):** It gives me great pleasure to speak in today's debate on an issue that is close to my heart. Twenty-three per cent of Scotland's looked-after children are in Glasgow and Glasgow has the highest proportion in Scotland of its children being looked after, with 3.2 per cent of the under-18 population in the care of the local authority. That figure is more than double the Scottish average of 1.5 per cent and is higher than the figure in any other part of Scotland.

Last year, I spoke about the incredibly poor education outcomes for looked-after children. The evidence shows that establishing stability and permanence early in a child's life can generate an improvement in their life chances. I welcome the efforts that have been made to improve the quality and consistency of decision making on permanence but, along with Barnardo's and the NSPCC, I would like major improvements to be made in the speed of the process.

There are three areas in which further improvements are required. The first is in establishing a care plan for permanence. It is vital for the welfare of a child that early and effective decisions on permanence are made once that child enters the looked-after children system.

Secondly, a study by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration found that, for 92 per cent of the children in its sample, it took more than two years from their first becoming involved with services for them to be adopted. In one case—as has been highlighted—the process took more than 10 years, which is a ridiculous amount of time.

The third area in which improvement is required is in assisting with the adoption process. I would be interested to hear from the minister what steps are being taken to encourage the minority communities in Scotland to participate in the adoption scheme. If she does not have the answer today, I will be happy to receive it at a later date—I do not want to put her on the spot. Many of our communities in Scotland have traditionally welcomed looking after siblings and other relatives. That care package is extremely important. We need to stop the bureaucracy taking too long.

I will give an example of my experience of the process. After two years of interviews—including interviews of my children—training, visits and people coming to my place and my parents' place, I was eventually told that I was not a suitable adopter. The reason that was given was that I work too hard. I got very worried, because I have two children. I said, "You're not taking my children away, are you?" My children are okay—they can stay with me, even though I work very hard—but I cannot adopt anyone else. That is an interesting phenomenon.

**Aileen Campbell:** Mr Malik makes valid points, which show the importance of raising awareness of the rule yourself in campaign. It is necessary to ensure that a broad spectrum of people put themselves forward as potential adoptive parents. The illustration that Mr Malik has given shows why we have a bit of work to do to ensure that people can be actively ruled in to provide a loving and nurturing home, which I know he has provided for his family.



**Hanzala Malik:** I thank the minister very much. I do not know whether my children would agree with that. However, they have achieved good academic results, so I must have got something right.

The number of looked-after children in Scotland has grown by 46 per cent over the past decade, and the number of looked-after babies under the age of one has almost doubled. As has been said, that puts a major strain on social work departments. It is essential that local authorities be adequately resourced so that decisions on children becoming looked after are made in the best interests of those children, rather than as a last resort when the situation has reached crisis point.

Barnardo's has expressed concern that, too often, decisions are based on resources rather than on need. It argues that early intervention by local authorities and social work departments can save money in the long run. I sometimes feel sorry for social work departments, because they are doomed whatever they do. They are in an extremely difficult position—resourcing is an issue for them.

What will really turn things around for us is the time factor. We need to be more sensitive about how we deal with the issues and need to shrug off the ancient historic ways in which we have dealt with them. I genuinely believe that timing and promotion of the issue are important. I look forward to hearing in the minister's summing up what other support local authorities will receive in that regard.

15:50

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** I had the privilege of speaking in last year's debate on this issue, and I am honoured to be called to speak in today's debate. In last year's debate, I said that when I was first elected to Aberdeen City Council an official asked me how many kids I had. When I said that I did not have any children, the official's response was, "Well, you have 300-odd as of today." That brings home our corporate parenting responsibilities. Even more daunting is the knowledge that I am now one of the corporate parents of more than 16,000 kids. That is a huge responsibility that none of us should forget. The minister referred to the corporate parent training that will be available shortly to members. I have done similar training and have done GIRFEC training, and I think that it is immensely important that, as members, we know what our responsibilities are.

In the debate last year, the then Minister for Children and Young People, Angela Constance, said:

"if something is not good enough for our own sons and daughters, it is not good enough for any child or young person growing up in Scotland."—[*Official Report*, 27 October 2011; c 2777.]

I agree entirely with that statement. We should be aspirational for all the kids for whom we are responsible.

I pay tribute to all those folks right across Scotland who work in children's services. Mr Malik talked about social work services, which are sometimes very much put upon—as many have said, it seems that they cannot do right for doing wrong. As a Parliament, we should recognise the good work that goes on across the country in social services, pay tribute to our social workers and put in place the adequate protection that they require.

Over the past year and a half, I have had the great privilege to visit a number of services in my constituency. Just the other week, I volunteered in Barnardo's Union Street shop with Diane and her team, who do sterling work. Also present was the lady who heads up the Linksfield residential service in Aberdeen, which is a Barnardo's-run project that I have visited before and hope to visit again. In last year's debate, I highlighted Aberdeen City Council's award-winning adoption and fostering service, which also does sterling work. I make no apology for mentioning that service again.

Today, I want to concentrate on the impediments to folk becoming kinship carers. While doing research into what general practitioner contracts require GPs to do, I found an interesting anomaly. I received a letter today from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde that states:

"GPs are obliged within their contractual terms (it is a national contract) to provide certain reports. The most common are medical certificates and death certificates. For others, it falls into two camps".

It is the first camp that we need to take cognisance of. The letter refers to

"Collaborative fees where it is recognised that they do work, usually for a Local Authority, and then claim a fee, for example for fostering/adoption."

It continues:

"GPs can say no to these requests as it is not obligatory".

That is probably a bit of the red tape that has been talked about so much today. I hope that the minister will follow that up and try to ensure that agreeing to such requests becomes obligatory so that the right information can be sought and we can get on much quicker with fostering and adoption.

I want to highlight the difficulties that the new welfare reform regime might throw up when

children are being placed. The Welfare Reform Committee visited a housing association last week to talk about the housing benefit pilot that it is undertaking. One woman highlighted the difficulties with the bedroom tax. She is a kinship carer but there is no permanency at the moment. Like many others, she is extremely worried about the impact of the bedroom tax on her ability to be a kinship carer. It will be fine as long as the legal process is on-going, but when it is finished, she might be penalised for having a so-called extra bedroom, even if she has a child living with her. I hope that we can lobby the Westminster Government very hard to take account of those silly situations.

Members have talked about early intervention and the speed of the adoption process, but I do not have the time to go over those issues. We must secure the future of the children involved because they are Scotland's future.

15:56

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** The excellent briefings provided for the debate by our research team and Barnardo's contain a number of statistics on which we can draw; members have shared many of them during the debate already. The numbers that took me by surprise were that there are 16,000 children who are being looked after by Scotland's local authorities, and that there are possibly up to another 15,000 being cared for by relatives under informal arrangements. We should just imagine how those children would fill two decent-sized football stadiums. That is a stark reminder of the importance of the work that the Scottish Government is doing with local authorities, other partner organisations and families who support their children.

The rule yourself in campaign that is being promoted this week by BAAF is as enlightening as it is moving in the way in which it highlights the cases of the youngsters who are featured. The wishes on a star chart shows the wishes of some of those youngsters, who yearn for what most children might regard as the ordinary things in life, such as having a pet, going swimming or just having fun. In the absence of a family, parents or brothers and sisters, those ordinary things become dreams for so many youngsters. I commend the organisation for the work that it is doing and welcome the events throughout Scotland that Barnardo's, in particular, has planned in order to offer potential parents an insight into the adoption process.

As the minister said when she launched the national parenting strategy last month, she is not starting from scratch. She is pulling together universal services in health, education and social

work, combining those with the third sector and bringing everything together under one shared agenda to demonstrate a real commitment to Scotland's children and families. The suggestion in the proposed children and young people bill to award rights and responsibilities to our kinship carers recognises the work that they do and gives them a much more stable working environment. For too long they have been unsung heroes, taken for granted by a system that, although it is grateful for their intervention on behalf of thousands of youngsters, does little to recompense them for their efforts. Most local authorities now pay kinship carer allowances, but it was a fight to get the UK Government to agree not to claw back some of those allowances to balance out other benefits. The minister and her predecessors can therefore be proud of their achievements to date, including the widely supported plans in the national parenting strategy.

During the summer, I had the pleasure of meeting Who Cares? Scotland's Kilmarnock-based team under the excellent guidance of Jimmy McWilliam and his staff. As members will know, Who Cares? Scotland provides advocacy support to many youngsters in care settings. Not all are destined for adoption, of course, but the discussion that I had that day with Jimmy about the work that his team does opened my eyes to the needs of our looked-after children.

One of the most striking messages was that looked-after children sometimes have little social contact with their friends. Therefore, on top of the obvious challenges that they face in retaining family relationships, they can find themselves presented with yet more difficulties in simply trying to keep friendships going.

Who Cares? Scotland asked more than 100 youngsters what was important to them for the children and young people bill. Clare Adamson has already shared a quotation from the report, but I would like to repeat the last sentence, which stood out for me. The young person said:

"I never got to say goodbye to my friends either which I didn't like."

In the report, the common message from young people was that we must involve them in the process, tell them what is happening and give them time to prepare themselves. If our purpose is really to put children at the centre of all that we do, those sentiments must be listened to and acted on. I am sure that the minister will have noted the comments that were made in the report with great interest.

In the report "Care and Permanence Planning for Looked After Children in Scotland" by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration there is a helpful section that looks at timescales and

some causes of delay. The sample that is offered in the report shows us the four stages to achieving permanence, from initial contact to permanence being decided, the lodging of applications and petitions, and orders being granted. For more than half the children in the sample, it took between one year and two years to progress from the point at which permanence had been decided to presenting the petition in court. Many reasons were offered to help us to understand the delays in other parts of the process. As expected, they ranged from attempts at rehabilitation in families, delays in identifying suitable adoptive parents and difficulties if other siblings were involved. However, it is not clear to me why there can be delays of up to two years between the point at which permanence has been decided and the submission of the application to the court for determination. I think that Nanette Milne has already mentioned a suggestion by Barnardo's that a framework should be established with clear guidelines on what the timescales should be so that we would all know what to expect.

From the tone of the discussion on this important subject and the breadth and depth of the work that the Scottish Government has already carried out, I am in no doubt that the minister and her team have a clear understanding of the issues surrounding looked-after children and their journey to permanence and adoption. It seems that we are developing a whole-system approach, as requested by East Ayrshire Council, which is my council, and I am sure that others support that approach. The additional call for a proactive Scotland-wide approach to finding adopters and long-term carers, which perhaps links the issue to employability and alternative pathways, is interesting. I hope that the minister will consider that as she takes forward her agenda.

16:02

**Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab):** I, too, am pleased to be taking part in the debate.

We have heard from many members that it is an established maxim that children who are not well cared for and are neglected go on, in the main, to have more challenging lives as adults. Graeme Pearson illustrated that well in his speech. In my experience as an MSP and, formerly, as a Fife councillor, that certainly rings true. The lack of attention, care and love is as important as the concrete requirements of food, clothing and shelter.

This is an important debate on adoption and permanence, which are controversial but vital issues that we must consider if we are to deal better with the neglect of thousands of children in this country. It is almost surprising—certainly, I had no idea—that so many colleagues in the

chamber have gone through the adoption process and been successful in the end. We also learned about Hanzala Malik's experience.

My husband and I lived in London for more than 17 years when I was a trade union official, and we applied to adopt in that time. It took us around a year and a half to be approved. I suppose that that is a very short time period compared with the delays that we have heard about. However, we did not go through the whole process because, just at that point, my mother-in-law became terminally ill, and after that—lo and behold; nature sometimes has a way of helping people—our youngest daughter was born. That was a happy ending in some ways, but there is still a child out there whom we might have adopted. However, we did not do so.

For obvious reasons, there has been almost an institutional reluctance to take children from their parents for the purpose of adoption. The usual route is to try every other avenue short of removing children from the care of birth parents. In some high-profile cases, such as those of baby P and of Brandon Muir from Dundee, leaving children with their parents has had catastrophic consequences. In view of the points made by the minister—whom, by the way, I commend for the diligence and great care that she has showed on the issue—that serves only to underline just how vital it is that we give this work our utmost attention.

I do not believe that children should be placed for adoption without the greatest of care and consideration, but the circus of going from pillar to post can be distressing for the children also. The right balance must be struck, and that is why Liam McArthur's amendment is important. Liam McArthur made an important point about the situation in England, where 40 per cent of children are now permitted earlier access to nursery care. I hope that his amendment will meet with some success.

Recently on the radio programme "Moral Maze"—one of my favourite things to listen to as I drive home on a Wednesday evening, which is usually at 9 o'clock or thereabouts after we have finished with our receptions in the Parliament—there was a discussion on whether to place children of mixed race with other sorts of families in Scotland or, indeed, in England. My own preference is that, if there is a child out there who needs love, care and attention, the priority should be to place that child in a loving environment with a family, whether they be gay or whatever, so that the child does not have to go through life facing life's challenges alone.

I agree with the charity—others have said this, so I will skip over this bit—about the need for the framework mentioned by Nanette Milne. I also

agree on the issues around data collection—I will skip over this bit as well, as the point has been well rehearsed this afternoon.

In the high-profile cases where we have seen the consequences of inaction, the reaction from politicians and the media has been to blame the social workers and professionals who are tasked with trying to make sense of the system. However, those individuals are often just scapegoats for our failings. We need to get the policy right. That is why I was pleased to hear from Stewart Maxwell that his committee is looking in depth at this work. That is to be commended.

It is vital that we get the right resources to the front line of social work so that children can be properly protected. Cutting local authority budgets by almost 6.5 per cent is not good, but it is a fact that in these hard times that is one of the things that we have to deal with.

I am absolutely clear that leaving children in chaotic and damaging home environments is not the best option for them. I just want to ensure that, as we move forward in our discussions, the Government takes on board the need to attend to these issues urgently.

Before I sit down, I want to ask the minister to undertake some initiatives to share knowledge and experience. She will know of my interest in the wider European situation, but one of the most moving things that I saw when I first visited Romania was children begging in the street—a point endorsed by Cardinal Keith O'Brien when he visited the Parliament. Those are the poorest children in Europe. As a consequence of Ceauşescu's policies, children's homes were closed down—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** I would be grateful if you could close down, too, please.

**Helen Eadie:** That meant that those children ended up on the streets as beggars, without anyone. I hope that the minister might take the initiative to look at how we might share knowledge and experience with Romania. I would be happy to meet her to explore further how we might do that. I have a team of Romanians coming to the Parliament tomorrow, although that may be short notice for her—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, please.

**Helen Eadie:** I hope that the minister will give a sympathetic hearing to how we could do that.

16:09

**Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):** As a parent of two young children, the welfare of

children and young people in Scotland is extremely close to my heart. I want to explore a number of issues, the first of which is the importance of corporate parenting. Early in my days as a councillor in Aberdeen, it was emphasised to me by my then group leader, one Councillor Kevin Stewart—whatever happened to him?—that it was extremely important that we took our roles as corporate parents seriously. It is important that members at all levels take up opportunities for training and involvement in corporate parenting strategies.

I was often struck by the feeling that council members who were not part of the administration perhaps did not recognise or appreciate their role as corporate parents and felt that the responsibility and burden fell only on councillors who were part of the administration. It is perhaps worth re-emphasising to all local authority members that they have a role as a corporate parent, regardless of whether they are a member of their council's administration.

My colleague Kevin Stewart mentioned the good practice in Aberdeen City Council. When we talk about best practice, it is important that, rather than simply highlight it, we consider ways in which it can be shared with other local authorities. We have heard examples of areas where there might be room for improvement or where local authorities are not delivering what could be described as best practice. When a fostering and adoption service has been nationally recognised, as Aberdeen's has, it should be highlighted to those councils as something to consider.

During my time as a councillor in Aberdeen, investment was made in bringing children's homes back up to a standard that allowed the council to bring children back to Aberdeen from out-of-area placements, which were often extremely expensive and counterproductive. Nanette Milne commented that we sometimes have to send children out of the area, and I agree that that will be necessary on occasion but, all too often in Aberdeen, it happened not because it was the best option, but because it was the only option, as the investment to enable placements within the local authority area simply had not been made. However, thanks to investment in, for example, the Willows children's home and the Gilbert Road children's home in my former council ward, we were able to reverse some of the decisions that had been taken, which had not proven to be the best decisions for the individuals or the local authority.

We must also look at the wider children's home estate and work out which homes are no longer fit for purpose. In Aberdeen, one home in my ward, the Netherhills children's home, which was not fit for purpose, was closed. As well as investing, we

must consider whether children's homes are appropriate.

Smashing some adoption myths is one of the most powerful things that we can do. It was pleasing to hear the comments from my colleague Joan McAlpine on age, which is often viewed as a barrier to people coming forward to adopt. The most important criterion for people adopting should be the ability to give love and security, and that can be fulfilled no matter what the age of the individual. We must get beyond the stigmatisation that all too often surrounds age. BAAF's chief executive, David Holmes, has talked about the need to grapple with myths and to ensure that people do not rule themselves out of adoption, but rather rule themselves in.

I agree with Margaret McDougall's interesting point that we need to consider whether placements with the family are best. That is one reason why the Government's work on kinship care, such as the introduction of kinship carer payments and the work to enshrine the role of kinship carers in statute as part of the forthcoming children and young people bill, is extremely important.

One point that has rung true throughout the debate is about the importance of having children at the centre. I have listened carefully to many members saying that we need to speed up the process. I agree that, in many cases, the process takes far too long, but for me the most important thing is to ensure that we get the process right for the child, rather than simply do it quickly. If we can improve speed and still get it right for the child, that is a winning combination, but we should never sacrifice the rights of the child simply for speed of process. That must be our main focus.

BAAF's national adoption week website has been collecting the wishes of children who want to be adopted. I will take the opportunity to share some of those wishes, which go from the touching to the amusing.

Phoebe, aged five, says:

"I wish for a family that can show me love and patience".

Robbie, aged four, and his brother Simon, aged six, say:

"We wish to have a family who will look after us, give us cuddles and have fun with us".

There is also Ellie, aged four, who wishes

"for a mummy who will make my hair look nice".

We then have Jack, aged five, who says:

"I wish for a monkey, puppies and cats and dogs".

If anybody watching the debate or reading the *Official Report* has a monkey at home, they could be the person Jack is looking for.

Lastly, we have Corey, aged seven, who says:

"I wish for two dads so I don't have to share with my younger brother".

On the days when I have one child in my arms and the other child tugging at me to get my attention, I can sympathise with that sentiment.

16:15

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):** I welcome the debate and the minister's speech, which she started by referring to the recent report by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration. I found that report an interesting and worrying read at the weekend. It underlined the importance of securing decisions about permanent homes for looked-after children but found, as many speakers reminded us, that there were worrying delays in making such decisions.

We are now familiar with some of the figures in the report. More than half of the children in the study took more than four years to achieve permanence. Moreover, nearly half experienced at least three moves and more than a quarter experienced at least four moves before achieving permanence.

Given the importance of secure attachments—particularly, as we now believe, in the very early years—which was another major theme of the minister's speech, it is essential that services intervene as early as possible to support children and achieve permanence. Because of that, I welcome the Government's care and permanence plan from 2011, with its emphasis on responding to the needs of children as early as possible. I also welcome the establishment of CELCIS—I am not quite sure what the correct way to pronounce that is. It has a dedicated care and permanence team, and I am sure that we look forward to the comprehensive work to which the minister referred on attachment theory.

In some conversations that I had before the debate, it was put to me that there was a lack of adoption experts within CELCIS. I hope that that is not true, but perhaps the minister can tell me in her closing speech or in correspondence whether that information is correct.

Of course, the debate is not only about adoption, but I will concentrate on that aspect because I became interested in the subject after a constituent came to one of my surgeries a few months ago. What she told me and the subsequent work that I did on the matter opened up a particular perspective on the adoption process. I accept that it is only one perspective, but I will give it because it adds something to the points that other speakers have made.

The experiences about which that constituent told me highlighted several aspects of the problem. First, she said that the children whom she sought to adopt had been kept for too long in the family home. I know that that is a common complaint and I understand the complexities of the matter, but it is important to place my constituent's comment on the record.

She also said that there were further delays in moving from the previous foster carer to her and her husband as foster carers because everything must now be referred back and forth between the sheriff and the hearing. Apparently, that did not happen in the past.

She then talked about a two-year process for adoption after all that and highlighted problems in following the letter of the 2007 act. For example, one sheriff did not specify zero contact with the birth parents, although that must be explicit. That caused a delay, but a more significant problem arose because the judiciary lodged the application in the wrong jurisdiction, which led to an appeal, and the whole process had to start all over again.

My constituent described how, in that second judicial round, she faced two gruelling weeks of being grilled by the counsel for the other side and how the social worker endured the same grilling. She commented that there is a major disparity between what happens in the legal process and what social workers do in their day-to-day work and decision making.

I hope that, when they are introduced, the new court rules on timetabling and judicial management will help. In particular, the proposals to change sheriff court rules should enable sheriffs to play a more proactive role at a much earlier stage.

When I discussed my constituent's concerns with a family law lawyer, I was given a further worrying perspective that suggests that there is a fundamental problem with the 2007 act, which was introduced to Parliament by the Government of which I was a member. The lawyer described to me the way in which the legal process is getting bogged down in lengthy disputes, and referred in particular to section 31 of the 2007 act, which she said completely defeats the aim of taking the focus on parental blame out of adoption and making the welfare of the child the principal focus.

In particular, she said that the courts are now clogged up with cases that take weeks to resolve and require huge sums of public money in order to satisfy section 31(4)(b) of the 2007 act. In the majority of cases, the child will have gone through the full gamut of child protection and children's hearings proceedings before having been placed for adoption, and yet the court is often faced with hearing days of evidence from social workers, who

have to rehearse all the ways in which the parents have failed, simply in order to meet the legal test for dispensing with consent.

The lawyer with whom I had that conversation suggested that there should be a much simpler test of safeguarding the child's welfare, amended to reflect the necessity test under article 8 of the European convention on human rights. I was concerned to hear that the adoption working group, which met for years before the bill that became the 2007 act was introduced, recommended such a test, but that amendments that were made to the bill as it went through the Parliament changed that. Quite apart from the specific points that the lawyer was making, I found the conversation very interesting with regard to the need for post-legislative scrutiny. I hope that the minister will address that point, which I offer in order to bring a slightly different perspective to the issue.

I very much welcome the minister's speech and the announcements that she has made today.

16:22

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** I welcome the debate on permanence and adoption. I support the aims of national adoption week and the tone of the debate so far.

Gil Paterson is correct—as always—to say that debates such as this show the Parliament at its best, because we are dealing with real problems and real solutions that affect people's lives and, in some cases, some of the most difficult-to-reach, looked-after children.

Today's debate has been like a game of spot the ex-councillor, because we have all been councillors at various times and taken on the role of corporate parent. It is only when we look at the issue as a corporate parent that we truly understand our role in looking after those children.

We will all have heard the term "corporate parent" as we went through our normal lives before becoming elected members, but it is only when we become councillors in local authorities that we understand what it means. We are there at the coalface and we see what is happening when we hold surgeries and various families come in. We have to deal with individual situations that can be heartbreaking and quite difficult.

Kevin Stewart mentioned what Angela Constance said last year, but she was not in the chamber at that point so I will mention it again. She said that

"if something is not good enough for our own sons and daughters, it is not good enough for any child or young person growing up in Scotland."—[*Official Report*, 27 October 2011; c 2777.]

I agreed with that at the time, and I do so again today. I am pleased that the minister, Aileen Campbell, has reaffirmed that position this afternoon.

We must ensure that we all work towards the goal of making Scotland the best place in which to grow up, and that we take up our role as a corporate parent. It is important that looked-after children gain a permanent home quickly, and I welcome the fact that the child will be at the centre of the process.

Joan McAlpine and other members have mentioned that the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration published a report on care and permanence planning for looked-after children. The thing that stood out for me in that report was that it takes over two years, in most cases, for children to find some form of permanence. That is a worry, because the sooner that we can help those looked-after children, the easier life will be for them.

Other situations have been mentioned during the debate. For example, there are challenges when we try to leave children with their birth parents. That can sometimes lead to tragic circumstances, as has happened in various areas, but in the majority of cases it works out.

Those are issues that we must think about. I understand why the timescales can be quite difficult. We have to ensure that we get everything correct and above board.

This is national adoption week, and many people will be completely unaware of the idea behind the rule yourself in campaign, thinking that they are too old, too young or have too different a lifestyle to be accepted as an adoptive parent. We must promote the campaign and ensure that people know that the option is available to them.

The minister is correct that we need to ensure uniformity across local authorities. When I was a councillor, I heard many stories from other authorities where the situation was different from my authority. That causes more problems in what is a difficult situation to begin with.

Local authorities need to make it simpler for families to access support. I welcome the Government's support for kinship carers, because it is natural for grandparents and other members of the family to help out in difficult situations. We have been doing that for generations, but we have to say that there are more older people doing that now. In my constituency, I can name a couple of cases. We need to support those families, because they have already gone through some difficult situations. We have to ensure that we make it easier for them to access support.

Once again, we are debating a subject that we all agree on. This decision will make a difference for all our children and young people and can change the pathway that a young person might take. I take my corporate parenting role seriously and will, therefore, continue to support the Scottish Government's ambitious ideas in this area.

Recently, a family member came to me to ask about adoption. I gave him the details but, although I take my corporate parenting role seriously, I went home to my wife and said, "What do they want to do that for? Why are they asking these questions?" That attitude is part of the problem and we all have to get over that feeling and ensure that we support people who are going for adoption, because the future of our children is the most important thing for everyone in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before we move to closing speeches, I remind all members who have spoken in the debate that they should be in the chamber for the closing speeches.

16:27

**Liam McArthur:** I agree with Clare Adamson, George Adam and others that this debate has shown the Parliament at its best. That is, perhaps, due in no small part to the fact that, as Helen Eadie pointed out, a surprising number of members in the chamber have personal experience of the adoption process—I will draw a diplomatic veil over Hanzala Malik's attempt to put his kids up for adoption. We heard about a variety of experiences. Richard Lyle's experience was clearly a tortuous one at various points, and Gil Paterson clearly has no attachment problems whatsoever with his 12-year-old baby, but I offer the role of poster child for the rule yourself in campaign to Nanette Milne, who demonstrated that, when the process is done right, there are benefits for not only the children who are adopted, but those who do the adopting. Nanette Milne was also right to point to the bravery of the birth parents in that process.

The scale of the challenge is not to be underestimated. Kevin Stewart and others have drawn attention to the fact that there are almost 16,000 looked-after children in this country, yet adoption accounts for only around 300 or so cases. There are particular problems, such as for children with special needs. Hanzala Malik drew attention to the problems in relation to not only ethnic minorities, but the pressures in Glasgow. An island community such as Orkney, which I represent, is probably at the other end of the spectrum, but there are tensions there, nevertheless, not least because, if a placement cannot be found in Orkney, an out-of-island placement must be found, which can be a dramatic and traumatic experience.

Overall, there is an acceptance of the need to increase the number of potential foster carers and adopters. The register is a step in the right direction. It will provide more matching opportunities, which will bring an opportunity to speed up the process. As George Adam and others have said, support for families who get involved in this process is critical.

The importance of getting it right early on was reflected in every member's speech. The child with attachment difficulties inevitably—or almost inevitably—becomes an adult with the same issues. The right to a loving, supportive, secure environment is one that we expect for our own children, as Angela Constance reminded the chamber in a previous debate, and it is one that we should expect for those who are looked after.

We cannot duck the fact that the costs of early intervention are high, but the costs of not acting are far higher. Graeme Pearson made a number of important points in that respect, not least on the percentages of those who find themselves in prison or in difficulty later in life. I again extend my plea for the Government to look at how we might extend early education to more two-year-olds in Scotland, as that appears to be one way to deliver a greater level of positive early intervention.

The impact of delays was a feature of most members' speeches. A point that was not made in this debate but has been made in previous debates is that timeframes for a child are very different from those for an adult. Six months or a year in the perspective of a child is a very different quantum from that for an adult.

As various members mentioned, it is more difficult to find adoptive parents for older children. Graeme Pearson's example was at the extreme end, but there is plenty of evidence to suggest that that is a problem. The NSPCC in its briefing suggested that:

"Poor attachment increases the likelihood that a child or young person will have low self-esteem; find it difficult to make and sustain close relationships with their peers ... be vulnerable to further abuse as they seek closeness in inappropriate relationships; and may deal with the anger by self-harm, offending behaviour or risk-taking behaviour."

We all agree that the process needs to be speeded up, although there are tensions between the rights of parents and the rights of the child. Mark McDonald made a fair point; we cannot simply look to fast-track this and an early decision is not necessarily the best one. The issue needs to be dealt with on the basis of evidence and robust data, and decisions will inevitably be made on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, there is plenty more that we can do. Malcolm Chisholm pointed to some of the legal and court-based problems that exist, and resources are regularly cited as a drag factor.

Looking forward, I repeat that the Scottish Government has taken a number of important steps, not only through the parenting strategy but with the children and young people's rights bill, which I expect to command support across the chamber. The Education and Culture committee has already done a fair amount of work in this area, as its convener Stewart Maxwell pointed out. The inquiry that it is undertaking could not be more timely; themes are already emerging on ways in which we can improve the situation. I look forward to participating in that.

As the minister acknowledged, this area has frustrated the efforts of successive Governments of all political hues. It will not be an easy process, but the best chance of achieving progress is if we maintain the consensus that has been much in evidence today. We have to challenge not just ministers, but those involved in the sector, and the tone in which we do that is important.

It is the least that we can do in our role as corporate parents and it is the least that we can do to support the many people who are doing such remarkable work in this area. Most of all, it is the least that we can do in the interests of the looked-after children and young people for whom we have responsibility.

16:34

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** It has been very clear from the contributions to the debate—many of which were based on significant personal experience—that everyone agrees that there is no greater responsibility than bringing up children. We also agree that the state has no greater responsibility than to ensure that children who for one reason or another are not born into a secure and loving family—immediate or extended—are properly looked after.

We are also clear that although hundreds of social workers across Scotland work tirelessly to do their very best for every child in difficult circumstances—as Hanzala Malik alluded to—nothing can replace the love and security of a permanent and stable family environment. The evidence is overwhelming, whatever criteria are used, so it goes without saying that that must be the overall policy objective.

Within that policy objective, we must be clear that it is the child and his or her immediate family—whatever the definition of that may be—that matters most and that policy making must reflect the very diverse range of needs. If I interpret correctly all the current briefings on the matter and the Scottish Government's intentions in the children and young people bill, plus all the as yet incomplete conclusions that have been drawn by the Education and Culture Committee, then it is



clearly important to design policies that will be in the best interests of the child and their family or carers, but that at the same time will articulate with local authority structures, with schools, with healthcare and with financial pressures. There is a temptation to devise policy the other way round, which is the last thing that we want to do. Barnardo's makes the compelling point that that can only frustrate moves to ensure that there is a quick and right decision for the child. We note the improvements that Barnardo's believes need to be made.

It has been very good to celebrate national adoption week and to hear the updates on adoption policy from the Scottish Government, which can help to inform members as we enter the next phase. However, there is still some other expert evidence to come. We have an obligation to listen carefully to it and to weigh up the implications before we move further on some aspects of policy. As Stewart Maxwell said, there is a need to talk to real people on the front line.

The Scottish Government has acknowledged, as has each of the Opposition parties, that more has to be done to provide workable and equitable solutions rather than just present the statistics and diagnose the problems. How often have we been told at committee that we are very good at that part, but much less good at providing meaningful action, particularly—as Malcolm Chisholm and Liam McArthur said—in the earliest stages of children's lives?

I remember that, in their evidence to the committee, Claire Burns, the strategic policy manager for CELCIS, and the Educational Institute of Scotland said that there has been little improvement when it comes to taking the desired action, although we have been very good at diagnosing the problems. In other words, there have been lots of attempts to do things, but they have not always had the greatest impact.

What lessons need to be learned from the experts on the ground? What can we do as politicians to ensure that there are significant qualitative improvements in the life chances of adopted and looked-after children?

Some issues that relate to the decision-making process must be addressed. The convener of the Education and Culture Committee set out the challenge contained in the wealth of written and oral evidence that has been presented to us on some key themes. First, as has been reiterated by several former councillors who are now members of the Parliament, local authorities are not yet skilled enough at bringing greater coherence to decision making, particularly when it comes to involving council officers across lots of different departments. It is good to hear the Scottish

Government's intentions on that, especially in relation to dealing with some of the discrepancies.

The spirit of GIRFEC is definitely out there, but the practicalities still present problems. It has been pointed out that sometimes there is not enough of a multidisciplinary approach to training among professionals. That issue was raised by Graham Donaldson, among others, when he examined how childminders and teachers could be assisted to provide crucial educational support in the earliest years for children who are perhaps going through some difficulties.

It has also been pointed out that, in terms of decision making, it is often the financial concerns of local authorities that drive the policy, rather than some of the other factors that we should look at to achieve better qualitative outcomes. Implicit in such comments is the suggestion that we need to take more seriously the role that the voluntary sector can play in providing additional support.

It has obviously been pointed out that in some areas local communities and local voluntary sector organisations can provide some of the greatest support to potential adoptive parents and to families when there is perhaps a desire to become adoptive parents but, for one reason or another, there are problems. The views of the voluntary sector are crucial.

There is a wealth of evidence that suggests that a lack of permanence and stability in childhood can have significantly negative impacts further into people's lives. We cannot sit back and wait and hope that things will change without a different intervention approach in the earliest years. It has been good to hear that there is a will in the Parliament to make that happen. As Nanette Milne said, we are happy to support the Scottish Government's motion, and both the Labour and Liberal amendments.

16:40

**Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab):** This has been an excellent debate. One thing that has marked it out as such has been the informed comments by so many members, who have drawn from their personal experiences. It is telling when we have heard not only about the joy of going through the adoption process and the contribution that it can make to someone's life, but the frustration that members have articulated and the consequences of that frustration.

We have all accepted the fundamental premise of article 8 of the ECHR, which states that everyone has the right to a family life. However, that right is denied to so many children in this country not only because they do not have a parent or a parent has been removed from their life due to a tragic event, but because of the

circumstances in which they live and the failings in their parents' lives, whether they are linked to violence or addiction of whatever nature.

It is staggering to hear about not just the extent but the consequences of the problem. Hanzala Malik said that 23 per cent of Scotland's looked-after children are in Glasgow, which allows members to see where the concentration of the problem lies. When the areas surrounding Glasgow are added—Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and Ayrshire—we see that poverty and deprivation are a huge factor in causing many of the problems. If we are fully intent on coming up with an adequate solution that serves the many children whom we are talking about, we must make an impact on poverty and deprivation and the areas where they are concentrated.

Nanette Milne made an excellent speech. She said a number of things that were telling and with which I entirely agree. All of today's speeches have echoed what she said: the focus must be on the child's wellbeing. That must be the starting point for everything that we do.

Nanette Milne made a remarkably telling point, too, when she spoke about the social circumstances of adoption when she adopted and the social circumstances of many children who are up for adoption now. Life is completely different. When she and her husband were looking into adoption, many children were placed for adoption because of illegitimacy and the social stigma attached to that. That compares with now, when so many children are considered for adoption not because there is a social stigma but because there is a problem in that child's life and in the lives of that child's parents as a result of alcohol, drugs or violence between adults and violence inflicted on children.

That fact changes significantly the whole debate about what adoption is for and why we should do it. That is why so many members have emphasised the need for early intervention. The funny thing is that Nanette Milne spoke about early intervention in totally different circumstances, but she testified to its success. Now we need early intervention not just to enable a child to develop to their full potential but, in many cases, for the child's safety.

Graeme Pearson gave us another staggering fact: children in care are 13 times more likely to end up in prison.

Members talked about the need for intervention. Liam McArthur said that problems can start at the earliest stage, even before birth. We know about such problems—we know that children are more likely to fail if they grow up in disadvantaged circumstances. My heart goes out to the people who have made the effort to offer themselves as

adoptive parents and who are prepared to take on kids who have specific needs. The fact is that many children are damaged, not by the time that they reach the age of seven, eight, nine or 10 but by the time that they are one or two.

It is tragic that the mental and physical abuse of a child in the first year or two years of their life has an on-going effect on the child's development throughout the primary education years and into the secondary education years and adolescence. I do not think that we fully understand the lasting damage that such experiences inflict on youngsters. That is why we all need to ensure that we translate our words into action.

Stewart Maxwell talked about inconsistency across the country. When we talk about such things, we are not being critical for the sake of it or trying to score points. We identify issues because we genuinely and passionately want to make a difference for every child in this country. As Stewart Maxwell said, it is unfortunate that shared values do not always translate into common practice, for example in the context of training.

Let us face it: there are problems with resources, as Stewart Maxwell said, and unless we address them we will find ourselves talking about the same issues next year and in five and 10 years' time.

There is a challenge for the Parliament: do we genuinely and passionately want to make a difference on the issue? If we do, are we prepared to make decisions and take the consequences, even if there is an impact on other policy priorities and areas of our lives?

We should not underestimate the scale of the challenge. Margaret McDougall talked about parental neglect and substance abuse. I would bet a pound to a penny that just about every member can give examples of that from their casework. That is the reality.

What can we do to make a difference? Agencies are struggling. The voluntary sector is struggling. Social workers are struggling. It is right that so many members paid tribute to the contribution of social workers—Neil Bibby did so not just from the political perspective but with reference to his family's experience. Social workers do an immense job. They work in extremely difficult circumstances, under huge pressure, and they need support. We should not wait until something goes wrong and then blame them. Let us try to do something that makes it easier for them to do their jobs properly.

We have had a good, well-informed debate. Let us try to do something that makes a difference. I make one suggestion for the minister to consider. There has been no disagreement among speakers in the debate. Is there a chance for us to put aside

our party political differences and set up a minister-led working group that involves all parties in the Parliament and draws in experts from outside the Parliament, to ascertain whether we can do something that will make a lasting difference?

16:49

**Aileen Campbell:** As many members have mentioned, the debate has provided a timely opportunity to raise awareness of and reinforce our collective commitment to issues around looked-after children and young people—in particular, issues around permanence and adoption. Contributions from members have been considered and thoughtful, and most of all they have highlighted that we all want the best for our looked-after children. Indeed, as corporate parents ourselves, we want all our children to experience a safe, stable, nurturing and permanent home. That is the best way in which to ensure that they are equipped with the confidence and self-esteem that they need to help them withstand life's challenges.

It has been heartening to hear that there is recognition across the chamber that it does not matter where children live or whether their parents are single, a couple, or older than those of their peers. The important thing is that our children feel loved and secure.

As we have heard, we cannot pretend that achieving that is an easy task—everyone has recognised that it is no easy thing to achieve. It is not without its challenges and we can sometimes feel frustrated at the length of time that it can take to find a permanent home for our children and young people. Many members have cited legal issues or issues around professional capacity, but nevertheless we understand that the time that it takes to find a permanent home can be frustrating. However, we have also heard—in particular from Gil Paterson in his personal account and from Mark McDonald—about how doing that too fast can have adverse effects and we must always remember to put the child at the centre of all care planning decisions.

Let me put on record that the Scottish Government is working hard to improve the life chances of our looked-after children. I, like everyone here, am a corporate parent and I am determined to focus on those things that will make the biggest difference and to support our partners across the sector such as BAAF, the independent adoption agencies and every one of our local authorities so that each child is found a permanent home as quickly as possible.

I am confident that we have the right policies and the right approach, but we need to remain vigilant and keep those things under review. Our

approach is to support those at the front lines who do the heavy lifting. We are doing that effectively through our key initiatives such as the national parenting strategy, getting it right for every child, the corporate parenting agenda, the looked-after children strategic implementation group care and permanence plan, the national adoption register and, of course, the proposals that we set out in the children and young people bill. Those initiatives are already delivering positive change and positive differences to many children's and young people's lives across Scotland.

Despite there being 16,000 looked-after children that we know about, often the reason for that is that children are staying in care for longer. There are also fewer children coming into care. In addition, the numbers are showing encouraging upward trends in adoption so there is modest improvement and we are definitely travelling in the right direction, which gives us all a bit of confidence that we are making the right decisions.

I turn to some of the remarks that colleagues have made. Neil Bibby made a thoughtful and compelling speech, which acknowledged the need for us all to work together to move the agenda forward in a way that always recognises that the child should be at the centre of service delivery and design. Neil Bibby also acknowledged the need to support our social workers and to thank them for their work; so too did Hanzala Malik and Kevin Stewart. I absolutely agree with that. Social workers do fantastic, often unsung work and they often need to make challenging and difficult decisions, so it is right that we ensure that social workers feel confident.

We recognise the need to ensure consistency in decision making. Lack of consistency has been raised by many members, including Stewart Stevenson—I apologise; I meant Stewart Maxwell—and Joan McAlpine. I recognise that that is an issue. The Scottish Government has set standards that are expected from child protection services in national child protection guidance and we are creating a national framework for child protection learning and development to support the developmental needs of a multi-agency workforce. However, we know that we always need to do more.

We also recognise the need to show leadership and to ensure that we work with local government in recognising local needs, while recognising the need for national consistency.

Liam McArthur thoughtfully and constructively made the point about the need for earlier and better permanence planning. That proved to be a theme in many members' speeches. I take that point seriously, because it is crucial that we get the right decisions made for every child as quickly as we can. That is why we will continue to help

local authorities to address their current case load by providing a consultative permanence team and disseminating good practice. We have already commissioned a project to look into delays and we will continue to raise awareness of the need to get things done quickly.

Related to the theme of early permanence is the issue of preventative spending and child development. The earliest years of a child's life are the most important for their outcomes in later life, cognitively, emotionally and socially. Children cannot be expected to cope with multiple placements and I would not expect that of them.

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** There is far too much chatting going on in the chamber.

**Aileen Campbell:** Attachment is very important. Gil Paterson, Liam McArthur, Joan McAlpine and Clare Adamson all discussed that in their remarks. We have a greater understanding of that from experts such as Suzanne Zeedyk and Bruce Perry, who show us that babies are born relationship ready, that they are able to communicate before they are even born and that their synapses are firing. Therefore, the interventions that we make and the decisions that we take as policy makers are important. They last a lifetime and need to be positive.

If attachment does not happen, the child could have foundations that are not as strong as those of a peer who has been loved and cherished. That is why our parenting strategy and our play, talk, read campaign, which promotes positive interactions, more love, more cuddles and more nurture from day 1 of a child's life, are so important. Those things do not cost anything, but in terms of a child's long-term outcomes they are absolutely priceless.

Stewart Maxwell spoke knowledgeably as the convener of the Education and Culture Committee. I put on record my thanks to him and the committee for their work on this agenda. I particularly welcome the committee's work to highlight outcomes for children who are looked after at home. I plan to host a summit that will look specifically at that issue. In the light of Hugh Henry's remarks, I would happily engage with him and others who have an interest in the subject to inform how we progress that work, if they would like to do so.

**Stewart Maxwell:** I am interested in the summit that the minister plans to hold. Will she give us more information on that as soon as it is available, to ensure that the Education and Culture Committee is fully informed of the on-going process for that summit? Could we perhaps even have one or two invitations to the summit?

**Aileen Campbell:** Yes. Of course, the invitation that I extended to Hugh Henry and others in

different parties will be extended to Stewart Maxwell. As we develop our approach to the summit, we will liaise with him to ensure that he knows what work we are planning to do.

Nanette Milne, Helen Eadie, Gil Paterson, Richard Lyle and Hanzala Malik all made good contributions and powerfully used their own experiences to show how wonderful it can be to adopt a child and provide a loving, nurturing home. I thank them for that, as it added a real richness to the debate. I would be pleased to liaise with Helen Eadie regarding the issue of Romanian children that she raised. I cannot promise that it will be tomorrow, but I give a commitment to speak to her. I recognise her clear passion on the subject.

Clare Adamson, Willie Coffey and George Adam all highlighted the fantastic work of Who Cares? Scotland. I have had the pleasure of meeting some of the looked-after children from Who Cares? Scotland and have sat in on its corporate parenting training. I only hope that many MSPs take up the offer of participating in that corporate parenting training.

I visited the debate project last week to mark national care leavers week. Some of the testimonies that those young people gave me about their experiences of the care system were tough to hear, especially given that we, in this chamber, are responsible for creating the system that put them through those experiences. We absolutely need to do better by our looked-after young people. I encourage every member to engage with Who Cares? Scotland to get that real-life perspective on our care system, which is a system that we constantly need to improve.

Many members have mentioned the need to ensure that we have robust data. I chaired the last LACSIG meeting, at which it was clear that people in that setting also recognised the need to have much more robust data to inform how we move policy forward. I know that LACSIG is looking closely at the issue. We cannot collect data just for the sake of it; we must collect the correct data to inform policy and ensure that we have a system that is not becoming a pipeline for prisoners, as Graeme Pearson and others suggested.

We have lots of opportunities, whether through the bill, the national parenting strategy or the work of LACSIG and CELCIS. Many people are committed to the permanence and adoption agenda. I thank everyone very much for their contributions to the debate, which recognises national adoption week. It is good for the Parliament that, collectively, we can send out the message that we are on the side of looked-after children and that, as corporate parents, we know that we need to do far better by them.

## Decision Time

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-04682.1, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend motion S4M-04682, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on permanence and adoption, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S4M-04682.2, in the name of Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S4M-04682, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on permanence and adoption, as amended, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-04682, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on permanence and adoption, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises that this is National Adoption Week; congratulates the work of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering in raising awareness of adoption via its campaign, Rule Yourself In; acknowledges that there is an increase in the number of children being adopted, including those from care, but recognises the damage that multiple placements can have and the need to secure permanency quickly and at an early age; welcomes the Scottish Government's recently launched Parenting Strategy, which includes commitments to all of Scotland's parents, including corporate parents, as well as the proposals contained in the Rights of Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, and agrees that the work to support a collaborative multi-agency approach to improving the quality of decisions in respect of permanence planning should continue; further notes the publication of the consultation responses to the Bill and agrees to give them full consideration as it progresses, and believes that more robust data collection at a national level and adequate support for social workers is critical to ensuring success.

## William Murdoch

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-04226, in the name of Adam Ingram, on William Murdoch, the Scot who lit the world. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament welcomes the celebrations surrounding the 200th anniversary of the gas industry and, in particular, the opportunity to recognise the singular contribution made by William Murdoch, 1754-1839, who was born and grew up in the Ayrshire village of Lugar where his inventive engineering genius first became evident; notes that he was responsible for the production of the first steam carriage as well as what is considered his greatest innovation, which rapidly transformed society, gas lighting; further notes that the great scientist, Lord Kelvin, on unveiling a marble bust of Murdoch in the Hall of Heroes at the Wallace Monument in 1892, remarked on the benefit of his work not just to Scotland but to the whole world, and regards the gas@200 anniversary as an ideal time to highlight the life and work of William Murdoch whose gift of gas lighting was freely offered to the world.

17:02

**Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** This year marks the 200th anniversary of the gas industry in this country, and tonight the Parliament is holding a reception—hosted by my colleague Mark McDonald—to celebrate the major contribution that the industry has made and continues to make to Scotland and its economic wellbeing. I encourage fellow MSPs to participate in the event.

I am particularly grateful to have this opportunity to highlight the life and work of William Murdoch, the engineering genius who, among many other achievements, invented gas lighting, which places him in the pantheon of the great pioneers of the first industrial revolution.

Styled "The Scot Who Lit the World" in Janet Thomson's excellent book on his life and work, Murdoch was very much a product of the Scottish enlightenment of the late 18th century and a leading member of that remarkable generation of Scots who invented the modern world.

William Murdoch was born into a family of millwrights at Bello mill in the Ayrshire village of Lugar. Many successful technicians, engineers and inventors of the industrial revolution came from similar skilled artisan backgrounds. William's father, John, certainly set his son a considerable example in inventiveness and improvement at the mill. It is even reputed that father and son invented a tricycle that carried John to Cumnock on market days—60 years in advance of Kirkpatrick Macmillan's bicycle invention down the road in Dumfries.

Of course, in addition to his father's tutelage, William also benefited from a formal schooling at Cumnock parish school. Since 1696, every parish in Scotland had been required to maintain a free school and schoolmaster by act of the Scottish Parliament.

It was at Bello mill that the young William began experimenting with steam and made early attempts at gas lighting. He and his siblings excavated a small sandstone cave next to the mill on the banks of the Lugar water, which William used as a laboratory for his experiments. He placed burning coal into his mother's old kettle, attached a perforated thimble to the end of the spout and set alight the gas that was released from the coal, illuminating the dark little cave. Incidentally, the light-giving property of the local caunle coal—or candle coal—was well known. A familiar sight in Ayrshire homes of the time was the earthenware container of burning caunle coal placed on top of the fire, giving light as well as warmth to the room.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Murdoch does not receive the recognition that his achievements deserve. Certainly, I cannot recall any mention of him in the textbooks on the period. That is the case despite the admiration of his contemporaries, the award of a gold medal by the Royal Society and, indeed, the remarkable honour bestowed at the turn of the 19th century, some 50 years after his death, with the placing of his marble bust—one of only 16 people so honoured—in the hall of Scottish heroes at the Wallace monument in Stirling. I suspect that the main reason for his relative obscurity is that his work has been subsumed within that of the inventor of the steam engine, James Watt—of whom more later.

At the age of 23, William left his native Ayrshire village of Lugar and walked 250 miles, taking eight days, to begin work with James Watt and Matthew Boulton at the renowned Soho manufactory in Birmingham. Perhaps he had been inspired by an account of the works by another local Lugar man who had visited it the year before: James Boswell, the son of the local laird of the Auchinleck estate. Yes, it was the James Boswell of Boswell and Johnson fame.

In any case, William quickly became indispensable to the undertaking, becoming the practical go-to man who ensured that the engines worked and kept on working, which was no small feat in the days when mechanical engineering was in its infancy. Invention and innovation went hand in hand with that work, in order to improve the performance of the machinery. However, his terms of employment made it clear that his inventions were the intellectual property of his employers, so William's groundbreaking work in, for example,

converting steam power to produce rotary motion and the turning of wheels was patented by, and attributed to, James Watt.

As for gas lighting, for which he is now best known, Murdoch apparently perfected the process for producing and capturing coal gas while based in Cornwall, where Boulton and Watt's engines were used in the tin mines. Murdoch's house at Redruth was the first domestic residence to be lit by gas. When he returned to Birmingham, he continued experimenting, lighting the interior of the Soho buildings. The first industrial factory to be illuminated by gas was the Philips and Lee cotton mill in Manchester, which was fully lit by Murdoch with 904 gas lights in 1805.

Incredibly, Boulton and Watt denied Murdoch the opportunity to patent and develop gas lighting, which was not only much cheaper to run than the traditional oil or tallow lighting, but more brilliant, steadier and cleaner in use. The company therefore left the way open for competitors to exploit the market, which predictably boomed in the following decades, from the lighting of commercial properties to domestic and street lighting.

It is interesting that Murdoch contented himself with producing his paper for the Royal Society and its award of a gold medal in 1808 to him as

"the author of the most important or useful discovery which shall be made published ... in heat and light."

Had Murdoch been motivated by fame and fortune, he could easily have achieved both, but his energies were directed towards his work in order to satisfy his intellectual curiosity and solve practical problems, benefiting others as much as, or even more than, himself. He led a productive and fruitful life, while providing a comfortable living for his family. In these days of puerile celebrity culture, he is a role model who deserves to be promoted to our young people.

17:10

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Adam Ingram for securing the debate, which gives us the opportunity to celebrate the life and works of William Murdoch. He was fittingly dubbed "The Scot Who Lit the World" by Janet Thomson in her book of that name, which I will certainly now read. I thank the member for bringing alive the life of William Murdoch so brightly for us today. It was quite inspiring.

As we all know, he was a brilliant figure whose work and innovations played a significant part in the industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries. Of course, he hailed from Lugar in Ayrshire, and I am always happy to celebrate the achievements of one of South Scotland's sons.

Among Murdoch's achievements was the first working model of the steam carriage—or road locomotive, as I understand he preferred to call it—in 1784. Murdoch's innovative idea was to design a three-wheeled vehicle about a foot in height, with, placed between the two larger back wheels, an engine and boiler that had a spirit lamp beneath it to heat the water, and a tiller at the front to turn the smaller front wheel. Murdoch was able to build on the cruder design of engineers such as Nicolas-Joseph Cugnot to design the more efficient model that I have just described. By building that model, he had the honour of creating the first man-made machine that was capable of moving around completely under its own power.

The harnessing of steam power cannot fairly be attributed to one inventor alone, but William Murdoch certainly played a major role in developing a technology that would power the whole industrial world. Indeed, his employer James Watt—another Scot—also played a part in the development of steam power, but is much more celebrated than this modest man was and is. He also built on Murdoch's design by developing a reciprocating engine that was capable of powering a wheel.

As members will be aware, the steam carriage was not Murdoch's most famous invention; he is better known for his 1792 invention of the gas light, as I found out yesterday, which replaced lighting that used oil and tallow. In that sense, he lit the world from his house in Redruth in Cornwall, which was the first in the world to be lit by gas. In my capacity as shadow minister for environment and climate change, I am not accustomed to celebrating the burning of gas, but I will forgive Mr Murdoch this time. After all, his method of lighting was far cleaner and more efficient than earlier methods and I am sure that he would, were he alive today, be at the forefront of sustainable energy design.

There is an air of, if not tragedy, then perhaps bad luck in Murdoch's inventing career. It seems that he was not able to gain full recognition for his inventions through time. He failed to follow up his steam carriage invention, having been dissuaded from pursuing the project further by his employers, so he left further development of the device to other engineers. Patenting of inventions by employers is perhaps a lesson for the whole world and it seems ruthless to us today. He also failed to patent his gas lighting system, because he was advised that it would not make commercial sense. His idea was built on by Friedrich Winzer, who was a German inventor and the person who patented coal gas lighting, in 1804. That is unfortunate, but I am delighted to have heard that William Murdoch received a gold medal, and I am sure that he would have been happy to learn that

he has been given some small recognition in the chamber today.

I hope that our highlighting the achievements that he brought to the industrial revolution will serve as an inspiration to today's men and women inventors in South Scotland and far beyond.

17:05

**Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** I congratulate Adam Ingram on securing this members' business debate, not simply because it allows us to recognise the fact that, through William Murdoch, Scotland gave the world gas lighting, but because it also offers us an opportunity to acknowledge the understated contribution that a range of Scots have made to the creation of the modern world.

If we ask most people to name Scots who have made an impact in creating the world as we know it, I suspect that they will come back with the names Alexander Graham Bell, Alexander Fleming and John Logie Baird, but many more have, like William Murdoch, left their mark on our everyday lives. I suspect that it will not surprise members to learn that I intend to be quite parochial in focusing on that subject.

The county of Angus may be considered by some to be a quiet backwater.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** What do you mean "some"?

**Graeme Dey:** Thank you.

Over the centuries, Angus has punched far above its weight in producing sons and daughters who have gone out into the world and left lasting marks, without perhaps becoming household names. There are obvious examples for those of us who are interested in such matters. There is William Small, the 18th century scholar who was born in Carmyllie and whose influence on Thomas Jefferson was such that that US president described him as the father who inspired him to build the US declaration of independence on Scottish bedrock. That was, of course, a reference to the US declaration of independence being based on the declaration of Arbroath.

We can also point to Sir Robert Alexander Watson-Watt of Brechin, who developed and introduced radar, and, of course, to David Dunbar Buick, who was born in Arbroath in 1854. Buick emigrated to the USA and is credited with having developed a method of bonding enamel to iron for the production of baths and sinks after getting into the plumbing supply business. However, his greater claim to fame is the creation of the Buick manufacturing company to build internal combustion engines and cars. A statue in Buick's honour is to be unveiled in his adopted town—

Flint, in Michigan—later this year, and moves that have been instigated by the Arbroath Guildry Incorporation are afoot in Angus to commemorate him there through the commissioning of a series of statues of famous sons of Arbroath.

It is intended that the statues will include William Small and one Thomas Moonlight. For members who have never heard of Thomas Moonlight, I say that he is reckoned to have been one of the USA's greatest-ever soldiers before he went on to become governor of Wyoming. In that capacity, he pardoned the Sundance Kid, who went on to link up with Butch Cassidy. Perhaps we will gloss over that. I commend the *Daily Mail* to members, although members would not expect a Scottish National Party MSP to say that. In particular, I commend the edition of 27 October, which contained a well-researched tribute to those three men under the heading: "The Scottish town that shaped America".

The contribution that Arbroath and the surrounding area has made to the world has not been confined to the contributions of those three giants. The area also produced James Bowman Lindsay of Carmyllie, who was the scientist who perfected the first constant electric light before Edison and Swan—who are, of course, credited with having invented the light bulb.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Dey, will you be returning to Mr Murdoch at any time soon?

**Graeme Dey:** Yes. I am simply making the point that a real Scottish characteristic is that we have made such a contribution to the world.

As I said, we can consider the number of Scots who have done unsung things in much the way that William Murdoch did. Neil Arnott is credited with having invented the water bed among many other things, and Alexander Shanks was the inventor of the modern lawnmower. As we look across Angus, we cannot forget the likes of J M Barrie and Bon Scott, of AC/DC fame.

Angus is one wee part of Scotland that has given much and is giving much to the world, and it will continue to give much to the world in what I hope is a soon-to-be-independent nation.

17:19

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** I, too, congratulate Adam Ingram on securing the debate, as 2012 marks the 200th anniversary of the Scottish gas industry. The timing of the debate could not be more appropriate.

James Watt, Isambard Kingdom Brunel and Charles Babbage are names that are commonly associated with the industrial revolution, but today it is important to recognise the contributions of

William Murdoch, who would have turned 258 this year, had he been still alive.

As I am sure all members are aware, the great Murdoch was born and bred in Ayrshire in almost the same time and place as Robert Burns and within sight of Boswell's home at Auchinleck. Although much of his professional career was spent in Birmingham and Cornwall, his formative years were spent in Lugar, Cumnock and Auchinleck, where my ancestors came from—my mother always maintained that his family and ours were distantly related.

But back to Murdoch. He is known for his innovations to the steam engine and for creating a prototype steam locomotive in 1784. However, as has been said, he is probably better known for discovering the ability of gas to create light. He first lit his own house in Redruth in Cornwall in 1792, and six years later he used gas to light the main building of the Soho Foundry in Birmingham, where he worked with Matthew Boulton and James Watt. His skill was such that he also worked on one of the first British paddle-steamers to cross the English Channel—the *Caledonia*—and made a number of discoveries in chemistry. It is also reported that, through his father, Murdoch was involved in the construction of one of the bridges over the River Nith.

Boulton described Murdoch as

"the most active man and best engine erector I ever saw"

and while there is no questioning his ability, Murdoch is undoubtedly—as Adam Ingram said—one of the unsung heroes of the industrial revolution. His employers Boulton and Watt are credited with many of his inventions, but correspondence from Boulton in particular indicates the vital contribution that Murdoch made to many—if not all—the Boulton-Watt inventions. Despite his pioneering work with gas, Murdoch derived no significant financial benefit from his invention due to his failure to obtain a patent in his own name.

As is often the case with engineers, Murdoch frequently experimented with technology, and that led him also to devise the first pneumatic message system, which was later developed by the London Pneumatic Dispatch Company and was reportedly adopted by Harrod's. In my childhood, the same system was still in use in Glasgow and Edinburgh shops.

However, it is fair to say that the steam engine was Murdoch's first love, with most of his best work being associated with it. In 1817, after James Watt junior bought the *Caledonia*, Murdoch began on work to make her seaworthy by building and installing new engines and boilers. His engineering genius extended to marine engineering and his work was so successful that Boulton and Watt



even received an order from their competitors for a new steamboat engine. Orders soon followed from commercial customers and the Royal Navy. It is estimated that, from 1813 until 1825, more than 3,000 horsepower of marine engines were made by Boulton and Watt, which powered between 40 and 60 vessels. That was all achieved by a young Ayrshire man with his brilliant mind.

Today, in noting Murdoch's contribution to the industrial revolution and the Scottish enlightenment, the Scottish Parliament gives Murdoch a little more credit for his pioneering work, which he so richly deserves. Well done, Adam Ingram, for drawing Murdoch's contribution to our attention today.

17:23

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I congratulate Adam Ingram on bringing the debate to Parliament.

We have already heard how brilliant William Murdoch was. As we have heard, he invented the steam tricycle, the steam cannon and waterproof paint. He was a man of myriad skills and talents. He invented the oscillating cylinder steam engine, the steam gun and the pneumatic tube message system, and he worked on one of the first steam passenger vessels to cross the English Channel. He also made many discoveries in chemistry.

While working at Redruth in Cornwall, Murdoch dealt with many mechanical problems relating to the steam engine, which is why he was able to come up with so many practical improvements to the basic steam engine designs. There is evidence that, as early as 1782, Murdoch discussed and collaborated with James Watt on a number of inventions and improvements. However, one of his most significant inventions was the sun-and-planet gear, which allowed steam power to be used

"to produce a continued rotative or circular motion round an axis or centre, and thereby to give motion to the wheels of mills or other machines."

Murdoch was also the first person to demonstrate a steam carriage, which he did in Rivers's great room at the King's Head hotel, Truro—the first public demonstration in Britain of such steam locomotion.

Murdoch also experimented with chemistry. In 1784, he discovered iron cement, which was made from sal ammoniac—or ammonium chloride—and iron filings. In 1795, Murdoch developed a replacement for isinglass, a precipitate that was made from sturgeon that was used to clarify beer to remove impurities. There was very little limit to the man's incredible genius.

The North River Steamboat, the first steamboat to run on the Hudson River, was to a large extent

designed by Murdoch, who built the engine and agreed the technical details. In 1815, he designed and installed the first gravity-fed piped hot-water system since classical times at Leamington Spa baths. At the celebration of the centenary of gas lighting in 1892, a bust of Murdoch was unveiled by Lord Kelvin—who, of course, had a house in Largs, in my constituency—in the Wallace monument in Stirling. There is also a bust of Murdoch by Sir Francis Legatt Chantrey at St Mary's church.

The town of Redruth celebrates Murdoch day every year in June. The 2007 event included a parade of schoolchildren with banners on the theme of earth, wind, fire and water and the first public journey of a full-size working reproduction of Murdoch's steam carriage.

Truly, Murdoch was an incredible Scot. We have heard about many other great Scots. I recommend the book "How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World & Everything in It"—or "The Scottish Enlightenment: the Scots' Invention of the Modern World"—by Dr Arthur Herman, who is the co-ordinator of the western civilization programme at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC.

I will mention some other great Scots from the wonderful county of Ayrshire. There is of course Henry Faulds from Beith in my constituency—the Scottish physician, missionary and scientist who developed fingerprinting. There is John Boyd Orr, who was the first person to make the link between poverty and nutrition. We also have Thomas Brisbane, the Largs astronomer, and Alexander Fleming, the biologist and pharmacologist. John Kerr from Ardrossan in my constituency discovered the quadratic electro-optic effect, which is a change in the refractive index of a material in response to an electric field—now known as the Kerr effect, as I am sure members will know. There have been many other great Scots, such as William Dunlop Brackenridge, Robert Simson, John Loudon McAdam and John Morton Boyd CBE.

It is important that Scots are encouraged to learn about the famous Scots from their small towns and communities. I mentioned Dr Henry Faulds from Beith in Ayrshire. The Rev Witherspoon, who wrote the American declaration of independence and founded Princeton University, was the minister in Beith, yet many people in the town probably do not realise that. We should give people some pride in their towns and counties by telling them about what Scotland has contributed in the past. That would be an inspiration to our young people and would allow many more of them to become the best that they can be. Perhaps in future years and generations,

we will produce people of the genius of William Murdoch.

17:28

**Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):**

I, too, congratulate my colleague Adam Ingram on securing the debate and on his extremely informative speech, from which I certainly learned many things that I did not already know regarding William Murdoch. As my colleague highlighted, there is a reception in the garden lobby following the debate to tie in with the gas@200 celebrations, and all members are more than welcome to attend.

It was pointed out that Murdoch failed to profit from his invention because he did not patent it, but it is also worth noting that Boulton and Watt also failed to recognise the potential of the domestic market and the major contribution that Murdoch's invention had made and that they abandoned the gas market in 1814. Given the many inventions that they patented, that was perhaps a major error on their part.

Kenneth Gibson talked about Murdoch's discovery in 1795 of an alternative to isinglass, which is a substance used in the brewing industry to remove impurities. It is actually obtained, rather tastefully, from the swim bladder of fish. In 1795, when Murdoch made his discovery, isinglass was exclusively produced from sturgeon—specifically, beluga sturgeon—which was extremely expensive to import and cost the brewing industry a great deal. Murdoch discovered that it was possible to substitute dried cod for sturgeon, which made the brewing industry a significant saving. Indeed, it was considered such a significant discovery that the Committee of London Brewers paid him £2,000—which, at that time, was a fairly substantial sum—to use his invention and end their dependence on imports.

Members have gone through the list of the various inventions in which Mr Murdoch played a significant part, even if he did not develop them entirely himself. It strikes me as rather odd that, when I went through school, his was not one of the prominent names that were mentioned. I think of a recent episode of "QI", in which Stephen Fry listed all the things that were invented by Scots. The list was extensive, but not necessarily exhaustive, because I am pretty sure that some of the inventions that we have spoken about this evening did not feature in it. Perhaps that highlights the need to make people more aware of individuals such as Murdoch and the significant contributions that they have made to the world.

I am a representative of the north-east of Scotland. The gas industry is a major employer there and an important part of the north-east and

wider Scottish economy. In Peterhead, we have the St Fergus gas terminal, which is a massive facility and a significant employer. I am sure that the debate is fascinating for those who are interested in seeing how different Scots contributed to the modern world, but we should not forget that many people also now owe their employment and livelihoods to the discoveries that were made by people such as William Murdoch.

It is only right and proper that my colleague Adam Ingram secured the debate to highlight Mr Murdoch's fantastic achievements. Let us hope that, as we move forward, those achievements are recognised more fully by Scots throughout our nation.

17:32

**The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing):**

I thank Adam Ingram for bringing this most interesting topic before the parliamentary chamber and commencing the debate with such a vivid picture of the achievements and life of William Murdoch. I also thank all members who participated in the debate for adding to that picture.

As we heard, William Murdoch was born in the Ayrshire village of Lugar. I understand that he is still greatly celebrated in the town of Redruth in Cornwall, which holds an annual Murdoch day in June. He was an extraordinary man of remarkable insight and wide-ranging achievements. We owe a debt—not for the first time—to Kenneth Gibson in particular for pointing out how wide-ranging those achievements were. Mr Murdoch's achievements included the steam engine and beer clarifying—a quite extraordinary width of achievement—but he is perhaps most widely recognised for his work producing coal gas and inventing the first domestic gas lighting system.

In 1792, Mr Murdoch first began experimenting with coal to produce gas and, through his hard work, innovation and genius, discovered the best method for quality gas production. He designed the system for transporting, storing and purifying gas and using it for lighting. That invention truly transformed the world. It led the way for the gas industry's massive contribution to civilisation. Where would we be without it? We would not have the heat and light that we take for granted.

The motion welcomes the celebrations surrounding the 200th anniversary of the gas industry. Mark McDonald alluded to the fact that he is hosting an event this evening at which we can come together and mark the successes of that bicentenary.

I hope that it is relevant—primarily because of the first sentence of the motion—for me to talk a little about the gas industry. The oil and gas

industry supports around 440,000 jobs in the United Kingdom and 200,000 jobs in Scotland, and has generated almost £300,000 million in tax revenue at today's prices.

I recently had the opportunity to visit the St Fergus gas terminal. I took a tour of the site and visited the control room that monitors and controls the flow of gas from three companies—Total, Shell and Apache—into the national transmission system, which is the motorway pipeline that transports natural gas around the country.

I hope that it is also relevant to point out that the oil and gas strategy that the First Minister launched in May sets out a clear support plan of which William Murdoch would, I hope, have approved. The plan recognises that we want to maximise recovery of oil and gas reserves so that they are not wasted by lying unexploited in the sea bed. We want to raise the rate of exploitation from 40 per cent, as 60 per cent is currently wasted. It is surely not green to waste any product, whether it is water, food or fuel, and it is green to maximise the recovery of our oil and gas reserves. I will throw an interesting statistic into the debate, which William Murdoch paved the way for us to achieve: for every 1 per cent of extra oil and gas that we can recover, the tax take is £22,000 million.

The ingenuity that William Murdoch displayed is shown by many other Scots in expanding the scope of our gas industry. For example, I had the pleasure of meeting a gentleman from Shetland called Ian McKinnon when I visited Houston in April this year. He is now at the forefront of a company that started from an incubator unit in Houston that Scottish Development International set up, and he is en route to turning over millions of dollars in the shale gas industry. He was able to increase the efficacy and value of shale gas that is recovered by managing the waste solutions, which shows that Scottish engineers are continuing the tradition of ingenuity.

We are on the verge—we hope—of seeing in Scotland the beginning of a carbon capture and storage industry that will allow us to extract the carbon emissions from coal and gas power production and enable us to achieve European Union emissions targets. CCS plans can potentially be applied to the Peterhead project, which is a joint venture between Scottish and Southern Energy and Shell. A 340 MW post-combustion capture is to be retrofitted to the existing 1180 MW combined cycle gas turbine power station at Peterhead, subject of course to a planning application that will be considered in due course.

There, again, the gas industry is set—we hope—to play a leading role in this country. Without William Murdoch's invention, we would not perhaps be where we are now.

Gas continues to play a massive part in our economy. The industry in Scotland is hugely successful. The National Grid plays an important role in keeping the lights on, in relation to security of supply in the United Kingdom. I am glad that representatives from the National Grid will attend this evening's event, including Mike Calviou, the director of transmission, and Duncan Birt, whom I met earlier today.

It is right to mark the achievements of the gas industry in Scotland as well as the extraordinarily inventive mind and works of William Murdoch. We have also had interesting little diversions into the notable success of Angus and Ayrshire—in fact, there seems to be some sort of unofficial competition going on about which of those two esteemed counties produced more inventors. I am sure that Mr Dey and Mr Gibson will carry on that competition at some later date.

I conclude by paying tribute to William Murdoch. Mr Ingram mentioned that Mr Murdoch was not a man who bothered to seek for himself credit for the many inventions that he gave the world. Ronald Reagan once said that it is amazing what you can achieve in life if you do not mind who gets the credit. Perhaps that comment can be applied to William Murdoch—a great Scot, and the Scot who lit the world.

*Meeting closed at 17:40.*



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