



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 5 September 2013

Session 4

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## Scottish Parliament

Thursday 5 September 2013

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 11:40*]

### Business Motion

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Good morning. The first item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-07588, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the business programme for today.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 5 September 2013—

after

*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: High Speed Rail (Preparation) Bill – UK Legislation

insert

*followed by* Proposal for European Union Legislation: Motion of the Committee—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## General Question Time

11:40

### Glasgow Airport (Aecom)

**1. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when Transport Scotland received Aecom's initial recommendations on public transport infrastructure options relating to Glasgow airport. (S4O-02342)

**The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown):** Transport Scotland has been working with the group led by Glasgow airport on future surface access to the airport since 2010. That client group received the completed initial appraisal report on the Glasgow airport strategic transport network study from Aecom on 29 August 2013. The study includes a range of options across all modes of transport, which are recommended to be taken forward to detailed appraisal.

**Mark Griffin:** Regarding the delay in publishing that report, it was reported that initial findings were given to Transport Scotland as early as April. That came alongside news that the last plot of Glasgow airport rail link land was sold back to the original owner for £50,000, which, at almost £800,000 less than they were originally paid, highlights the folly of the Government's scorched-earth policy on GARL. What cumulative loss was made by the Government in disposing of land that had been purchased for the GARL project?

**Keith Brown:** First, I welcome Mark Griffin to his new position. I also congratulate him on his engagement over the summer.

Mark Griffin's question has a fundamental flaw. The land that was purchased that he mentioned was initially purchased by Strathclyde partnership for transport, not by the Government, although the Government subsequently bought it from SPT. He might wish to address some questions to SPT about that.

We have just had the initial appraisal report. There is no question that the Government is delaying. The first time that it came to the notice of the client partners—the lead partner is Glasgow airport, not the Scottish Government, and the other two partners are Glasgow City Council and Renfrewshire Council—it was the two councils that asked for substantial changes to the initial recommendations, which had to be worked through. There is no question of any delay. There have been substantial benefits in the Paisley corridor and improvements in the area, paid for by the Government. The cancellation of the GARL project saved £176 million.

Of course there has been a cost, because land was purchased at the height of the market and then sold during a recession—there is no question about that. However, let us compare that with reports that Mark Griffin talks about. Those reports refer to the £2 billion of additional costs for the aircraft carriers that the Labour Party signed up to, and the point that he raises today seems a much smaller matter.

We took the right decision on GARL at the time, and our position remains the same. The Government will not be funding a heavy-rail link to Glasgow airport, albeit that the report recommends that such a link may be investigated if a private sector bid comes forward; the Government would of course consider that.

**James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab):** Which Government minister authorised the sale of the land that was referred to in *The Herald's* report this morning?

**Keith Brown:** The sale of the land had to proceed from the decision that was taken by Parliament in the budget paper that was agreed. That falls under the Crichton Down rules. Like any other public authority, the Government is obliged to sell that land—there is no option but to do that. We did the right thing. If James Kelly thinks that it was the wrong thing, perhaps he should talk to his colleagues at Westminster and have the primary legislation changed.

### Civil Emergencies

**2. John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to review its arrangements for dealing with civil emergencies. (S4O-02343)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** Recent events and emergencies, ranging from the London Olympics to abnormally severe weather, have shown that the Scottish Government's arrangements for dealing with emergencies remain sound. However, we continue to keep them under constant review and to refine them when lessons are identified, either during exercises or during real emergencies.

**John Finnie:** I recently lodged a parliamentary question to ask the Scottish Government

"whether it maintains details of companies based in Scotland that are involved in research into, development or manufacture of armaments."

In response, I was told:

"The Scottish Government does not maintain a central list of companies".—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 16 July 2013; S4W-15197.]

If that is the case, how can the cabinet secretary assure the public that all contingencies to cover civil emergencies are in place?

**Kenny MacAskill:** Civil emergencies cover a broad spectrum. The Government does not maintain a central list of companies that are based in Scotland and involved in research into the development and manufacture of armaments, and neither do the enterprise agencies.

It is clear that the Government—and the Scottish National Party, as Mr Finnie knows—has a view on the sale of armaments. However, some of the issues can become quite complex. Certain technologies are developed through the military that have civilian and police benefits. That does not apply only to the internet. For example, the automatic number plate recognition system started out as a military development, but is now used to a great extent by the police and has been very well received by them. Such things are a matter of balance. There are political issues involving areas of conflict in which we would not support armament sales, but it is equally clear that certain developments by the military such as the internet and the ANPR system bring significant benefits for society and for civilian policing.

**Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary will be aware that Dumfries and Galloway Council's application for support under the Bellwin scheme to help it to meet the costs of the severe weather in March as an emergency was deemed to be ineligible under the scheme's rules. In that instance, both the threshold for assistance and the criteria were against the council, which nevertheless accumulated considerable costs as a result of the weather.

Will the cabinet secretary look at what may still be done to support Dumfries and Galloway Council through other methods?

**Kenny MacAskill:** I have no doubt that my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth will be happy to do that. The Scottish Government activated the Bellwin scheme following the severe snow storms in March. The claim that Dumfries and Galloway Council submitted was considered fully but deemed to be ineligible as it fell within the 0.2 per cent threshold that local authorities maintain in their annual budgets to deal with unforeseen emergencies.

I appreciate that the extreme weather had a financial impact in the area, and additional support is being provided. For example, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment announced last week that more than £730,000 in fallen stock payments has now reached the bank accounts of more than 4,000 farmers throughout Scotland. More than half of those funds have gone to farmers in south-west Scotland.

We are happy to consider further assistance through existing available funding streams if an application meets the criteria.

### School Estates

**3. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what statutory duties local education authorities must consider when reorganising school estates. (S4O-02344)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** Under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, education authorities have a duty to ensure the

“adequate and efficient provision of school education”

in their area.

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 sets out the consultation process that an education authority must—and I stress “must”—follow when it is proposing changes to its school estate, such as school closures, relocations and changes to catchment areas.

**George Adam:** Does the cabinet secretary share my concern about the rationalisation of the school estate throughout the Renfrewshire Council area and the Labour-led council’s strategy to avoid statutory requirements? Is that not a prime example of how Labour is determined to make the closure of schools a much easier process?

**Michael Russell:** I understand that Renfrewshire Council plans to carry out a preliminary consultation on a range of options for reorganisation of its school estate. I encourage George Adam’s constituents to respond to the consultation so that their views can be taken into account.

Where a council decides to take forward a relevant proposal under the 2010 act to close or relocate a school, there must be no doubt that there is a clear statutory consultation process that it must—I repeat “must”—follow.

I expect Renfrewshire Council—and every council—to follow the law and engage in an open and honest discussion with the community that it serves about any school closure proposal. I also expect educational benefit for the affected children to be central to any and every such proposal.

### NHS Lanarkshire (Hospital Standardised Mortality Rates)

**4. John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when ministers last met NHS Lanarkshire to discuss hospital standardised mortality rates. (S4O-02345)

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** I chaired NHS Lanarkshire’s annual review in Hamilton on 29 August, at which the

recently published hospital standardised mortality rates were discussed.

Ministers and officials regularly engage with all national health service boards—including NHS Lanarkshire—to discuss matters of importance to local people.

**John Pentland:** I thank the minister for that response, but when we look at the mortality rates, there is a marked inconsistency of approach. On the one hand, Wishaw is now being investigated after the figure was 10 per cent higher than expected last quarter, although it was average or below average for the previous three quarters; on the other hand, Monklands’ figure was high throughout the year—it went from 9 per cent to more than 38 per cent, with 80 unexpected deaths—without any investigation until now. Why did it take so long for the alarm bells to ring at Monklands? Should the minister now be considering an independent inquiry into NHS Lanarkshire as a whole?

**Michael Matheson:** It is important to recognise that there has been variation across the three hospital sites within NHS Lanarkshire around hospital standardised mortality rates, which has been picked up over several quarters. NHS Lanarkshire has been reviewing its processes and practices to see what it must do to address that issue, and it brought forward a programme of work that it intended to take forward to address the specific issues.

However, in light of the most recent data, Professor Jason Leach, from the Scottish Government, felt it prudent to appoint a specialist team to go in and undertake an independent review of the progress that has been made within NHS Lanarkshire. We expect to receive the review report from Healthcare Improvement Scotland by the end of this year. At that point, we will be able to identify the factors that have resulted in a higher mortality level in the three sites in NHS Lanarkshire. It is likely that there will be a number of different issues, but it is important that we take the right amount of time to investigate the matter thoroughly and then take appropriate measures as necessary to address it.

### Common Agricultural Policy Reform (Funds)

**5. Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made on distributing the funds arising from reforms to the common agricultural policy. (S4O-02346)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead):** During the recent European negotiations, we were profoundly disappointed that the United Kingdom Government did not attempt to negotiate better

budget allocations for Scotland, given our very poor share of CAP funds. However, we are, of course, currently negotiating Scotland's share of the UK's CAP budget with the UK Government and other devolved Administrations. We hope that the UK Government will finally recognise our case and agree to give Scotland's farmers a much fairer allocation of available funds.

**Rob Gibson:** Can the minister explain how much support will be lost to Scotland's rural economy under the new CAP through the UK Government's failure to press the case for Scotland's high-quality produce that comes from areas of natural constraint, such as exist in my constituency?

**Richard Lochhead:** That is a very good point. Scotland went into the negotiations with the fourth-lowest level in Europe of direct payments for farmers and the lowest level of payments in Europe for wider rural development measures. Under the funding formula that was adopted during the recent negotiations, no member state will receive less than the average of €196 per hectare by 2019. If Scotland had been a member state, that would have delivered an uplift of around €1 billion to Scotland—an increase of around 30 per cent—by 2019-20. As matters stand, of course, we are part of the UK, so the UK will qualify for perhaps up to €60 million by 2020, rising from €10 million in 2014. At the very least, that money should come to Scotland because the UK qualifies only because of Scotland, so the money belongs to Scotland and Scotland's rural communities. That is what we will demand, but it is nothing in comparison with the €1 billion that we will lose out on because we are not a member state in our own right.

### Underoccupancy Charge (Bedroom Tax)

**6. Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact the underoccupancy charge, which is commonly known as the bedroom tax, is having on communities in Scotland. (S4O-02347)

**The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess):** The Department for Work and Pensions' underoccupancy charge is affecting 82,500 households in Scotland, of which 63,500 contain an adult with a disability and 15,500 contain children. We estimate the average reduction to be around £11 per week per household.

**Jamie Hepburn:** During the recess, we saw Labour-controlled North Lanarkshire Council threaten to evict a severely disabled single mum suffering the bedroom tax and, reportedly, the council leader turning up on her doorstep to harangue her rather than assist her. Does the minister agree that that conduct was shameful, as

was North Lanarkshire Labour's vote on the council against Scottish National Party councillors' motion in favour of a no bedroom tax eviction policy?

**Margaret Burgess:** Like, I am sure, everyone in the chamber, I was very concerned to read about the possible eviction of a disabled lady due to the bedroom tax; in particular, I was concerned that the local authority may have made an error in classifying the tenant as underoccupying her home, when she had said that she had a son and daughter living with her. I therefore wrote to the chief executive of North Lanarkshire Council and asked him to review the case. The response that I received a week later confirmed only that the eviction was not pending. I think that that case highlights the dreadful effect that the bedroom tax is having on Scottish society and why this Government believes that it should be scrapped.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I am sure that the minister will be equally concerned about threatened evictions in East Ayrshire and Clackmannanshire. I think that that makes the point.

Will the minister take this opportunity to tell the Parliament whether the Scottish National Party will support my member's bill to protect all tenants across Scotland from eviction arising from the bedroom tax—that is something that she can do now—or will she make people wait until 2017?

**Margaret Burgess:** I will say a couple of things on Ms Baillie's Labour-come-lately proposal. It is pure hypocrisy. I like a bit of political ding-dong like anyone else, but the issue is far too important for this kind of political opportunism. The Scottish Government has consistently said that we oppose the bedroom tax. We encouraged our SNP councils six months ago not to carry out evictions. We are talking about real people out there. I want to say something important, because we should not have people frightened out there: to date, there have been no evictions in Scotland because of the bedroom tax.

We will continue to talk to councils and work with stakeholders, and we will continue to look at every constructive proposal to mitigate the impact of the bedroom tax, but the hypocrisy of Labour at this stage is almost overwhelmingly unbelievable. We are consistent on the bedroom tax, but Labour has not been. I say to the people of Scotland that we continue to work with stakeholders, who are genuinely concerned about the impact that the bedroom tax is having on real people in all our communities. We will continue to do that until we get a yes vote in the referendum. Until then, we will ensure that we protect the people of Scotland from the United Kingdom Government and Labour policies.



## General Practitioners

**7. Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it supports GP practices. (S4O-02348)

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** The more Scottish GP contract in Scotland will bring real benefits for patients while reducing bureaucracy and enabling GPs to spend more time with their patients. General practice is at the heart of the vision for healthcare in Scotland, ensuring that the people of Scotland are provided with better care in their homes and communities and helping them to live longer and healthier lives.

Last year, the Scottish Government invested more than £757 million to deliver primary medical services, and this year it has increased funding to general practice by £8 million.

**Margaret McDougall:** The focus on reducing the pressures that are placed on hospitals has moved certain responsibilities, including responsibility for programmes such as detect cancer early, to primary care. Doctors' practices are expected to handle pre-op care and reduce the prevalence of unscheduled care demands at accident and emergency units, and they have seen an increase in demand for appointments as a result of demographic shifts and because of the pressures of recent changes in benefit qualifications. What steps is the Government taking to ensure that primary care is properly resourced and does not become the poor relation of the national health service?

**Michael Matheson:** We have taken forward a range of measures, including making sure that the level of general practitioners available in Scotland is increasing, to help to support the provision of primary healthcare services in our communities.

The member will recognise that the increasing pressure that our GPs find themselves under because of the welfare reform changes has not come about as a result of the actions of this Government. I would prefer to be in a position where we could influence welfare policy to make sure that it aligns more effectively with our healthcare policy in Scotland, rather than having a system imposed on us that causes unintended consequences in the Scottish healthcare service. However, we will continue to ensure that we support our general practitioners to provide the best possible care in the primary care setting in Scotland, and we will continue to take forward those measures in the years to come.

## First Minister's Question Time

11:59

### Engagements

**1. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-01524)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** Engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

**Johann Lamont:** I thank the First Minister.

Nicola Sturgeon's department told the Public Audit Committee that her five biggest transport projects cost £3.3 billion. The true figure is £3.8 billion—half a billion pounds more. Why did Nicola Sturgeon mislead Parliament and the people of Scotland in that way?

**The First Minister:** Johann Lamont should catch up with the evidence that the permanent secretary gave to the relevant committee yesterday, which made it quite clear that there were no mistakes and that there was no misleading. The question was whether we consider the cost of a project or the cost of things like buying land to prepare for a project. There are many arguments for considering the cost of a project, showing the economic value and showing what is actually done in building the project.

What Johann Lamont should be concentrating on is the extraordinary success of the non-profit-distributing programme, which is building schools, hospitals and colleges around the country. In Glasgow, in particular, the new colleges will help to revitalise further and higher education in the city.

**Johann Lamont:** I assure the First Minister that I did catch up with the evidence to the Public Audit Committee yesterday, which was described as insulting to this Parliament. I cannot believe that the Scottish Government thought that we could build a railway without needing to pay for the land on which it would go—I do not know whether Nicola thought that she was going to build a transatlantic monorail.

I think that the First Minister does not understand why people think that he is out of touch. When he is shown a £500 million discrepancy, he does not try to explain it. Instead, he tries to explain it away. That is simply not good enough.

Nicola Sturgeon seems to be running her department with the same competence with which she is running the yes campaign. She missed half a billion pounds. Let me explain what that buys: it

buys nearly 14,000 teachers; it pays for 16,000 nurses; and—let me say so that the First Minister, in his world, can understand—it buys nigh on 1,000 trips to the Ryder cup.

Was Nicola Sturgeon being deliberately misleading, or is her eye off rising costs to the taxpayer because she is too busy watching the yes campaign's support going down?

**The First Minister:** It is obvious that the long summer of inactivity over the past few months has not improved Johann Lamont's temper. I could point out that half a billion pounds is one two-hundredth of the estimated lifetime cost of the Trident missile system, which is so beloved of Labour and the Tories.

I know that Johann Lamont and the Conservatives are welded together in the better together campaign, but her quoting a Conservative MSP, as definitive proof, really is evidence that the rest of Scotland would find rather tame and insubstantial.

The £500 million that Johann Lamont is pointing to is money that is spent to prepare for vital infrastructure projects, such as the money spent on the M74 and the M80, the money spent to buy the land for the peripheral route that is coming to the north-east of Scotland, and the money spent in acquiring the land for the vital hospital and other projects that are taking place around the country.

Johann Lamont wants to trade on capital spending. NPD replaced the private finance initiative, through which people ended up paying multiples of 10 of the original capital cost, because of the Labour Party's total inability to negotiate with private financiers to get a good deal for the public. That is why the £2.5 billion NPD programme is revitalising the capital infrastructure of Scotland in the face of punitive cuts from the Tories and Liberals in Westminster.

**Johann Lamont:** I am glad to see that the squirrel is back, refreshed after its holidays.

In the real world, it is beyond belief that that is a suitable response from someone who is charged with not knowing where half a billion pounds is. You have found half a billion pounds missing and you need to take responsibility—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Order!

**Johann Lamont:** Of course, in the First Minister's world, that was an explanation. However, if his answer is true, why has the Auditor General for Scotland Caroline Gardner described the Government figures as "incomplete" and "inconsistent"? Why was Peter Housden hauled before the Public Audit Committee yesterday to be dealt with by all the parliamentarians, not just the convener? Was he to be a scapegoat?

Whether he is sneaking into primary schools the back way or fêting Rupert Murdoch at Bute house, the First Minister at the first sniff of trouble refers himself to Peter Housden, knowing that he will be cleared. Now Nicola Sturgeon gets to use Sir Peter as a human shield.

Perhaps they do not know this on the Scottish National Party benches, but we live in an era in which, for too many families, every penny is a prisoner and in which families are putting back on to supermarket shelves treats and even basic goods that they used to be able to afford. How, in that climate, can this Government have got its figures wrong by half a billion pounds?

**The First Minister:** The half a billion pounds has been spent on things such as site preparation. I say to Johann Lamont that it cannot be spent again on the list of things that she has put forward. If she does not think that that money should be spent, by definition she does not think that these capital projects should have gone ahead.

By any acknowledgement, the non-profit-distribution trust is far better than the PFI paraded by the Labour Party. Even George Osborne—belatedly, I have to admit—has started to slate PFI as a dreadful use of taxpayers' money.

I do not think that Johann Lamont should be accusing civil servants who cannot answer back of a variety of things. As for visits to Aberdeen primary schools, I point out that the response to a freedom of information request totally vindicates our position, just as the people of Aberdeen Donside vindicated the SNP in the by-election.

**Johann Lamont:** The First Minister is not on good land when he talks about civil servants being unable to defend themselves. This is the First Minister who gave us the most accurate answer ever given to any Parliament and then had to come back at 5 o'clock to bravely blame the civil servants for making a mistake. This is about ministerial accountability and responsibility, not about scapegoating civil servants. Over the summer, Alex Salmond promised every Scot a £300,000 North Sea dividend after separation. Now we know that his figures have a half-billion-pound margin of error.

Here is why this matters and what people fear. In the increasingly unlikely event that Scotland votes to leave the United Kingdom, we will find out the day after the referendum that everything that the First Minister claimed before on the currency, on pensions, on welfare, on oil revenues and on corporation tax was possibly incomplete and inconsistent and he will tell the nation, "Sorry—it was the civil servants' fault". Is it not the case that ministers are spending their time on their separation obsession that most Scots reject, and that while their campaigning is failing to convince

Scots this SNP Government is failing to run the country?

**The First Minister:** So, after two months of preparation, that is the exact extent of Johann Lamont's questioning. Last year, the summer climaxed with the something for nothing society; this year, we had the summer of nothing from Johann Lamont, and her rehearsing of her questions did not improve them.

Johann Lamont said that I was misleading about the wholesale value of North Sea oil. The £1.5 trillion—incidentally, that is one thousand billion—is the estimated value of the resource over the next 40 years. I have to say that I find it interesting that she compared the figures with the Treasury paper on this issue—Johann Lamont and the Tories: better together. I had a wee look at that paper, which estimates the value of revenues over the next 18 years. Why are the Treasury and the Labour Party telling people that there are only 18 years of North Sea oil and gas production? I find that very interesting, because a couple of years ago the Prime Minister was declaring that the Clair field would last until 2050. Why on earth does the Treasury talk about the next 18 years when the Prime Minister talks about the Clair ridge development lasting until 2050?

The attempt by Johann Lamont and the Tories to underestimate the value of Scotland's resources is not a recent phenomenon; it goes back to the 1970s and the 1980s. How do we know that? Denis Healey, thankfully still alive, blew the gaff when he said that there had been a deliberate underestimation of North Sea oil value in order to try to stop the Scottish nationalists.

Of course, Denis Healey said that it was mainly the Tories who did that. I think that it was both the Tories and the Labour Party. Better together means very little to the people of Scotland.

### Prime Minister (Meetings)

**2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S4F-01509)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** No plans in the immediate future.

**Ruth Davidson:** Last week, Audit Scotland told us that, in 2011-12, Scotland's colleges were forced to cut 1,200 members of staff and that 48,000 student places had gone, along with 5 million teaching hours. However, it did not tell us how many college courses have been cut. Can the First Minister?

**The First Minister:** The SNP's manifesto commitment was to maintain full-time numbers in colleges—that is, people studying full-time courses. The reason why we do that is to prepare

people for employment. We have met that commitment.

As Ruth Davidson perhaps knows, recent statistics show a record number of Scottish students in full-time higher education.

**Members:** That is higher education.

**The First Minister:** We do higher education in colleges. I do not know whether the Labour Party is aware of that.

That number contrasts with the nose-diving figures from south of the border, where the Tories are in control. That is why Scottish students are better off with this Scottish National Party Government.

**Ruth Davidson:** I am sure that that is all very comforting to the 48,000 people who have missed out, but it failed to answer the simple question that I asked: how many courses have been cut from colleges across Scotland?

The First Minister clearly does not know, so I will tell him. It is 614 in the past three years. Although the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has previously dismissed those courses as "hobby courses", they include plumbing, veterinary nursing and information technology.

The record is that there are fewer teaching staff, fewer hours taught, fewer students in the classroom and fewer courses to choose from, and all because Alex Salmond has raided college budgets to the tune of £34 million.

Just yesterday, Michael Russell made the ridiculous assertion:

"Every young person in Scotland knows that progress is being made."—[*Official Report*, 05 September; c 21983.]

If this is progress, how bad must things get before he accepts that there is a problem?

This cannot go on. With the budget due next week, can the First Minister confirm that there will be no more cuts to our colleges?

**The First Minister:** Ruth Davidson seems to have forgotten that the last time she read out a list of courses it was found that some of the courses that she said had ended were actually still in existence. I have never known of people going back to their previous mistakes.

Let us look at the exact figures. The record-high number of young people attending full-time courses at college—funded full-time—increased from 59,605 in 2010-11 to 61,304 in 2011-12. We have concentrated on full-time college courses. We have done that because it prepares people for employment.

On any measure, whether it be funding, number of students or full-time courses, or investment in

the capital infrastructure of colleges across Scotland, from Glasgow to Kilmarnock and from Inverness to Forth Valley College, the record in Scotland is inconceivably better than the record south of the border. Looking at the decimation of the colleges and universities in England under the Tory-Liberal Administration, no one could possibly want anything other than for our colleges and universities to be under Scottish control.

Scottish control means a record number of full-time students. Tory control from London means a diminution of students, a diminution of prospects for young people and a policy of despair across the country.

### **Cabinet (Meetings)**

#### **3. Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):**

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-01521)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** Issues of importance to the people of Scotland will be discussed.

**Willie Rennie:** This week, 130,000 two-year-olds have been able to go through the doors of nurseries in England to start their free education. How many two-year-olds are receiving free education in Scotland?

**The First Minister:** As Willie Rennie knows, we have extended the provision to looked-after two-year-olds and we have expanded provision for three and four-year-olds to, from next year, 600 hours from 412.5 hours under the previous Labour-Liberal Administration.

I am puzzled by Willie Rennie's continuing the argument, given the information that is coming to light about the much-vaunted scheme south of the border. Before the recess, we discussed at several First Minister's question times whether there would be a diminution in the quality, standards and numbers in childcare provision south of the border. Willie Rennie told me that that was nonsense, but Nick Clegg then made that exact issue a major controversy in the coalition Government.

Willie Rennie should look at what is now being reported about the uptake and availability of places in England at present. Many people are saying that, because of nursery closures, there will be no nurseries for children to go to.

**Willie Rennie:** The First Minister does not seem to recognise that the child to staff ratios in Scotland are the worst on these islands, and have been throughout his whole term of office. It is surprising that he does not seem to know how many two-year-olds are receiving free education in Scotland, because I suspect that he knew that I was going to ask the question. This is something

that he has the powers to do today. He does not have to wait for independence, but he is going to give two-year-olds what they need only when he gets what he wants. The First Minister has chosen to deny children in Scotland something that children in England are getting.

**Members:** Oh!

**Willie Rennie:** The SNP back benchers should listen, because that provision is changing the life chances of children in England but is being denied to children in Scotland. Will the First Minister change his mind, or is he going to continue to be the stubborn First Minister that he has always been, on the issue?

**The First Minister:** When we discussed the matter previously, Willie Rennie denied that there was going to be a diminution in the quality of childcare standards in England. Then, on 5 June, Nick Clegg

"confirmed that the changes to ratios for pre-school children that were consulted on earlier in the year will not go ahead."

Why are they not going ahead, given my warning about the English situation? Why was there such an argument within the coalition Government?

Willie Rennie does himself less than credit not to acknowledge that the provision of 600 hours from next year is a substantial achievement in the extension of provision for three and four-year-olds from the 412.5 hours that we inherited. As I have already told him, we are extending the provision to looked-after two-year-olds, as well.

What worries me is that after the experience that Willie Rennie had following our previous debate about whether there was an attempt to diminish standards in England, he is now ignoring the reality that is being reported south of the border. The BBC has reported that nursery closures mean that there might not be enough places to deliver two-year-olds' promised entitlement. The chief executive of the Family and Childcare Trust is quoted on the BBC website this week as saying:

"We are concerned that the loss of nursery provision in children's centres is impacting on local authorities' ability to find sufficient places for the offer. ... Cost savings have driven nursery closures and this approach reduces capacity in the system".

Willie Rennie should look at what is happening under the Tory-Liberal Government south of the border. One thing that he can be sure of is that the commitment to 600 hours for three and four-year-olds—which is up from the 412.5 hours that we inherited—will be met, is properly funded and will be a substantial enhancement to childcare in Scotland.

### Syria (Humanitarian Aid)

**4. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister, in light of its providing assistance to non-governmental organisations supporting humanitarian projects in Syria, what recent discussions the Scottish Government has had with the UK Government regarding the provision of humanitarian aid. (S4F-01517)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** I am sure that all members share the concern for the millions of innocent men, women and children who have had to flee their homes as a result of the conflict in Syria. The Minister for External Affairs and International Development, Humza Yousaf, is in regular contact with the UK Government on humanitarian issues, including the situation in Syria, and is due to speak with Foreign Office minister Alistair Burt later today.

As members will be aware, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Mike Russell, announced in Parliament yesterday that the Scottish Government will provide a further £100,000 to the Disasters Emergency Committee's appeal for Syria. That will bring our contribution to £200,000 in total. The announcement was welcomed by the Disasters Emergency Committee. The funds will be spent by some of the leading agencies that are working in the region that are funding food, shelter and the provision of clean water for the men, women and children who are fleeing the conflict.

**Jim Eadie:** I thank the First Minister for that answer and for the additional funding that was announced by the Scottish Government.

Will the First Minister join me and all members in the chamber in expressing our solidarity with the people of Syria, one third of whom have now been displaced in the conflict? Will he do all that he can, including discussing the matter with the UK Government, to ensure that agencies that are active on the ground, for example Oxfam, are given every possible assistance to ensure that they can provide the emergency aid that is so desperately required to address what has now become a major refugee and humanitarian crisis?

**The First Minister:** Yes, I can give that commitment. Let me say that it is really important that after the vote—which I supported—in the Westminster Parliament, there should not be a political vacuum. There should be concentration on reinforcing international diplomatic efforts and on humanitarian aid. Of course, we also need to ensure that anyone who is accused of committing a war crime such as using poison gas against civilian populations is arraigned, as they should be, before the International Criminal Court, which is the established tribunal in law that should indict

suspects in such occasions. Those are the priorities that should be taken forward.

I am delighted that the Scottish Government has been able to make a contribution that is, although modest compared to the scale of the issue, nonetheless important in signposting the feelings of the people of Scotland on helping our fellow human beings in Syria at the present moment.

**Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):** I welcome the Government's pledge to provide £100,000 of extra aid, but will the First Minister encourage the UK Government and the international community to provide support to countries including the Lebanon and Jordan, which will offer refuge to an estimated 3 million Syrians by the end of the year, and support to the estimated 10 million Syrians requiring aid in Syria?

**The First Minister:** Yes, I will and, yes, we are. I am sure that the international development minister will make that very point in his discussions with the UK minister this afternoon.

### Housing

**5. James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on the statement by the chief executive of Homes for Scotland that the country is "mired in a housing crisis". (S4F-01527)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** Our position is to face up to the challenges posed by the economic downturn and by Westminster's cuts to our capital budget. Unlike our predecessors, we aim to tackle the challenges of the housing industry head on. We have achieved a 31 per cent rise in the number of social housing completions in the past six years. We are working with the private sector to bring forward a range of new initiatives to support the wider housing market, including the national housing trust and the new home scheme. We look forward to the vital £120 million shared equity scheme, which is to start by next month.

**James Kelly:** Does the First Minister share the concerns of Homes for Scotland that, if the current—based on last year's figures—25 per cent reduction in house building continues, it will result in a shortfall of 160,000 homes by 2035?

Further to the findings of the Jones Lang LaSalle report, which showed that the majority of house builders think that independence would deliver less housing development in Scotland, will the forthcoming white paper consider the risks for housing from Scotland separating from the United Kingdom?

**The First Minister:** The risk to housing has been from the slashing of capital budgets by the United Kingdom Government. I would have thought that, as someone who presumably cares

about the housing budget, James Kelly would have realised that. Therefore, it is with some satisfaction that we can note, despite that range of capital cutbacks, that the rate of house building, both in the social sector and overall in Scotland, is substantially higher than in England and in Wales at the present moment.

However, I agree that more must be done and the initiatives that I cited are, therefore, the approach that we are taking.

Does James Kelly not understand that, in the past five years, we have completed 3,724 council homes? In the last four years of the previous Labour Administration only six homes were completed. When Johann Lamont was Deputy Minister for Communities between 2004 and 2006, no council homes were built whatsoever. Iain Gray, the lost leader recently returned to the front bench, put it well in August 2008, when he said that Labour had

“the best homelessness legislation in the world, but we didn’t build the housing to make it work”.

James Kelly will accept that the Scottish National Party, with its record on housing, will take absolutely no lectures from a Labour Party that failed on social housing and a Labour leader who did not manage to build a single house in the two years when she was the Deputy Minister for Communities.

### **Welfare Reforms (Women)**

**6. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** To ask the First Minister, in light of its report, “The Gender Impacts of Welfare Reform”, what impact the Scottish Government considers welfare reforms are having on women in Scotland. (S4F-01520)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** The publication of the report—I am glad that Alison Johnstone is commenting on it—reflects the Government’s serious concerns about the impact of the United Kingdom’s welfare reforms on women.

A single woman is predicted to lose on average 4.5 per cent of her net income due to the coalition Government’s actions. That is largely driven by the particular loss for lone parents, 90 per cent of whom are women, who are set to lose as much as 8.5 per cent of their net income. Furthermore, the introduction of universal credit will pay benefits to households rather than individuals, which may result in a loss of financial independence for women and therefore less money spent on children. The so-called reforms seem to me to be deeply unfair. They are uncaring and will force some of the most vulnerable households in our society to pay for the mistakes of the United Kingdom Government.

**Alison Johnstone:** Unfortunately, we do not control welfare in Holyrood, so we must mitigate the cuts in other ways. The Government has chosen to invest in construction to kick start the economy, but there is a massive gender divide, with only 2 per cent of construction apprenticeships going to women.

The proposed extra hours of childcare are welcome, but investing in truly transformative, affordable childcare systems, such as the Nordic models, would provide hundreds of jobs and enable thousands of women to pursue work and education, boosting the economic recovery. What will the First Minister do to ensure that efforts to develop the economy are specifically designed to help women back into work?

**The First Minister:** That is a very good question, and the point about apprenticeships is well made. We inherited approximately 16,000 apprenticeships; that figure has increased to more than 25,000. I know that Alison Johnstone will concede that there has been a disproportionate increase in the number of modern apprenticeships going to women. That substantially improved percentage is to be very much welcomed.

Alison Johnstone’s point about construction apprenticeships is fair, hence the substantial drive to attract young women not only into construction but across the range of professions that have previously been the overwhelming preserve of males. I know that she and others approved of the conference on women in work that the Scottish Government held with the Scottish Trades Union Congress and other partners. That identified some of the things that we can do to assist in that process.

We should acknowledge that, among the vast increase in the number of apprenticeships, it is particularly welcome that there is an overall percentage rise in the number of women going into modern apprenticeships.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** The First Minister will be aware that the Scottish welfare fund—the provision of community care grants and crisis grants is now devolved to Scotland—has the potential to impact positively on women. Does he agree that it is a matter of concern that the fund is underspent by almost five times the amount that was expected to be spent? What action will he take to ensure that women, who are indeed struggling, get the urgent assistance that they require?

**The First Minister:** I heard that claim made during the debate on the programme for government for 2013-14. The welfare fund, which is newly established, is about to be put on a statutory footing. Members are commenting on the first few months of the scheme, during which

local authorities have accommodated and disbursed the funds, and then extrapolating from that that there will be an underspend.

Jackie Baillie should understand that, as the impact of the welfare reforms of the UK Government—which is her partner in the better together coalition—come through, there will be many people in Scotland who will want access to that welfare fund. Along with the action that Scotland's local authorities and Government have taken to protect people from council tax benefit cuts and the action that we have taken to reinforce the charities in Scotland so that they can cope with people in despair and distress, she really should bring herself to welcome the welfare fund, the statutory footing on which it is being put and the additional funds that are going into it, and recognise that extrapolating from the first few months is not giving the real picture. The need that will be caused in Scotland by an estimated £270 million being withdrawn from the income of people in Glasgow alone will pose substantial challenges. Believe me, the welfare fund will be fully subscribed.

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** The UK is currently the fourth most unequal country in the world. Will the First Minister tell us how an independent Scotland will reverse such an iniquitous situation?

**The First Minister:** We will point to many of the initiatives taken by many of our neighbours and friends in Scandinavia, who have managed to build more prosperous and more equal societies. If we look, for example, to their transformational attitude towards childcare, we can point forward, to future social equality in Scotland.

Given the UK Government's track record under Labour, the Conservatives and Conservative-Liberal coalition over the past 25 years, the belief that staying under the control of Westminster Government will do anything other than produce continuing generations of poverty and inequality in Scotland is belied by the evidence. We do not need a crystal ball to work out the consequences of Westminster rule; we can look at the past 25 years of failure. That is why independence offers the prospect of a more prosperous society and a more equal country.

**The Presiding Officer:** That ends First Minister's questions.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am sure that the leader of the Opposition did not mean this, but she may have given an indication that the permanent secretary, Peter Housden, would present some sort of front or cover for the First Minister. I hope that she takes some opportunity to ensure that the *Official Report* does not give that impression.

**The Presiding Officer:** That is not a point of order, Ms MacDonald.

## Links with China

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

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-06993, in the name of Graeme Pearson, on enhancing enterprise for Scotland and China. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

#### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament recognises and celebrates both the historical and contemporary links that exist between Scotland and China; notes that China is currently the second largest economy in the world, with many experts predicting that it will overtake the US as the largest within the next decade; supports all efforts to foster trade links between Scotland and China, including establishing a direct flight path from Scotland to China, but is concerned that visa regulations are not conducive to Chinese businesses operating in Scotland and vice versa; endorses the educational links that exist between Scotland and China, including what it understands is the high number of Chinese students who choose to study at Scottish universities and the links between schools in the south of Scotland and their Chinese counterparts; welcomes these links, and notes calls for the encouragement of the learning of Mandarin and Cantonese in Scottish schools and their twinning with Chinese schools.

12:34

**Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank you, Presiding Officer, and the Parliament for giving me the opportunity to open this debate.

I am also grateful to the Minister for External Affairs and International Development for taking time out to play a part in our debate. I hope that, at the conclusion of our discussions, we will have aided the Government in focusing in on some of the main issues that have been raised throughout Scotland and, in particular, in the cross-party group on China about developing and enhancing enterprise for Scotland and for China.

Next month will mark the 64th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and will also mark a remarkable transformation in a country that is on course to replace America as the world's largest economy. It is vital that Scotland does all that it can to forge close economic links with China to the benefit of both our countries.

As convener of the cross-party group on China, I am aware of several needs that have been identified regularly that should be the focus of work by the Government. To assist members, I have bulletpointed those needs.

The first is the need to establish direct flights between Scotland and China. Even one flight per month is deemed to improve our relationships with people who would engage with Scotland and who want to know more about us.

The second issue, which is a difficult one, is the need to improve the visa/immigration process for Chinese visitors, investors and educationalists.

Thirdly, we need to increase and improve the opportunities that Scottish children have to learn Chinese languages, the use of which will become an important relationship-building exercise and will facilitate understanding in both directions between the two countries. We also need to help and encourage Scottish schools at primary and secondary level to twin with schools in China.

In addition, we need to support small and medium-sized enterprises in establishing business links with China. We have a good track record with large organisations on a global level, but the small and medium-sized enterprises that find it hard to finance trips to China and to do the kind of research that is required represent a real challenge. The creation of a web page, Twitter and Facebook environment to encourage cross-fertilisation of ideas among Scottish entrepreneurs and to provide a connection with the Chinese audience would be an important way of placing the brand of Scotland at the forefront of everyone's minds.

Finally, in the year ahead, in which we hope that the homecoming will be a success for Scotland, why would the Government not want to consider a homecoming for Chinese students who have studied here successfully in previous decades and who still love our country, to encourage them to return to Scotland and bring with them a knowledge of where China is today?

I hope that it is not so much a case of whether we should do those things, but when we do them.

According to VisitScotland, the number of Chinese visitors to Scotland is continuing to rise exponentially. The Scottish Parliament's European and External Relations Committee has agreed that the establishment of a direct air link is vital. If we want to strengthen our economic links with China, we must also ensure that we minimise the barriers that exist to co-operation and trade. At meetings of the cross-party group on China, I regularly hear stories of Chinese businesses that are looking to invest in Scotland, but which are deterred by difficulties with visas and immigration. Although I acknowledge that those are complicated issues that are reserved to the United Kingdom Parliament, the Scottish Government must examine all available avenues to minimise barriers to trade and to encourage our colleagues at UK level to resolve some of those issues.

The financial figures from the past few years illustrate how important trade with China is to Scotland. In the first half of 2012, trade between Scotland and China was worth almost £800 million, which represented growth of 14.4 per cent



from the previous year. As well as including traditional goods such as salmon and whisky, exports now extend to chemical-related products and machinery and transport equipment, exports of which have increased by more than 40 per cent.

The fields of telecommunications, science and technology, information and communication technology and renewable energy are all areas in which China seeks to expand. Even in the global economic crisis, there has been an expansion of foreign banks in China, to the extent that their profits have increased by 109 per cent. That further illustrates the importance of Scotland's relationship with China.

We must also bear it in mind that, over the past 5,000 years of history, China has contributed a wealth of literature, art, philosophy and science to the world. China is on its way to becoming the largest economic power in the history of the world. Its progress is built on a number of defining values that we should bear in mind.

First, the needs of the group and society are prioritised above the individual's needs. Secondly, Chinese people seek to ensure harmony—they pursue unity and common ground while simultaneously allowing differences. Thirdly, on the basis of peaceful co-operation and co-existence, there is mutual non-interference in each other's affairs. It is important that we appreciate those differences.

Over the next 50 years, the challenge for China is to develop harmony in its communities while responding to the ever-growing demand for consumer goods and enhanced standards of living. There are 150 million people in China living below the poverty levels that one would deem acceptable.

Forty years ago, 100 Chinese students came to the UK. Last year, British universities had 65,000 Chinese students, of whom 7,000 were in Scotland. We need to encourage Chinese students to come to Scotland to study while increasing and improving the opportunities for Scottish children to learn Chinese languages.

The five-year plan for China offers opportunities for Scotland to deliver. China seeks to enter a world community. We should engage in that ambition and develop a healthy relationship that goes in the right direction. We must play our part in ensuring that China joins Scotland in a modern world. I encourage the Government and the minister to note the points that I have made, which I hope they will actively pursue in the year ahead.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask for speeches of four minutes, please.

12:41

**Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie)**

**(SNP):** I thank Graeme Pearson for bringing the debate to the chamber and for the sentiments that he expressed in his speech.

I have been interested in China and the Chinese people since I was a child. Strangely enough, my interest began when my granny gave my mother a pair of Chinese blue and white porcelain plates. As a young person, I was hooked on art. The blue and white art of China fascinated me and that fascination—it is almost an illness—continues today. I really am keen on Chinese porcelain.

I never thought that, as a Scottish businessman, I would find myself doing business with and in China. Some 18 years ago, I travelled to China for the first time, to attend a massive commodities fair and establish links with Chinese companies in my line of business. I was taken aback by the range of finished products and the machinery to manufacture them that were on show. It was fascinating to see the products and the machines to manufacture them.

When attempting to make contacts, I was pleasantly surprised by how well informed many of the Chinese company representatives were about Scotland. That turned out to be no accident. When communications broke down between China and nearly every western country, the relationship between China and this tiny country of Scotland was maintained. China was never closed to Scotland. Scotland is a nation that was and is to this day trusted by China. That gives Scotland an enormous advantage over other countries. Scotland, with its population of 5.2 million, is working with China, which has a population of 1.34 billion—what a partner for Scotland to work with.

With a population of 1.34 billion, China has been in a hyperdrive of development in the past 20 years. It is cramming into a mere decade the industrial effort that took western countries 200 years. That is a miracle in our lifetimes. In fact, there are two miracles: the fact that that massive country is physically and materially able to have such development and the managing of it on a human scale.

With all the endeavour in China to better the country and its people, what can we do to assist China and ourselves?

China encourages partnership with external players. We can offer tried-and-trusted systems that can augment and give sustainability to processes in China, whether in health, industry, electronics or education.

On a less positive note, China has encouraged much of its student population to learn abroad and Scotland is more than able to oblige, but the

obstacle of visa availability is having a detrimental impact on Chinese students attending Scottish universities and on commerce in general. In fact, it is embarrassing that Chinese people from across sectors, including diplomats and politicians, are hindered by the UK Government from entering Scotland for legitimate business. Fixing that problem would be of significant importance.

I endorse Graeme Pearson's motion, which graphically highlights in a few lines why it is in our interest to work positively with China. Few people in Scotland know just how highly regarded our country is in China. It respects our views and actions, which is important. Let us see how we can put that to good use for both our countries' futures.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I respectfully ask members to keep to their four minutes.

12:46

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):** I congratulate Graeme Pearson on introducing this important debate and recognise his interest in and knowledge of China. That knowledge is certainly shared by Gil Paterson, but unfortunately not by me, which I regret and hope to do something about before too long.

I recognise China's central importance in the world economy. It is now the second most powerful economic nation in the world and it will soon be the first. Its rise in terms of a revolutionary upheaval in global economic power is comparable only with that of the United States at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Our global economy is highly interconnected now, of course, and it is therefore in our interests to develop economic ties with China and to take a great interest in the development of the Chinese economy, as it has had and will have a profound effect on economies in the west. Leading contemporary economists, such as Martin Wolf in his book "Fixing Global Finance", and Will Hutton in his book "The Writing on the Wall", have emphasised China's central importance for the world economy and our economy. It is clearly in our interest as well as China's to develop economic ties.

In that regard, I welcome the £800 million of trade that we had with China in 2012—I am told that that was a 14 per cent increase on the previous year—and acknowledge the work of, for example, Scottish Development International, which I am told increased the number of companies that it supports to access Chinese markets from 77 to 208 in five years. It is clear that that work is important, but there is more to do, as Graeme Pearson has emphasised, on issues such as more direct air links, dealing with visa problems and the other issues that he mentioned, which are

clearly important in building on the good progress that has been made in the past few years.

It is not just a matter of fostering economic connections, of course; there is also the issue of education and cultural links, which I think is recognised in the Scottish Government's working with China strategy. Again, I welcome the fact that there are 7,000 Chinese students in Scottish universities and the fact that 18 Scottish higher education institutions have academic and research links with China. It is clear that that is very important, as is encouraging more of our students in schools to study Chinese languages. To me, the situation is reminiscent of the 1960s, when there was, for understandable reasons, a fashion for learning Russian, given Russia's global significance then. China is now the country that might be comparable to it, and the more people who can learn Chinese languages, the better.

Other links are also important. In my constituency we have the botanic gardens, the most important international focus of which is China. That has been so for some time and is ongoing. The gardens, which are not far from here, have the largest collection of Chinese plants outside China in the whole world.

There are also, of course, cultural links. I was pleased to see the outstanding Chinese production of "Coriolanus" during the Edinburgh festival and to see a Chinese film called "Three Sisters" at the film festival. It highlighted the poverty in much of rural China. Notwithstanding China's overall high gross domestic product, it has a GDP per head that is a tenth of ours, of course. That highlights the issue of poverty.

The last point that I want to make is that at the book festival I heard a man called Ma Jian talk about his book, "The Dark Road", which leads me to human rights issues, which it is right to acknowledge in this debate. The issue that he was writing about—and rebelling against—was the one-child policy. A wholly different attitude to individual freedom underlies some of the human rights issues in China. We must highlight abuses of human rights, but that should not detract from building positive relationships with China on economic and other issues.

12:50

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** I thank Graeme Pearson for providing the opportunity to have this important debate.

None of us will be any more than a couple of metres from something that has some Chinese technology in it. Very few of us will be more than a couple of generations away from people in our family who went to and engaged directly in China.

In my case, a rather distant cousin of mine, James Jeffrey, died in Shanghai at the age of 33 in 1870. The connections between Scotland and China go a very long way back. We should not get too complacent about them, because we played a not too creditable role in the exploitation of the Chinese population in the opium industry, but the world moves on and I think that we are in a substantially better place.

My wife and I had the great privilege to go to China immediately after the end of the cultural revolution; we arrived there on 4 November 1978. We had had our names on the waiting list for a couple of years. When we put our names on it, we could not afford to go, so the delay was welcome as it enabled us to save up enough money.

When we went to Beijing in November 1978, we found a country substantially different from that which one would find today. We saw not a single privately owned car while we were in China in the 1970s. Today in Beijing, the number of cars per 100 households is 60. That compares to something like 35 per 100 households in London and somewhere in the 40s per 100 households in Edinburgh and Glasgow. That is not all good news, but it is a very strong indicator of the economic progress that is being made. All the premium car makers have assembly plants out there. Indeed, the MG is now a Chinese-owned brand.

We also had the immense privilege to go down to Kunming in Yunnan province—that was accidental; we had not intended to go there. Kunming is not well known, but it is the other end of the road to Mandalay, which most people will know about. We were told—this was not verified, but it could certainly be true—that we were the first westerners to go there since the revolution in the 1940s.

The history of Scotland's engagement with China was writ large in that visit in 1978. The English that people spoke—and it was spoken widely—was spoken with a Scottish accent, because the original tutors of English to the Chinese were Scots missionaries. Not everything about engagement with the Scots missionaries was good, but that was. Businesses such as Jardine Matheson in Hong Kong, which has Scottish roots, continue to this day.

In 1978 we were some five months away from a referendum on establishing a Scottish assembly—the vote was held on 1 March 1979. Everywhere I went in China in 1978 I was asked questions about that referendum. Then, just as now, the Chinese knew about and were interested in what was going on in Scotland.

The motion before us touches a lot of important buttons. I will say a word or two in my concluding

remarks about air links. As transport minister, I probably had five or six meetings with Chinese interests and I know that the current minister does the same. The barrier that we have is a rather odd one: it is the difficulty around the Boeing Dreamliner, which is the only aircraft that fits the runway lengths that we have here and can go to China in a single hop. There is actually a huge advantage for Scotland, because Edinburgh and Glasgow airports are closer to Beijing in flying distance than London Heathrow. The Chinese are interested in making a Scottish airport their European hub connection airport. Let us hope that we can do that. I congratulate Graeme Pearson again.

12:54

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I congratulate Graeme Pearson on securing today's debate and I also pay tribute to his work as convener of the parliamentary cross-party group on China, of which I am happy to be a member. The CPG is a very good forum for raising some of the issues that we are discussing today.

Like Graeme Pearson and others, I am very positive about increasing trade and educational links between Scotland and China, and I recognise the significant potential economic benefits for Scotland through increased exports, especially in food and drink products such as whisky and salmon, and additional tourism income, both of which are so important to my region of the Highlands and Islands.

China's rapidly growing professional classes offer the same kind of opportunities that American markets and visitors offered Scotland in past decades. I commend the staff of businesses such as Marine Harvest Scotland, whose processing factory in Fort William I visited earlier this year on behalf of the European and External Relations Committee as part of the China plan inquiry. Marine Harvest has greatly increased exports of its fresh farmed salmon to China. Lorries travel directly from Fort William to Heathrow. Recently, the fish farm sector has been troubled by amoebic gill disease, which harmed Marine Harvest's exports last year, but it remains an example of good innovation in the export market to China.

The European and External Relations Committee inquiry into the Scottish Government's China plan was widely welcomed and its report on the subject is very useful. The first recommendation was:

"The Committee would welcome a response from SDI on how it could make progress in supporting business to business partnerships between Scottish and Chinese companies"

Humza Yousaf, the minister who is with us in the chamber, said that he agreed that there should be support in business-to-business partnerships and pointed out that SDI had set up a new office in Shenzhen and increased its staff by 30 per cent. That is all very good, but the question about SDI would not have been raised in the first place if things had been going at 100 per cent, so I hope that that has improved.

The committee secured a positive media profile for the inquiry. Evaluation demonstrated that media coverage reached in excess of 750,000 people, which is a great many. The committee will soon consider the Scottish Government's response to the report.

When we were taking evidence, it was important to hear from businesspeople who had direct experience of working in the Chinese market, including those in asset management, a sector in which Scotland has a strong international reputation. I was particularly struck by the evidence given by Angus Tulloch, who is a leading Scottish financier. Mr Tulloch emphasised the requirement for businesses to find the right partner in China. That relationship building must be viewed as a long-term process and the value of speaking in the language of the country with which trading is desired cannot be overstated. We in the chamber would all agree on that point, and I would support additional efforts to increase the learning of Mandarin Chinese in Scotland's schools, colleges and universities. Increasing the availability of the teaching of Mandarin is key to that ambition being realised. The European and External Relations Committee inquiry into the teaching of modern languages in Scotland, which my committee has been doing lately, should help to highlight and improve Scottish children's learning of Mandarin.

Many businesses highlighted the major difficulty of obtaining visas for Chinese businesspeople, and that must be looked into by the relevant departments to prevent good ideas from being wasted through red tape and technicalities.

We are also positive about the concept of direct flights to China. We recognise that business leaders have argued that a direct air link is of crucial importance to the Chinese view of Scotland. It could encourage more Chinese firms to recognise the possibilities of using Scotland as a European headquarters. It could also provide a real boost to tourism, although business leaders have suggested that such a link would have to be low cost, and low cost enough to rival the available routes for business travel to Europe.

Today's debate is very important. I am sure that the Parliament will debate our links with China with increasing frequency in the future. I look forward to the minister's response to today's debate and to

the European and External Relations Committee's further consideration of the Scottish Government's China plan.

12:59

**Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and congratulate Graeme Pearson on bringing it to the chamber.

As we know, China is a growing economy—with growth of around 9 per cent per annum, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—and it continues to grow. Two facts about the Chinese economy stand out in particular: Chinese economic growth contributed to a third of global growth in 2011, and China is now the world's second largest goods importer, behind only the United States.

In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift in international trade. It is no wonder that there are now several graphics circulating on the internet that originate from a variety of high-profile research institutes such as the London School of Economics and purport to show the economic centre of gravity. For those of us who are unfamiliar with geopolitical jargon—I count myself as one of that group—the economic centre of gravity is generally defined as the precise spot on the globe where we can identify the average economic activity. It is worked out based on the GDP of every country on the planet and, although it might not mean much in policy terms, the dot is shifting very quickly. It has travelled east from the mid-Atlantic since the 1980s, and is predicted—perhaps unsurprisingly—to lie somewhere between China and India by 2050.

I mention that to highlight the importance of China to Scotland and to the world as a whole, and the importance of our China plan. Over the next 30 years, China will become an ever more important focal point for Scottish business. If we are to meet the China plan's targets for increasing trade opportunities by increasing the value of exports to China and encouraging investment, we must understand the importance of its formidable economic trajectory.

Trade with China is unique. Successful interaction with the country, for business and for Government, depends heavily on genuine mutual engagement. As Stephen Perry, the chairman of the 48 Group Club of UK businesses, has said, we should start thinking of China as a "global partner" rather than just an economy.

I stress that successful economic partnerships depend not just on trade deals but on—perhaps most importantly of all—attitudes and perceptions. How do Scots see China? How do Scots do business at an international level? What are our

skills and what do we offer as a people? How do we interact with others, and how adaptable are we?

The British Council in Scotland has said that we need a new generation of Scots who are “globalised citizens”—that is, people who are ready to interact on the world stage with confidence. However, despite our best intentions, we would all admit that one skill that is lacking in so many Scots, regardless of their qualification level, is the ability to interact in foreign languages. The European and External Relations Committee has been conducting an inquiry into foreign language learning in primary schools, and we have at least some understanding of the barriers to increased uptake of languages such as Mandarin—for example, we simply do not have a sufficient number of qualified teachers.

Arguably the biggest long-term barrier to language learning in Scotland is attitudinal: given the choice, many young Scots choose other subjects over foreign languages. With Mandarin, however, there is some cause for optimism. Figures show that young Scots are bucking the trend by opting for Mandarin, where it is available, in greater numbers than for any other language, and uptake among that group is the highest in the UK. Approximately 70 Scottish schools are now teaching Mandarin, including in my constituency a primary school in Leuchars and a secondary school in St Andrews. Last year, 300 Scottish students took exams in Mandarin, in comparison with 100 in 2011.

We also need to understand the cultural and historical aspects. Stewart Stevenson mentioned the opium wars, and Jamie McGrigor mentioned the evidence that was given to the European and External Relations Committee by Angus Tulloch, who said:

“People should not go into China without understanding the damage that we did during the opium wars.”—[*Official Report, European and External Relations Committee*, 2 May 2013; c1175.]

On that note I will conclude, and I look forward to hearing the minister’s comments on his recent trip to China.

13:03

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab):** I congratulate Graeme Pearson on bringing to the chamber this important debate on enhancing enterprise for Scotland and China. Unfortunately, I have not been to China, but it is on my list of places to go. As the motion states,

“China is currently the second largest economy in the world”.

It is therefore vital that Scotland strives to foster relationships with China, and this debate is an

excellent opportunity to highlight the economic importance of such a relationship.

Graeme Pearson set up the cross-party group to promote relations between Scotland and China, which works with organisations and authorities to increase cultural educational and economic exchange between the two countries, and highlights the barriers that exist in developing those links.

To address the four major barriers that have been identified by the CPG, we need to have direct flights from Scotland to China, as has been mentioned many times in the debate; improved trade; educational links and language opportunities; and improved visa and immigration procedures. I welcome the Scottish Government’s recognition, in an answer to a parliamentary question by Mr Pearson earlier this session, of the importance of direct flights. Establishing such a link will be invaluable not only for business and the establishment of successful trade links but for tourism. It should be a key priority, which should be of economic benefit to both China and Scotland. Perhaps the minister will update us today on what progress has been made on that.

We also need to ensure that it is easier for Chinese businesses to be established here. The CPG has identified as a hindrance to the setting up of such business ventures the cost of visas and their processing time, which also affects visitor numbers to Scotland. I know that such matters are reserved, but I wonder what discussions the Scottish Government has had with its UK counterparts to tackle those barriers so that Chinese businesses can invest in Scotland, and vice versa. In the meantime, Scottish Development International needs to continue working closely with Chinese investment companies and entrepreneurs to build relationships and to outline why Scotland is an attractive investment opportunity and why such relationships can be beneficial to both countries.

To further improve trade links, we need a multifaceted approach, focusing on improving the teaching of Mandarin and Cantonese and our understanding of Chinese culture through education, school twinning and cultural exchange. It is deeply important that we do everything that we can to foster not only economic links between Scotland and China but cultural links. I welcome the Scottish Government’s five-year strategy for engagement between Scotland and the People’s Republic of China, but I hope that we can see the strategy extended to encompass longer-term outcomes and goals.

Again, I thank Graeme Pearson for bringing the motion to the chamber today and I thank the CPG for its work in bringing our two nations closer together. As we help to open up China, we can

play an important role in reducing China's human rights issues.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Many thanks. I now invite the Minister for External Affairs and International Development, Humza Yousaf, to respond to the debate. Minister, you have seven minutes.

13:07

**The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf):** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I, too, thank Graeme Pearson for lodging the motion and securing the debate, which has highlighted the strength of Sino-Scottish links. I want to put on record the great work that the CPG does under the stewardship of Graeme Pearson, Gil Paterson and the rest of its members. It is a great asset and resource for the Government, along with other partners such as the European and External Relations Committee, which has advised us in a very thoughtful and insightful report, to which there will be a response in the fullness of time. There are of course also other partners, such as Consul General Lee, who strains every sinew to ensure that we have closer collaboration between Scotland and China. I do not have time to mention other partners, but I thank them, too.

The astounding story of today's debate will be that we had an entire 45-minute debate about China and Scotland and nobody once mentioned pandas, which is incredible. I mention that in jest, but the serious point is that that in itself shows the closing relationship between our two nations.

The Scottish Government's China strategy is an important statement of commitment to the Chinese Government on the importance of the relationship to our nation. The refreshed China strategy contains four guiding principles that will continue to shape our engagement with China. The principles, each of which is important in its own right, are securing sustainable economic growth; respect for human rights and the rule of law; the understanding of culture, which Graeme Pearson mentioned; and increasing Scotland's influence on the international stage. I agree entirely with Malcolm Chisholm's sentiment that respect for human rights, which Margaret McDougall referred to in her closing words, and the rule of law is imperative. That is why it is part of our strategy. However, as Malcolm Chisholm rightly said, that should not preclude us from continuing to do what is right for Scotland's economic interests—there is no contradiction in addressing both issues.

The importance of China as a growing economic superpower has been reaffirmed in the debate. We have an opportunity through our relationship

with China to contribute to Scotland's economic growth.

We should have no doubt about it—China is incredibly competitive. I have been there and I was certainly not the only delegate from other parts of the world. However, Scotland has some incredibly unique offerings: world-class companies, world-class talents, research excellence, world-class universities and indeed luxury goods, salmon and whisky being perhaps top of the list.

**Jamie McGrigor:** I am encouraged by what the minister has said, but the second recommendation in the European and External Relations Committee's report on the China plan points out:

"there is a lack of awareness of the existence of the Plan itself and the support available from the Scottish Government among some of the stakeholders."

Will the minister comment on that?

**Humza Yousaf:** Sure. As I said, we will reflect on the plan. We can always do more to ensure that businesses—particularly small and medium-sized businesses—know about the outcomes that we have and about the expert services that SDI provides, such as market research and incubation hubs. The point is well made in the report and we will certainly look to reflect on it.

The demand is there from Scottish businesses, which rank China as their number 1 future market. In the past five years, there has been an increase of more than 80 per cent in exports to China. The point that both Jamie McGrigor and Graeme Pearson made about small and medium-sized enterprises was well made. SDI is leading another mission of Scottish businesses to China, and 80 per cent of them are what we would classify as small and medium-sized enterprises. We take that point on board, but we also reflect that there is more that we can do.

On my recent visit to China, one of the small enterprises that we helped—I do not think that I could call it medium sized—was TEFL Scotland, and we witnessed it signing a contract. A husband and wife team in Dingwall literally started that business from a garden shed, subsequently employing 10 people, doubling their workforce and securing a contract with one of China's biggest online teaching resources. That is a fantastic example, but I absolutely agree that more can be done.

We heard today from a variety of speakers. Gil Paterson made the point—I thought very well—about higher education and the importance of languages. In university education, we attract a phenomenal amount of Chinese students and Scotland has an excellent offer in its teaching and research. I believe that, through collaboration, both sides can learn from each other and gain a

shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities that the world faces.

As many speakers said, Scotland has been successful in attracting Chinese students and those from Hong Kong, but it is not just about the students who come to study here. We should also consider not only the economic benefit that they bring when their families come and when they spend here but what they bring culturally and academically.

I will talk more about the visa regime in a second, but I agree that there is a difficulty there—if nothing else, at least a difficulty of perception of Scotland's and the UK's openness. We will continue to encourage the UK Government and have discussions with it where and when appropriate, saying that the message should be that Scotland and the UK are open to the best academic and business talent that China and the world have to offer. My colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs has had that discussion many a time on behalf of Universities Scotland, the Institute of Directors, the Federation of Small Businesses and others and she will continue to do that where and when appropriate.

Language was mentioned, and that point is extraordinarily important. As Roderick Campbell said, to change the cultural mindset can be a difficult task, but the pragmatic and practical things that we can do—and have done—include the development of 13 Confucius classroom hubs in Scotland, each linked with a school in Tianjin, covering 17 local authorities. Learning Chinese languages is just one part of learning about China, its history and its growth in the modern world, but it is an extraordinarily important part and we will continue to do what we can to increase the uptake of languages.

Almost every speaker mentioned air links. Well before I became a member of the Scottish Government, the Government was pursuing the issue vigorously through ministers with responsibility for tourism, external affairs and many other departments. My ministerial colleague Fergus Ewing sought the establishment of a stakeholder group, to bring businesses together to discuss collaboration between Scotland and China, and one of the main comments from businesspeople is that there is a need for a direct air link.

We are straining every sinew in that regard. I was lucky to meet the Chinese civil aviation authority, and we agreed on a number of steps to take forward to promote the idea and, I hope, get to the point at which we have a direct air link between Scotland and China. I will endeavour to ensure that we keep the cross-party group and the

European and External Relations Committee updated on progress.

Under the China strategy we have committed to establishing a stakeholder implementation and delivery forum, to help to promote collaborative working and share best practice and practical expertise. I am pleased that the forum's first meeting will be held at the end of the month and I look forward to hearing the outcome of the discussions.

I am delighted to announce that an online information hub on Sino-Scottish links will be launched very soon. I know that that is of particular interest to Graeme Pearson and the cross-party group.

I thank members for their speeches. I will endeavour to keep members, committees and the cross-party group up to date on progress on the points in the motion about language, air links, universities, visas and tourism. I thank members for the opportunity to have this debate.

13:16

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Where Gypsy Travellers Live

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** Good afternoon, everyone. The first item of business is an Equal Opportunities Committee debate on where Gypsy Travellers live. I call Margaret McCulloch to open the debate on behalf of the committee. You have 14 minutes, minister.

**Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab):** As someone who has been a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee for less than a day, I was not—unfortunately—involved in the work that we are here to discuss, but I have before me two compelling and insightful reports that have left me eager to take the helm over the coming months. Those reports—“Gypsy/Travellers and Care” and “Where Gypsy/Travellers Live”, which were published in September last year and March this year—have raised clear concerns about whether the Scottish Government, local authorities and health providers are making due provision for one of Scotland’s traditional yet marginalised communities.

Before I introduce the reports and speak about the recommendations that they make, I would like to extend my thanks to my new colleagues and former committee members who worked on the inquiries. My particular thanks go to Mary Fee, who oversaw both inquiries in her time as convener of the committee.

The strong recommendations that are made in both reports are a clear sign of the committee’s engagement in the inquiries and the urgent need for action. Throughout its inquiries, the committee worked closely with Gypsy Travellers and the organisations that support them. Without the help of the Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project, which is an Edinburgh-based voluntary organisation that works with carers from black and ethnic minority communities, much of the committee’s engagement work would not have been possible.

Through MECOPP, the committee was able to attend an awareness-raising session with Gypsy Travellers, to invite Gypsy Travellers into the Parliament on a number of occasions and to visit multiple sites across Scotland. When the committee explored issues in the north-east region, the Grampian Regional Equality Council provided invaluable support and helped to set up the first ever committee meeting to be held on a Gypsy Traveller site.

The other voluntary organisations, health workers and liaison officers who contributed to the

inquiries helped to give a clear insight into how joint working and the involvement of Gypsy Travellers in forward planning can lead to successful initiatives, which provided a basis for many of the committee’s recommendations.

Of course, perhaps the greatest contribution to the two inquiries came from Gypsy Travelling people themselves.

In reading the reports, I was pleased to see that a clear relationship between the committee and the Gypsy Travelling people whom it met has been formed. Given the emphasis that Gypsy Travellers and support workers place on the need for trust, that provides a clear starting point for implementing the recommendations that are made.

One of the committee’s aims was to instigate action. Though numerous reports and recommendations have been made in the past, including a report by the 2001 Equal Opportunities Committee, the Gypsy Travelling community has experienced few positive changes. By talking to the committee, sharing their views and experiences in evidence and informally, coming to the Parliament and inviting committee members into their own homes, the Gypsy Travelling people whom the committee met helped to ensure that their voice was heard. I hope that that will set a precedent for the Scottish Government and its agencies in moving forward.

The committee’s first report, “Gypsy/Travellers and Care”, explored the relationship between Gypsy Travellers and their access to health and care services. For Gypsy Travellers who travel, clear barriers can exist to accessing healthcare and education, and consistent support and funding. Those who live on permanent sites face challenges in securing appropriate adaptations, and cultural differences can mean that certain support options, such as respite care, are not delivered appropriately.

In its recommendations, the committee focused on ensuring that all Gypsy Travellers had access to general healthcare and more specific support as needed. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that support and treatment are culturally appropriate and that care and funding for care are accessible and portable. The Scottish Government’s response left much in the hands of NHS Health Scotland, Education Scotland and local authorities. I hope to hear reassurances today that the buck does not stop there.

The Government spoke of the revision of the general practitioner registration form, the adaptations working group and the relevance of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill and what was the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Bill. I am sure that the committee would



welcome an update on progress and on how provisions are being put into action.

In its "Where Gypsy/Travellers Live" report, the committee shifted focus to the living conditions of Gypsy Travellers, and it visited seven sites over the course of the inquiry. The descriptions of site conditions in the report say it all. I quote:

"We were deeply disturbed to see that families paying rent to their local council were expected to bathe young children in freezing cold amenity blocks with extortionate heating costs, and that elderly and disabled people might have to go outside to a toilet block in the middle of a cold, winter's night. At one site, as well as a putrid overflowing septic tank and a fire hose that couldn't reach all of the pitches, we heard that, with no bus stop or roadside pavement, the only way for non-driving families to visit local shops or take children to use a playground was to walk two miles to the nearest town along a muddy, unlit woodland path. Another site was barely lit at night, with appalling and tokenistic attempts to make adaptations for a profoundly disabled resident and sightings of prowlers in the woods which provided the only place for children to play. We even felt the fear ourselves of being able to safely access one site up a steep, potholed and gravelled path, only able to imagine the danger it could present in icy weather. Disturbingly this site was lacking in either a fixed phone line or stable mobile phone signal, leaving residents with medical conditions unable to easily seek emergency care."

That description is all the more shocking when we realise that the majority of the sites are council operated, with rental rates that are not dissimilar to those in standard social housing and tenants paying standard council tax rates, although many are paying purely for a pitch and an amenity unit. Recommendations in the report were aimed at creating equality in the standard of living for Gypsy Travellers through the establishment of minimum standards for site quality, established and consistent rights for site tenants through tenancy agreements and the adequate provision of temporary and permanent sites across the country.

One thing that stands out in both reports is that those outside the Gypsy Travelling community understand little of Gypsy Travellers' culture and the challenges that they face in maintaining their traditional lifestyle. The committee heard—shockingly—of Gypsy Travellers hiding their cultural heritage for fear of not receiving medical treatment, of being harassed or of being unable to find employment.

Both reports highlight a lack of leadership at local, regional and national levels and urge the Scottish Government to set an example through clear guidelines and a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, including the development of a national awareness-raising campaign. The Government's response to "Where Gypsy/Travellers Live" set out details of a new cross-Government group that is designed to take forward the recommendations that were made in

the two reports, with the aim of meeting the Government's equality outcome that

"Gypsies/Travellers experience less discrimination and more positive attitudes towards their culture and way of life by 2017".

Before the summer recess, the committee wrote to the Scottish Government about its response to express the concern that, although the Government seemed to agree with many of the findings of "Where Gypsy/Travellers Live", there was a lack of action. That, sadly, reflects the committee's concern that there is a lack of leadership at ministerial level. As the new convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee, I hope to hear more about that today. Going forward, we will look for as evidence a tangible action plan with clear goals and, more important, clear results.

The committee made strong recommendations that were aimed at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in both reports. It raised the need for stronger leadership and consistency among local authorities. I am relieved that both COSLA and the Scottish Government have highlighted their intention to work together, but that intention must become action.

**Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside):** Will the member give way?

**Margaret McCulloch:** I do not have long to go, so I will continue. I am sorry.

Since the publication of the reports, the committee has revisited progress and received updates from the support organisations involved. I am pleased that both MECOPP through the Scottish Government and Grampian Regional Equality Council through the national lottery have received further funding for their work and that national health service staff in Grampian are exploring a new joint approach to health engagement with Gypsy Travellers, but I am concerned to have heard of on-going issues in planning for new sites in the north-east. It is clear that political leadership is needed in tackling the negative attitudes that present a barrier to such development.

The committee's goals in bringing about real and desperately needed improvements to the lives of Gypsy Travellers are the stand-out feature of both reports. To that end, it has agreed to revisit the recommendations of the reports as time passes. We will expect regular updates from the Scottish Government, and I hope to see in the near future the development of a clear action plan emerging from the work of the cross-Government working group. It is crucial that that has a timeline, an assurance of consultation with Gypsy Travellers and other stakeholders, and measurable outcomes. We also hope to continue

to monitor progress by keeping in touch with not only MECOPP and Grampian Regional Equality Council, but the Gypsy Travellers who contributed to both inquiries.

As convener of the committee, I look forward to leading the committee's on-going work and to hearing and seeing for myself the improvements that the Scottish Government and local authorities have in their power to bring about.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I give my apologies to Margaret McCulloch, Margaret Burgess and other members for confusing the running order and positions of the opening speakers.

I call the minister, Margaret Burgess, who has 10 minutes.

14:42

**The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess):** I welcome Margaret McCulloch to her new role as convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee. It is something that she has had only one meeting before coming to the debate. I congratulate her on becoming the convener.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide opening remarks on behalf of the Scottish Government. I thank the committee for carrying out the inquiry and producing its report, and thank everyone who gave the committee the evidence that helped to shape the report.

I am sure that, during the debate, we will hear examples of ways in which the Gypsy Traveller community continues to be disenfranchised and discriminated against; indeed, we have already heard some examples. Those are rightly considered to be some of the most troubling aspects of life in Scotland today and are not part of the country that we aspire to be. It is right that we consider the challenges and barriers that the Gypsy Traveller community faces every day, not just in this afternoon's debate but as part of the work that we undertake to do every day for all the communities that we represent, because the Gypsy Traveller community has made and continues to make a significant contribution to the life of our nation.

We believe in the importance of eliminating racism and racial discrimination against the Gypsy Traveller community. Make no mistake: we know that Gypsy Traveller groups are subject to widespread levels of prejudice, discrimination and abuse. They have a limited voice and influence in the public policies that affect them and they often have difficulty in accessing services that are appropriate for their needs. That results in much

poorer education and health outcomes than there are in other communities.

In fact, it was the consideration of those multiple poorer outcomes that helped to inform the Scottish Government's recently published public sector equality duty outcomes, one of which will specifically address the inequalities that are currently experienced by many members of the Gypsy Traveller community. In that, we have committed to working with Gypsy Travellers and other stakeholders to determine the best way to raise awareness and improve understanding, and in that way foster good relations between Gypsy Travellers and settled communities.

In addition, working with communities, we will also explore and build more sustainable means of engagement that take account of Gypsy Travellers' culture and transient lifestyle. We will review the relevant existing data sources that we hold across a range of public domains and identify evidence gaps. That work will inform our evidence requirements and plans moving forward.

We intend to carry out this work through a cross-Government group in order to ensure that all policy interests are taken into account. The same group considered the recommendations from the "Gypsy/Travellers and Care" and the "Where Gypsy/Travellers Live" reports and is in the process of putting into action—I stress the word "action"—the commitments that we made. In taking forward this work, we know that we need to see real tangible improvements in the lives of a community who have for so long felt ignored.

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):**

The minister referred to action following on from the two reports and acknowledged that there have been deficiencies. What was the Government doing prior to receipt of those reports?

**Margaret Burgess:** The Government has always been looking at the issues surrounding Gypsy Travellers, particularly where Gypsy Travellers live. The Scottish Housing Regulator now looks at the accommodation that will be provided for Gypsy Travellers. We will be looking at that. We have made improvements in care for Gypsy Travellers. We have set up a number of groups looking across portfolios, because, as the member well knows, there are complex issues surrounding the Gypsy Traveller community and we want to get it right.

As has rightly been identified, one of the first things that we have to do is raise awareness and ensure that the settled community and Gypsy Traveller community can live and work together in harmony. That is important. It is not something that has been put on the back seat and ignored; it is constantly being looked at and is constantly under discussion. We brought the cross-

Government group together again and we have welcomed the reports and evidence of the committee, which is informing how we will take things forward.

We are talking about discrimination that, if it were targeted at any other ethnic minority group, would be deemed wholly unacceptable. So, we have started exploring how to deliver an awareness-raising campaign that will endeavour to change the perception and prejudices that are sadly still associated with this community. During the evidence session with the committee, I was asked whether I would support such a campaign and I said that I would, because I think that it would have merit. Following the committee's report, officials held discussions with Amnesty International, which has also stated its support for such a campaign. For such a campaign to be successful, we have to include all stakeholders, including the Gypsy Traveller community. We look forward to engaging with them in producing and delivering a campaign.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Can the minister give us a timescale for when the campaign might start?

**Margaret Burgess:** I am announcing this today. We are in discussions about it. We will certainly keep the member involved. It will certainly be one of the first things that the group that we have set up will look at. We are making certain commitments today and that is one of the things that the group will look at. I would hope that it would be done fairly quickly, but I will not put a timescale on it and then have someone come back and tell me that we have missed it. It is something that we are keen to do as quickly as possible.

We know that it is vital that we take this opportunity to tackle the entrenched attitudes that are still prevalent. It is about getting the campaign right to ensure that we can build good relationships and better understanding between settled communities and the Gypsy Traveller community.

Responsibility is, of course, a two-way street. Service providers and the settled community undoubtedly have to do more to understand and respond appropriately to Gypsy Traveller communities. However, Gypsy Traveller communities also have responsibilities and must ensure that living in accordance with their traditional practices does not impact adversely on others.

**Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP):** Does the minister acknowledge that if there are inadequate sites for Gypsy Travellers to live, they sometimes have no alternative but to go to unauthorised sites?

**Margaret Burgess:** I will touch on that shortly, but that situation does not take away people's responsibilities. I am suggesting not that living on an unauthorised site demonstrates a lack of responsibility, but that responsibilities attach to all communities and they should not impact on others. I will talk about unauthorised sites shortly.

We must look at how we can remove the barriers and we can do that only if there is a better understanding. We know that many of the issues that arise in local communities are very sensitive, but we need to balance the rights of the Gypsy Traveller population to follow their traditional way of life, and the rights of local communities to pursue theirs.

One area in which we need to balance those different rights is unauthorised sites. We are very keen that the group should examine the rights and responsibilities in relation to authorised and unauthorised sites. We will invite representatives from local authorities, COSLA, the Gypsy Traveller community, and other stakeholders to be in the group, to look at that issue in depth, and to try to resolve the problem. It is about rights and responsibilities.

The group will look into the quality of some of the local authority sites. I agree that some of the cases that Margaret McCulloch outlined are shocking and none of us wants to see that. I also recognise that residents of local authority sites pay rent and are entitled to get services for that rent, and we will look at that. No one in Scotland should have poor living conditions and, as part of its work, the group will look at including the option of issuing updated guidance to local authorities. We will also explore the development and implementation of a standard Gypsy Traveller site tenancy agreement with set minimum responsibilities and rights. We need to explore that fully with all interested stakeholders before we can make a decision on the best way forward.

Any agreement should be about the rights and responsibilities of all concerned. When Gypsy Travellers are on a site, the services that they can expect from the landlord should be clear to them, as should what they should do if those services are not being delivered. I want to see that set out clearly in any tenancy or leasing agreement.

We achieved previous success with the work of the north-east working party, which was chaired by the then Minister for Housing and Communities, Alex Neil. That brought together a wide range of stakeholders and produced a strategy with practical steps to improve and sustain community relations in the north-east. We will follow up on the implementation of that strategy to see how its actions have been put into practice and establish what lessons have been learnt that we can apply to other parts of Scotland. There are sites in

Scotland that are well managed and appreciated by those who live on them.

The Presiding Officer is indicating that I should wind up my speech. We welcome the committee's report. A full response was provided that was compiled from input from across all Government departments, and it sets out clearly our proposals for addressing the report's recommendations. I look forward to progressing the work in light of those findings and recommendations as part of making Scotland the country that we want it to be.

14:53

**Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab):** Before I make my contribution, I will take a few moments to thank members of the Equal Opportunities Committee for their hard work on and dedication to the report that we are talking about today. I also thank my fellow committee members for the support that they gave me—and give special thanks to the clerks and staff for all their tremendous support—during my time as convener.

Scottish Labour welcomes the report and supports the findings and recommendations. However, throughout the report—and the report on “Gypsy/Travellers and Care”—there is a recurring theme of a lack of national leadership. In its briefing for this afternoon's debate, the Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland stated:

“relations between Gypsy/Travellers and the settled community is the single greatest community relations challenge the country faces.”

The EHRC added that

“These problems are not insurmountable, but require leadership and resources”.

One potential reason for that theme of a lack of leadership, which runs through the report, is the lack of political will, not just in central Government but in local government, and public apathy. The minister said in her opening speech that the issue

“is constantly being looked at”.

If that is the case, I wonder at the lack of progress that is being made.

Respectable racism is one challenge that the Gypsy Traveller community faces. If we were to replace the two words “Gypsy Traveller” with any other ethnic group we would not be having this debate, as action would have been taken long ago and leadership would have been exhibited in haystacks.

The following quotes were brought to my attention by MECOPP, and they show that we are some way from tackling the discriminatory attitudes seen throughout the country that are perpetuated by the media and local politicians.

One Aberdeen councillor is quoted as saying:

“Putting a gypsy travellers halting site next to a school is morally wrong.”

**Mark McDonald:** I recognise what Mary Fee is saying. However, I served on Aberdeen City Council from 2007 to 2012 when it was trying to deal with the issue. Will she acknowledge the role that many of her Labour colleagues played in bandying around rhetoric that was frankly unsuitable?

**Mary Fee:** This is not a party-political issue; as Mark McDonald will know, it crosses all parties.

A Dundee councillor is reported to have

“called on Dundonians to play their part in deterring travelling people from visiting the city”,

and further called on the people of Dundee to refuse to give work to Gypsy Travellers so that

“we”

may

“see an end to these people coming to Dundee.”

**Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):** Regarding the Dundee councillor quote, does Mary Fee suggest that local councillors, and we as parliamentarians, should be asking people to give work to people after a leaflet comes through their letterbox with only a mobile phone number on it? That was the issue: people were being warned to be careful not give any kind of work to people where the advert has only a mobile phone number.

**Mary Fee:** I thank Christian Allard for his point. However, my point is that such attitudes exist throughout the country and unless we highlight them we will never get rid of them. It is not a party-political issue; it is an issue that affects everyone.

I am aware that people from all parties make such remarks, but how can we expect the public to change their attitudes when politicians get away with it? Unless we publicise such discrimination, we will never end it. There are great examples of positive quotes from local and civic leaders, but the level of coverage that they receive is often of a different grade.

Scottish Labour recognises that many Gypsy Travellers in Scotland continue to face discrimination. Although the population of that ethnic group is unknown, with estimates ranging from 2,000 to 20,000, the level of discrimination is greatly disproportionate.

This week we have heard a lot about the Government's programme for Scotland, and we have repeatedly heard from the First Minister and his Cabinet about the need to create a fairer country and empower communities. However, it appears that the Gypsy Traveller community is often overlooked. Page 50 of the programme

places great emphasis on the Government's view of

"equality and social justice as central to its vision for a fairer Scotland",

and all four bullet points in section 19 relate to Gypsy Travellers. However, nothing on the Government's agenda aims to improve the lives, experiences and environment of that overlooked group.

During evidence sessions, as the report highlights, we heard that many Gypsy Travellers have to hide who they are, which means that such a rich cultural heritage is cloaked for fear of persecution. How can any Gypsy Traveller feel that that can be overcome when the Government will not take steps to tackle the discrimination that is often perpetuated by the lack of understanding of some in the media?

Having visited sites in different areas of the country, I have witnessed the shocking standards of living that Gypsy Travellers face: overflowing septic tanks, children bathing in freezing-cold amenity blocks, poorly lit paths, a lack of bus stops and outside toilets. Nobody should be expected to live in those conditions.

During those visits I met some strong Gypsy Traveller women who have overcome a lack of education and taught themselves to read. They are strong women who care for the elderly and the children in the community with little help from services that many others would require.

The report raises some grave concerns about how Gypsy Travellers live in Scotland, and we are concerned about the apparent lack of progress since the previous inquiry into Gypsy Travellers in 2004-05.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I would be grateful if you would draw to a close, please.

**Mary Fee:** Co-operation from COSLA during the evidence sessions was poor and left a lot to be desired. However, the follow-up response from the COSLA chief executive created a bit more positivity and hope that we can find solutions to tackle the real issues.

Scottish Labour supports the inquiry report's recommendations and hopes that the Government will take them forward to make a real difference to the lives of Gypsy Travellers.

15:00

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** I begin, as other speakers have done, by saying a few words about the revolving door that is the Equal Opportunities Committee. I arrived on the committee between the two reports that we are now discussing. The first report was very much the

responsibility, as far as the Conservatives were concerned, of my colleague Annabel Goldie. However, I took over in time for the second report. I note that that report says that I became a member of the committee on 17 January, but that is perhaps a slight misrepresentation, as I think that I had been attending the committee for two months as a substitute before I became an official committee member.

The experience of preparing the report "Where Gypsy/Travellers Live" was something that I genuinely enjoyed. I have had a certain amount of awareness of the problems relating to the Gypsy Traveller community within the north-east—my own region—for some time. In the past, I have taken the opportunity to go on to unauthorised sites and speak to the Gypsy Travellers to find out their views. However, the opportunity to meet Gypsy Travellers in their own environment and here in the Parliament was one that I enjoyed. I discovered, for example, that one of the limited number of families within the Gypsy Traveller community bears my own name. On the morning of 4 February in Clinterty, when we had an informal discussion, I found myself sitting beside a young man. When I introduced myself to him, saying, "Hello, my name is Alex Johnstone," he said, "So is mine."

We also met a broad range of representatives that day. Those of us who got to meet Sammy Stewart will always remember that he was a good laugh and a man who missed his calling as a stand-up comedian. I suppose that one of the ironies, which we never quite got to the bottom of, was that it appeared to be only men who were willing to talk to us that day at Clinterty, whereas only three days later, when we had a round-table session in the Parliament, we met only women from the Traveller community.

As I said, although we never quite got to the bottom of that divide, we found that Travellers themselves are very articulate and very well able to put across their views. They are one of those groups who will always be able to express themselves fluently but who do not benefit as they should from that fluency.

We discovered, for example, that the problems that Gypsy Travellers face and the problems that are faced by the settled community relating to Gypsy Travellers differ significantly across Scotland. We heard that there seems to be a particularly smooth relationship in the Argyll area compared with that in other parts of Scotland and that in large parts of the south-west a significant number of Travellers are in permanent accommodation. We also heard that in the north-east, which is my home ground, there is quite a degree of seasonal movement. That is where the

problem can arise in relation to unauthorised camps.

We also heard—at some length—that significant problems face the community relating to accommodation and the provision of healthcare and education. I should also pay tribute to the number of young people from the Gypsy Traveller community who were able to talk to us fluently and express their needs and desires, although they had only limited access to education.

I believe that there is a great deal in the report's recommendations that is worthy of support. In fact, the Conservatives support the broad thrust of the report. However, there are one or two concerns that I believe we need to address.

Local authorities, especially those in the north-east, have been unable to solve the problem of unauthorised encampments, which has persisted for many years. Similarly, private landowners have been left to deal with the problem on their own while the police maintain their presumption against prosecution. For ordinary people who are faced with an unauthorised encampment in their community, there seems to be no support whatsoever, while Travellers themselves know all their rights, have the support of human rights groups and are only too aware of how far they can exploit an establishment that is afraid to act for fear of criticism.

The Scottish Government has a long record of failure to address the real concerns of the settled community regarding unauthorised encampments. In the face of that, it is extremely important that strong leadership is delivered. The evidence of the local authorities in the north-east is that, in spite of the fact that there is a determined effort to establish the campsites that are necessary to deal with the problem, there is inevitably political pressure that undermines that.

If local authorities are unfit to take the matter through to its conclusion, there is no alternative but strong leadership from the Scottish Government in order to force through the changes. Discussion groups will not deliver. During the inquiry, COSLA resisted the invitation to become a significant part of the process. For that reason, I look forward to hearing what the Government will do in response to the report, but I also look forward to the day when it will deliver that strong leadership and we eventually begin to progress the long-term solution to this unfortunate problem.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move on to the open debate, with six-minute speeches.

15:06

**Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside):** Presiding Officer, I begin by apologising that I will

have to leave at the conclusion of my speech to get to a public meeting in my constituency this evening. I notified you in advance to that effect.

I was interested to read the report by the Equal Opportunities Committee. I note that it took evidence at the Clinterty site, which is located in my constituency. It has 17 permanent plots and four short-term plots. One of the difficulties that the council has always faced is that those plots are invariably always being let at the time when encampments arrive in Aberdeen, so there is no suitable alternative site to which the council can direct the Travelling community.

I am more than familiar with the issue now, as an MSP, but I was also familiar with it in my time as a local councillor for Dyce, Bucksburn and Danestone. Over the summer of 2007, just after I was elected, there were a number of encampments in my council ward, which led to the heightened tensions that members have identified. As part of the coalition administration in Aberdeen, I did what I could to try to get the issue addressed. Indeed, rather than it being the convener of the north area committee who moved recommendations on establishing halting sites, I had to do it as a member of the committee because the convener was unwilling to put his head above the parapet and take those tough decisions.

During our time in that administration, we found that the lack of leadership pervaded the council, both in terms of our coalition colleagues, who were unwilling to take a stance in favour of halting sites and to pursue them, and in the often reprehensible rhetoric, which I will return to, of opposition councillors, who sought to make political capital from the issue and to put us in a difficult position.

We therefore took the view that one of the difficulties that we faced as a council was that clashes were inevitable between the need to establish a halting site and the kickback that we would get from a settled community if we attempted to establish a site next to it. We agreed that one way in which to deal with that would be to put into the council's local development plan a requirement to establish a halting site in certain sizes of new development. Again, we found ourselves being attacked on that by political opportunists, but we pressed ahead with it nonetheless.

Let us fast-forward to 2013. At the beginning of the year, the council administration announced plans to develop halting sites. However, the way in which the plans were unveiled and the complete failure to consult on the sites have further badly damaged community relations in Aberdeen.

If a council is going to establish halting sites, it must engage with the settled community. We

understand that that is a difficult sell for politicians, but it is not good enough to do nothing to consult communities and bring them along with the plans.

In Aberdeen, the council is attempting to pass the buck on the issue. Although the establishment of halting sites is the council's responsibility, at the full council meeting in August the council moved that it will not progress a halting site until the Scottish Government grants a byelaw to the city that, as Councillor Willie Young said, would

"make illegal camping a criminal and not just a civil offence."

That does not help to move the issue forward in the way that the Equal Opportunities Committee wants it to move forward. Indeed, in letters to me, the Solicitor General for Scotland and Police Scotland suggested that a byelaw is entirely unnecessary, because the existence of halting sites will mean that a council is free to take appropriate steps if an unauthorised encampment exists in its area and people are reluctant to move to the halting sites that have been created.

I want to get back to talking about the rhetoric. I understand that emotions often run high on the matter. We need only look at the reporting and letters pages in the papers and at the letters that all elected members who have encampments in their constituencies or council wards receive from the settled community to see that. That is why it is vital that politicians, whether at national or local level, are careful in the language that we use when we deal with the issue. We have a responsibility not to heighten tensions or inflame opinion.

The current housing convener in Aberdeen City Council, Neil Cooney, said recently:

"Aberdeen City Council recognises Gypsy/Travellers as a marginalised, vulnerable group who historically have experienced discrimination and disadvantage".

I think that we all agree with that statement, but the difficulty that I have is that that is the same Neil Cooney who, when he was in opposition in the council in 2007, hit the headlines when he accused Gypsy Travellers of "environmental terrorism". Such rhetoric has no place in the debate. Indeed, at the time, Alfie Kefford, the chairman of the Gypsy Council, said that Councillor Cooney's remarks were "highly offensive" and

"We are extremely angry at what this man has said and want him sacked."

Instead of being sacked, Councillor Cooney has now been appointed as convener of housing and environment and is responsible for Aberdeen City Council's leadership on the Gypsy Traveller situation.

If the local approach is to put individuals who use such rhetoric in positions of leadership on the issue, it is little wonder that there has been little movement. I very much hope that all members will use their influence on councillors and local politicians to ensure that the discussions and debates that need to happen do so in a respectful manner, without the kind of rhetoric that I described.

15:13

#### **Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab):**

Like other members, I want to say how much I will miss Mary Fee as convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee—I am not sure whether she feels the same way. The committee certainly benefited from her leadership. I welcome Margaret McCulloch to the post and hope that she can follow in Mary Fee's footsteps. She certainly did so this morning, especially given her early morning start.

As I was writing my speech for this debate on Gypsy Travellers, I was trying to think of something positive with which to open. I failed to do that on this occasion—but before Scottish National Party members shout at me, let me say that my remarks are directed not solely at the current Government but at Governments that have gone before them, at every local authority in Scotland and at COSLA.

Throughout the evidence sessions to the Equal Opportunities Committee, I heard consistently from Gypsy Travellers about the systemic failures to which they have been subjected for far too long by people who were in a position to help. The failure of leadership is key, as members pointed out. No one seems to want to take responsibility even for attempting to alleviate some of the problems that the Gypsy Traveller community faces on a daily basis.

Our report aimed to be hard hitting, because all members of the committee thought that the problems that we had heard about, and which we had seen for ourselves on site visits, must be addressed now.

In our evidence sessions, we were acutely aware that ours was not the first nor the second report that the Equal Opportunities Committee had undertaken on these matters, but very little has changed in all of that time. The lack of suitable sites for the Gypsy Traveller community across Scotland became self-evident as the committee travelled across the country, making numerous site visits. However, that was not the only problem with sites.

On my site visit, John Finnie and I were invited into one woman's home, which she shares with her husband and very young children. The

caravan window had been smashed but had not been replaced, and all the heat from the woman's small electric fire was escaping without bringing much warmth to her family. When we asked whether someone was coming to repair the window, she informed us that she rented the caravan from the housing association, which believed that it was her responsibility to replace the window, something that she could not afford to do.

Although this woman paid her rent and council tax, she could not get a replacement window; if the same thing had happened in a bricks-and-mortar house, we would all be rightly outraged and asking the pertinent questions. In this instance, people simply shrugged their shoulders. It is simply not good enough for such situations to arise. However, we know that this matter is not a one-off, given that other members reported back to the committee similar if not worse situations.

This is why the committee believed it important to stress the need for higher living standards on sites. Moreover, we believe it essential that Gypsy Travellers have the same rights and responsibilities as those living in fixed accommodation. For that to be more than a recommendation, we need the Scottish Government and local authorities—via COSLA if necessary—to put in place an action plan to tackle this sort of issue. We also need the housing associations responsible for some of the sites across the country to take their responsibilities in the tenancy agreement seriously and not see the agreement simply as something to be signed and agreed to only by the Gypsy Travellers themselves.

I listened to the minister's opening speech and I acknowledge that she understands our recommendation and that she is working towards a solution. However, we need action. I realise that she does not want to rush action and get it wrong, but it would be useful to have a timeframe for when such action is likely to take place.

I recently visited the Gypsy Traveller site at Larkhall in South Lanarkshire to get a better understanding of the site provision in my own region. The residents told me that they felt it to be a good site and that the site manager was effective, but they wanted the site to be expanded to allow family members in other parts of Scotland to live there or visit. Given my experience of previous sites, I was delighted to hear that the people actually wanted to stay on the site.

I know that Larkhall is not a one-off, but it is an exception. That situation cannot continue, and I urge the Scottish Government to work with its partners to collate information on how to make a site work not only for the Gypsy Traveller community but for the wider community. After all,

the example I have just highlighted shows that it can be done.

There is a fundamental issue with our society's view of the Gypsy Traveller community. Too often, an all too prevalent attitude is to castigate this ethnic group as a problem community rather than see it as an asset to the wider community. The Scottish Human Rights Commission supports that analysis, describing discrimination against Gypsy Travellers as

“the last bastion of respectable racism”.

Tabloid journalism regularly demonises the Traveller culture and television programmes propagate the type of negative cultural stereotypes that have not been seen against any other minority community since the 1980s.

As we have heard, MECOPP provided a briefing to committee members, highlighting the fact that elected representatives recently abused their positions in the media to attack the Gypsy Traveller community. Mary Fee has already read out certain quotes, but the chamber must acknowledge their importance. I know that members in this chamber will be appalled by such statements, but the truth is that the councillors in question are not the only ones with those appalling thoughts. After all, according to a Scottish social attitude survey in 2010, 44 per cent of people thought that Gypsy Travellers would be unsuitable as primary school teachers.

If we are to tackle such discrimination, we need a national public awareness campaign aimed at tackling discrimination and racism against the Gypsy Traveller community. I know that the Scottish Government has already been in discussions about how best to carry that out. Although I acknowledge the minister's comments on the matter, I urge her to come forward with a timetable for when such a campaign is likely to begin. She said that she was announcing the campaign to Parliament today, but the announcement had already been made in the Government's response to the committee report. More information would certainly be helpful.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** You must conclude.

**Siobhan McMahon:** As Mary Fee stated earlier, if the levels of discrimination faced by the Gypsy Traveller community were happening towards any other “protected characteristic” as defined in the Equality Act 2010, there would be public outrage. It is simply not good enough for the treatment experienced by this group to have been allowed to continue for so long. I urge the Government to do everything in its powers to address this scandal now before it is too late.



15:20

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** I joined the committee in October last year, which was part way through the evidence-taking sessions, so I was only involved in the report, "Where Gypsy/Travellers Live". However, it became clear to me early on that this was a subject in which very slow progress was being made.

The report starts by saying:

"We are extremely frustrated".

I share that frustration and fully support the tone of the report.

I should say also at this stage that I think that Mary Fee has been an excellent and fair convener of the committee. I was disappointed to hear that she was leaving, but I welcome Margaret McCulloch to the post.

We have to accept that this is not an easy topic to deal with or even to discuss, and it is certainly not easy to find a solution that everyone will accept. However, the starting point is that we are dealing with a seriously disadvantaged minority group whose living conditions, with some exceptions, are frequently not acceptable and in relation to whom health and education provision is patchy to say the least.

Over the years, we have changed our attitude and speech in relation to a number of minority groups. We are not as far on as we want to be as a society, but it is much less common nowadays to hear someone say that they do not want to live next to Jewish people, black people or gay people. However, it is not unusual to still hear people openly say that they do not want to live next to Gypsy Travellers. We not only hear that from individual citizens; we read it in the media and hear it from some politicians. That is not acceptable.

As Mary Fee said, the EHRC's briefing for today's debate says:

"relations between Gypsy/Travellers and the settled community is the single greatest community relations challenge the country faces".

In terms of the numbers involved, it might not be the biggest challenge, but in terms of how poor the relationship is, I have largely to agree with the EHRC. We have taken other minority groups in our society seriously, but it seems to me that we have not taken Gypsy Travellers seriously.

It was clear from our witnesses that there have been particular issues in the north-east of Scotland, where the more vibrant economy has attracted this often mobile section of our population to jobs in the likes of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

That was brought home to me when I was campaigning in the Aberdeen Donside by-election. The subject came up a number of times on the doorsteps, and it was clear that it is a sensitive issue. I am not entirely clear why this debate has taken so long to happen, given that the report was published in March, but it has been suggested that it was delayed because it was too sensitive to discuss during the by-election. If that is the case, it is regrettable, but it underlines the sensitivity of the subject.

So, whose responsibility is it to improve things? To some extent, it is the responsibility of all of us. I do not believe that we can say that it is only local councils who have to act. I totally support the independence of local government and believe that councils should be allowed to deal with issues in their remit in the way that they choose to do so. The concordat has been a big improvement on what went before and I fully support it. However, local councillors are clearly in a difficult position. Often, a majority of the electorate is openly hostile to any new site in the locality and it takes a lot of guts to support a new site when there is such clear local opposition.

That is why we worded paragraph 49 in the way that we did. It says that

"evidence strongly suggests a need for leadership from the Scottish Government in supporting the development of sites."

Members should note the word "supporting". It continues:

"We see this as being essential in supporting local authorities and elected representatives, both in bringing sites to fruition and setting an example against discrimination."

That is the way in which I want us to move forward. I do not want people to blame each other or say that only one person has to act on the issue. I want central Government to support local government, because this is a serious problem that will be solved only if we are all involved. It is not fair to leave local authorities to take everything forward on their own. We need national leadership from Government and Parliament in relation to achieving more sites and the wider aim of changing the tone of the debate.

As has been mentioned, we were disappointed at COSLA's initial response. However, I must say that I am happier with Rory Mair's more recent response to the committee's letter of 27 June, in which he promised to give full consideration to the matters that were raised and consider reports to each of the executive groups in COSLA. Similarly, I am pleased that Shona Robison has an overarching responsibility for the equality portfolio, and that both she and Margaret Burgess are involved in this subject.

I am happy to see that the Government's response to the report says that it accepts that there is a problem. That is a good starting point. The question is: where are we going and how fast are we going? A number of groups and individuals are sceptical of more studies and more reports. At the very least, it would be helpful to have clear timescales or at least target timescales for how quickly new sites, in particular, can be provided.

I think that we can all accept that Gypsy Travellers face a serious amount of discrimination. I also accept that there is a fair amount of good will in trying to improve things. However, I ask that, if one thing comes out of today's debate, it is that there is more urgency about all of this.

15:25

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):** I join the rest of the chamber in welcoming the report, which gives a valuable insight into the real lives of the Travelling community in Scotland as well as making several important recommendations.

The traditional culture of the Travelling community has been present throughout the UK for centuries, but it has only recently been given the status of an ethnic group with its rights and responsibilities covered by the Race Relations Act 1976. It is our responsibility to ensure that the lifestyle choices that, as a minority group, those people make are respected and that their human rights and living standards are matters of concern to us all.

The accounts of impoverished conditions that are highlighted in the report paint a shocking picture of neglect. In one example, babies are found to be bathing in freezing water. In another, the absence of any lighting makes an area unsafe and impossible to navigate after dark, and there are overflowing septic tanks and a lack of any infrastructure to enable children to play. Decent living conditions are the basic human right of every person, regardless of their background, but at present there is a real shortage of approved sites for the current population.

As the report highlights, there is a lack of information available on the current number of Gypsy Travellers, with the most recent estimate taken in 2009. Local authorities and public agencies must seek to include the community in their service planning processes. As Amnesty International points out, the absence of figures on population size should not negate that planning requirement.

The report's recommendations rightly commend the work of Planning Aid for Scotland in helping Gypsy Travellers to engage with the process. It has been maintained at £237,000 per annum, and

I hope that the Government will continue to provide the same level of support to Planning Aid for Scotland for that work.

The problems that the Gypsy Traveller community faces go far beyond poor housing conditions, but many of the issues that they face throughout their lives have their roots in those conditions. The report cites the north-east of Scotland as facing particular problems, and I agree that any work to develop the necessary new sites should have a special focus on that area.

National policy, however, must reflect the urgent need for a greater number of safe sites throughout Scotland. At present, there is no obligation on local authorities to provide sites; therefore, I believe that a statutory duty such as exists in England and Wales should be seriously considered.

The report highlights an absence of evidence that local authorities have taken adequate steps to address need, and COSLA must fulfil its role in supporting communities to do that. I also support the recommendation about the development and implementation of a standard Gypsy Traveller site tenancy agreement.

In their working lives, Gypsy Travellers face discrimination constantly and are often turned away from job opportunities as a result of their home addresses being recognised as Traveller sites. Much of the discrimination is based on negative preconceptions of the characteristics of travelling life that are based to a great extent on representations in mainstream and social media commentary. We can encourage a change in attitudes only when we tackle those negative stereotypes and emphasise that antisocial behaviour at a small number of sites does not represent the population as a whole. In view of that, the EHRC's illustrative guide for media outlets is profoundly welcome.

Interaction with the community is vital if we are to make the right kind of progress. The committee's report outlines some of the work that has been carried out thus far in consultation, and I was heartened to read that a great deal of work has been done with the Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project—MECOPP—which works closely with carers in difficult living situations and knows the challenges that they face.

In its written submission to the inquiry into Gypsy Traveller accommodation, the group quoted a statement that was made in a previous submission 10 years ago:

"many of the difficulties Gypsy/Travellers encounter, and society's acceptance of prejudice towards this ethnic group, are effectively legitimised by State policies which are at best out-dated and paternalistic, at worst restrictive and discriminatory".

MECOPP's submission went on to highlight that that statement still holds true, notwithstanding the efforts that have been made.

MECOPP also pointed out that previous inquiries have failed to engage properly with the community. So few Travellers were aware of the committee's inquiry that the group made the laudable decision that it would gather responses itself, and I commend it for doing so. What came through in its snapshot of life in the Gypsy Traveller community is a general feeling that the Government has thus far failed to disseminate relevant information effectively and, as a result, has failed to engage and to receive feedback.

Many in the community felt that their way of life is not understood and their basic needs are not met. Many desire to be able to continue the tradition of travelling, but legal spaces for camping and parking are increasingly being closed down. When they travel, they face harassment from the settled community. Therefore, for the security of their families, they are often forced to remain in sites that are poorly managed and have very low living standards. Life on the edge of poverty, with little security, has led to life expectancy for Gypsy Travellers—men and women—being 10 years lower than the national average.

All of that is completely unacceptable. The common values that join the settled and Travelling communities together are far more important than the cultural differences that divide them. It is important that, in developing policy, we do not see people in one group as "other". Instead, we should recognise their value as members of Scottish society who have a distinct story to tell.

15:31

**Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):**

First, I feel that I need to clarify my position. The Equal Opportunities Committee's report "Where Gypsy/Travellers Live" was published in March 2013, so I can take no credit for it—I came to Parliament in May. However, when I joined the committee, I was very much aware of the good work of its members, particularly when they came to the north-east of Scotland to meet representatives of the Gypsy Traveller community at the Clinterty site.

The region that I have the privilege and honour to represent has a great tradition of welcoming Travellers, and for good reasons. In the past, many people in Scotland moved with the seasons to find work. At the end of the 19th century, thousands of men and women would come to work in the herring industry around the fishing ports during the catching season. The farming calendar would create seasonal work for labourers travelling from farm to farm in the north-east.

There is a myth that the reason why Gypsy Travellers are looking for work in the north-east today is because of the prosperity created by a vibrant energy sector. It is true that we are the powerhouse of the UK, but the north-east has much more to harvest than energy. From fishing in the North Sea to farming, we have kept our great tradition of producing wonderful food and drink.

Every year, I attend the Lourin fair at Old Rayne in Aberdeenshire. The fair, which is now 500 years old, was previously a gathering for traders, who brought crafts, produce and livestock to the village, as well as for seasonal farm labourers looking for work. In the old days, many people moved about and they were always welcome—their arrival was expected and celebrated. The picture was very much the same across Europe. I remember looking forward to the caravans taking over the main square of my own village in France every year. It was cause for celebration, as the Travellers brought us our funfair for the week.

What has changed over the years for our attitude to Gypsy Travellers to become what it is today? What has changed for the report of the Equal Opportunities Committee to call for a Government-led campaign with a remit of establishing a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination?

I agree with the findings of the report that, after 12 years of debating the issue, the appalling situation of many Gypsy Travellers is little changed. However, I am encouraged that the committee found some commendable initiatives in the north-east. I thank the Aberdeenshire councillors who wrote to update me on the progress made. One of those is Councillor Allan Hendry, who is pictured on page 18 of the summary report booklet. At a local level, people are engaging with the issue, but the outcomes are still very disappointing 12 years on.

The Scottish Government has already answered most of the points that we are debating today. I thank Shona Robison, who is the minister in charge of the equalities portfolio, and the Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess, for answering the most recent correspondence from the committee and for understanding the challenge before us.

Like others in today's debate, I was shocked when I first read the report, and I share the committee's frustration at the lack of action from COSLA. Page 18 of the report says:

"When asked to respond to our call for evidence, which included questions on how planning for Gypsy/Traveller sites is taken into account, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities ... stated, in its entirety, that 'COSLA does not provide services or have the relations of the sort you are seeking information about'."

On page 20, the report says:

"We were disturbed by COSLA's response to our call for evidence, which gives the impression that it does not see its role as being to support local authorities during the planning process. We ask that COSLA clarify its position, and that local authorities, as far as COSLA's role allows, use COSLA as a forum for support and partnership."

Such an attitude has stopped us from moving on as a society and accepting Gypsy Travellers' rights. COSLA is pivotal to the implementation and promotion of the strategy needed at national and local level. There has been a dereliction of responsibility from COSLA. Why does COSLA think that it can ignore the report? As we have heard, the Scottish Government wrote to the committee to say that it is ready to work with local government, including COLSA, and directly with individual local authorities as appropriate, in order to effect change and measure success collaboratively.

Gypsy Travellers do not travel daily, all year round. Families require safe and secure places from which to do their travelling. As Gypsy Travellers grow older and are less able to travel regularly, they require safe and secure stopping places. Gypsy Travellers also sometimes stop travelling to care for sick or elderly relatives or to continue a child's education in a supported school environment. That is the reality that our local authorities are struggling to cope with and, as we have heard, some are struggling more than others. The committee's report must be the start of finding solutions to local problems.

I am really impressed with the time and the amount of work that the Equal Opportunities Committee has dedicated its report. I hope that members enjoyed their trip to Aberdeen. I am sure that the committee will consider going back to see the improvement made to the places and conditions in which Gypsy Travellers live in the north-east.

I expect that the Scottish Government-led public awareness campaign will start to change attitudes towards the Gypsy Traveller communities. However, that campaign can tackle discrimination only if we all participate in it, at national and local level. As members of the Scottish Parliament, we have a responsibility to bring back respect for Gypsy Travellers and to celebrate the diversity of our nation—a diversity that we in this Parliament are very proud of.

15:37

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am not a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee, but I read its report closely due to my constituency interest. I commend members of the committee for the report. Like my colleague, Alex

Johnstone, I am pleased to support the recommendations set out in it.

The Travelling community in Scotland plays a large and important role in the culture and life of our country. I agree that much more needs to be done to prevent the stigma and discrimination suffered by those in the Gypsy Traveller community.

As the report says, accommodation and living space are, without doubt, the root cause of many of the problems that Gypsy Travellers face. The desperate conditions in which many Travellers find themselves must be addressed by the Scottish Government. An increase in appropriate sites is required as a matter of urgency, and it is Holyrood's role to encourage and lead local authorities in that endeavour, as the report says.

I hope that the minister will forgive me for taking time to lobby her on some of the issues affecting residents and Travellers in my region. The emergence of unauthorised Gypsy Traveller sites is a pressing matter for communities and local authorities in both Fife and Perth and Kinross.

In recent years, an unauthorised site near the Broxden business park in Perth has been used by Gypsy Travellers, creating serious issues in the neighbouring Oakbank residential area. Indeed, only this week, a group of Gypsy Travellers left that unauthorised site, according to a report in *The Courier* from yesterday, "strewn with litter". That has caused a great deal of concern in the local community. There have also been serious issues on the South Inch in Perth and at Glenrothes, Dalgety Bay and elsewhere in Fife.

**Dennis Robertson:** Does the member acknowledge that Gypsy Travellers traditionally had stopping sites throughout Scotland but, with the emergence of business parks, a lot of those sites have been taken from them? Where are they to go?

**Murdo Fraser:** I am just about to come on to address that point, if Mr Robertson will bear with me.

Members present who represent Fife and attend the regular meetings that we have with the local chamber of commerce will be familiar with the many complaints from businesses and local residents about Travellers pitching up on privately owned land and refusing to move. In some instances, when Travellers move on, those unauthorised sites—we say unauthorised, but they are actually illegal—are left in a filthy state, covered in rubbish, dog waste and worse. In a perverse legal twist, the innocent business owner or landowner is then left with the task and cost of cleaning up the mess and, if they refuse to do so, can be served with an enforcement notice by the authorities and have to bear the cost of that.

That behaviour is not only morally and socially unacceptable, it is also illegal. The Trespass (Scotland) Act 1865, which is still extant, makes it a criminal offence to camp on land without the owner's permission. Why are there no prosecutions when there is such a flagrant breach of the law? It is because national guidance from the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland includes a general presumption against prosecution.

Despite the fact that the law is on the side of the innocent victims of such behaviour, they will not usually have the assistance of the authorities. That cannot be acceptable. We cannot have a situation in which the police refuse to arrest those who are in breach of the law, whoever they may be. The general presumption not to take legal action against Gypsy Travellers for the crime of trespass creates many tensions within communities.

To return to Dennis Robertson's point, I entirely accept—it comes through the report loud and clear—that the lack of Traveller-specific sites exacerbates the issue. However, two wrongs do not make a right and the rule of law should be enforced regardless of non-harassment policies.

Private citizens and businesses—some of them struggling in the current climate—should not have to suffer because of or pay the costs of the failings of local authorities. It is not their fault. When there have been clear public order abuses—including urinating in public, dogs running wild, littering, fly tipping and other antisocial crimes—the police must use their powers to act.

Some Travellers—not a majority—seem to believe that they have carte blanche to do whatever they want without fear of prosecution from the police. That must change in order to create a more harmonious relationship between Travellers and the communities in which they live.

I call for some common sense on the issue. I was taken with what the minister said in her opening remarks about the need for balance in the debate. We need urgently to settle the issue by making land available for Travellers to live on but, in the meantime, we cannot have Travellers setting up camp wherever they wish, in areas that were never designed for human habitation, and then leaving them in a terrible state.

Residents whose lives are negatively impacted by Travellers must have the backing of the police and lawmakers. Similarly, Travellers who suffer from discrimination and hate crime abuse must have the backing of law enforcement officials.

Mutual respect, understanding and common sense must be the cornerstones of any future Travellers strategy. The Scottish Government has an important role to play in ensuring that Gypsy Travellers are given access to clean, habitable

sites and the public services that they require but, in exchange, Travellers must also recognise that they have responsibilities as part of society.

15:43

**Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP):** I am grateful to Christian Allard for reminding me that, in March, I turned on my radio and heard Mary Fee, who was then convener of the committee, talking about the inquiry and the report. She talked about it very well, if I may say. However, what struck me was that nothing had changed since I was on the Equal Opportunities Committee in the first session of the Parliament when the original report came out back in 2001.

That got me to thinking back to 2001. At that time, I was extremely shocked at what we learned—like, I suspect, members who came to the matter new on the Equal Opportunities Committee in this session. I thought that I knew a bit about what we called the Gypsy Traveller community through reading, a love of the culture, song and storytelling and the fact that, for some time, I lived and worked in Argyll, where there are a lot of Travellers. However, I was totally shocked at what I learned during that first inquiry.

I learned about the life expectancy of members of the community, which Malcolm Chisholm talked about. I was extremely shocked by the discrimination that people suffered when they tried to access GP services or to get into hospital, and I was horrified at the level of bullying of Gypsy Traveller children that was prevalent in schools, particularly secondary schools, which was such that the drop-out rate of Gypsy Traveller children from education was extremely high.

Looking back, I am struck by a couple of things. Ours is a very privileged job, because we meet people whom we would not otherwise meet, and there are things that stick in my memory. One of them is being on a site—a pretty bad site—in Argyll, where I met a lady who invited me into her trailer. She had been part of what is called the settled community—she had been given houses by the local authority and had given them up. When I asked her to explain to me why she had done that, she said, "It's very simple: I don't like living in a house, because you have to stand up to see out the windows." I was struck by a recognition that I would never understand that. Part of the problem with what local authorities, Government and we as individuals who have got used to all the trappings of being settled try to do is that we try to understand, but we will never understand, so why do we not just accept that there are people who require to live differently from how those of us in the main stream of society have chosen to live, make an accommodation and get on with it?

A United Nations rapporteur is looking at housing generally across the UK, and I know that she is meeting representatives of the Gypsy Traveller community again today. I hope that we can reach an understanding when it comes to what she reports.

The other thing that I remember strongly was going into a cafe in Argyll with a representative of the Travelling community. On realising that we were finding it extremely difficult to get served and wondering why, I asked him, "Is this cafe always like this?" He said, "No—it's because you're with me." I was shocked that such an open form of discrimination was happening in a decade in which the Parliament had been re-established. That impression was reinforced when his wife came and stood outside the door and motioned to him to come out. I said, "Tell her to come in for her lunch," but he said, "Oh no, she won't come in—she's too frightened to come in here."

It is absolutely awful that we are allowing people to live like that in this day and age, especially when—as Siobhan mentioned—on some of the sites in question, we are talking about rent-paying tenants who do not have tenancy agreements or any real rights. They have occupancy agreements, which amount to nothing.

I am conscious of the time, so I want to move on to discuss negative stereotyping and discrimination, which I think we all have a responsibility to address. I know that the National Union of Journalists has recently produced guidelines for its members. I was struck by the fact that one of its main guidelines is:

"Resist the temptation to sensationalise issues involving travellers".

Everything that I have seen on television lately involving Travellers has definitely sensationalised the story. Some of the headlines in newspapers are absolutely disgusting.

I go back to what I said at the beginning—I was part of the Equal Opportunities Committee's inquiry in 2001, yet here we are in 2013 and, sadly, nothing has changed. At around that time, I remember lodging an amendment to the Housing (Scotland) Bill on the issue, which was voted down. I am not convinced that the same would not happen again. As Mark McDonald said, this is an issue on which we are all frightened to put our head above the parapet. I think that we need a champion, who I hope will be Shona Robison in her equalities leadership role. We need to be much more vocal on the issue and to recognise that there are times when it is necessary to do things that are extremely unpopular, but which we must do because they are right. I would like to see that happen on this subject.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members to use each other's full names.

15:49

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):** As we know, the term "Gypsy Traveller" covers a broad range of groups that are descended from Scottish, Roma, Irish and other roots. Like others, I am proud to live in a diverse nation. As Scots, we should be proud of our unique Gypsy Traveller heritage.

I recently had a conversation about the issue with someone who told me:

"there's a thriving gypsy population in my own local area which has been there for as long as I can remember and long before that. The gypsies here are an accepted part of the local community; they work and live here, and are a part of the fabric of the area."

The Gypsy Traveller population has a long history in the south region and is even celebrated—the Yetholm common riding's principals are not standard bearers, braw lads or lasses, gala queens or cornets but the bara gadgie and the bara manashee. Anybody who knows a little Romany will know that that means the good man and the good woman.

If people travel to Yetholm, they will also find the Gypsy palace. It is a wee single-storey house that dates back to the 1600s and in which King Charles II was crowned in 1898. He was not the King Charles whom we might usually think of but the last crowned king of the Gypsies—Charles Faa Blythe, the son of Queen Esther. More than 10,000 people descended on Yetholm for that coronation, just over a century ago. Gypsies, Romanies and Travellers are not a new phenomenon—they have been a part of our culture for many generations.

I echo much of what has been said about the day-to-day challenges that Gypsy Travellers encounter. It is particularly concerning that, as a group, they continue to face discrimination—whether that is from individuals or institutions—although they have been part of our culture for so long.

We in Scotland can be proud of being a tolerant nation that always leads the way in stamping out discrimination and protecting our minority communities, which is why the findings of the committee's report make it a genuinely distressing read. The Scottish Human Rights Commission's observation that discrimination against Gypsy Travellers is

"the last bastion of respectable racism"—[*Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee*, 6 December 2012; c 777.]

is a shameful pill to swallow in a democratic society that should have no room for such prejudice to fester.

The report says:

“We were appalled at some of the standards we saw on sites, and disgusted that rent-paying tenants were faced with such bleak living conditions.”

We would not accept such living conditions for tenants in fixed housing, so why is it okay to ignore Gypsy Travellers’ plight? That is unacceptable in a fair and tolerant society. If we are to improve the lives of our Gypsy Traveller population, it is clear that we must tackle two key aspects: we must change the attitudes that feed the discrimination; and we need a firm national approach to fixed and temporary homes, with proper access to other services.

The current arrangements clearly do not work, and we know from the evidence that that creates and feeds into the social discontent of settled communities, which often results in conflict and the sensationalist media attention that the report highlights. As the report says, it is entirely reasonable that Gypsy Travellers should enjoy the same housing rights and responsibilities and the same access to services as tenants in the fixed housing sector have. I look forward to hearing from the minister on that point.

There has perhaps been a political reluctance to deal with the issue head on in the past. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has underlined the need for political leadership and I share its view, as I think others do. Partnership working must take place across all agencies, including COSLA, from which I hope that the minister will encourage active engagement. We must not shy away from tackling the issue on the basis that being seen to stand up for Gypsy Travellers might be unpopular.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind):** I apologise for being late, Presiding Officer—I had other business outside the chamber. However, I am glad that I came in at this point. How much more difficulty is there for Gypsies from Scotland because of the large number of Roma people who are coming from the east and who do not seem to be popular in some areas?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Jim Hume is approaching his last minute.

**Jim Hume:** Perhaps that is a question for the minister. I am sure that she will take it up.

Scottish Gypsy Travellers deserve all the basic rights in life that we all here enjoy without question. They deserve a decent standard of living and proper access to services, and their culture and unique way of life deserve to be recognised and protected. However, the report concludes:

“Discrimination is still one of the biggest barriers to site development”

and to proper

“access to healthcare, education, and employment for Gypsy/Travellers”.

Many Travellers rely on the voluntary sector for help with key services.

The committee heard from Lizzie Johnstone, who said:

“I was forced to go into a house so that I could get proper medication and health services for my younger son”

She said that one site that she had lived on

“was just not suitable for people with disabilities”.—[*Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee*, 7 February 2013; c 1004, 1012.]

The committee’s report is upsetting, but at least it affords an opportunity to achieve fair and decent living standards for our Gypsy Traveller population. Missing that opportunity would represent an abject failing on our part. I sincerely hope that the minister will take forward the committee’s recommendations.

15:55

**Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP):** I pay tribute to Mary Fee, who was convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee in my time on it. She led the committee very fairly and had determination and grit perhaps to ensure that the Gypsy Travelling community had a fair voice in coming to the Parliament.

Perhaps the Gypsy Travelling community has not had a fair hearing. Over the years—perhaps over the centuries—Gypsy Travellers have not been understood. As an individual who came to the Parliament and met the Gypsy Travelling community for the first time when we had an awareness session that was organised by MECOPP, I found myself with perhaps some ignorance about the community’s culture. It became evident that some of the Gypsy Travelling people who came to give evidence in Parliament were reluctant. They said, “What’s the point? We did this before. We came before and nothing’s happened.” MECOPP persuaded and perhaps lent on them slightly to come and give evidence, and they thought that perhaps something else could happen.

Linda Fabiani asked what has changed since 2001. Is it not disappointing to Parliament that, 12 years on, we are debating a situation that should have been dealt with back in 2001? The changes that were required to be made then should have happened then. We cannot afford to miss the opportunity for change this time.

I listened with interest to the minister's comments, to hear something that was perhaps different, which we could grasp and say, "Yes, we've got it right this time. Yes, we're going out there to do what we should have done back in 2001. Yes, we're going to empower the Gypsy Travelling community. Yes, we're going to empower the people who need direction and leadership not just from the Government and the Parliament, but from COSLA and our local authorities." However, I was disappointed, because I did not hear the bugle call or the cavalry charge.

The Gypsy Travelling community is not asking a lot; it is asking for the basics. It is asking for the basic right to go into a health centre and be cared for; the basic right to housing that does not leak; and perhaps the basic right to have indoor facilities. It is asking for basic rights for which the legislation already exists but is never enforced.

Murdo Fraser said that we need mutual respect. I agree with him, but let us get it right. A very small percentage of the Gypsy Travelling community go to unauthorised sites and leave them in a mess. The majority of the Gypsy Travelling community are upstanding, law-abiding citizens who just want the basic right to live as Gypsy Travellers in a community that has no prejudice towards them.

Margo MacDonald asked whether there was a difference between the Romany people and the other Gypsy Traveller communities. Yes there is. When we went to Clinterty in Aberdeen, we were told, "You know what the problem is? It's the Irish Travellers who are coming over here and causing the problems. We're getting the bad name because of—". It happens in every community. I do not know whether problems are being caused by the Irish community. I do not know whether problems are being caused by those coming from eastern Europe, but regardless of that, there should be no prejudice towards our Gypsy Travelling community. They wish to live their lives as law-abiding members of a community.

When we took evidence, we heard that the majority of Gypsy Travellers do not wish to be part of the settled community, living in the heart of it. They are quite happy to have a site on the periphery, providing that they have access to a bus stop, healthcare, a shop and schools for their children. Is that too much to ask? I do not think so.

This Government needs to put its head above the parapet and say, "We cannot let 2013 go by like we let 2001 dissipate."

16:01

**Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill (Lab):** I congratulate Mary Fee, the committee

members and the clerks on the report that we have before us.

In the 14 years during which I have been here, there have been quite a few achievements of this Parliament in which I am honoured to have played a part. Among the most important of them for me was helping to bring forward the first ever report of the Equal Opportunities Committee in 2001, after the issue of discrimination against Gypsy Travellers was brought to my attention, as the race reporter at that time, in a letter from an individual Traveller. Having taken on board the issues that were highlighted in that letter, I convinced the committee, of which you were a member, Presiding Officer, as was Linda Fabiani, to hear evidence from organisations that represent Gypsy Travellers and from individual Gypsy Travellers. We were so concerned by what we heard that we decided to appoint an adviser and to conduct a full inquiry in order to ascertain the level to which public sector policies discriminated against Gypsy Travellers.

That committee published its report in June 2001. It contained 37 recommendations—a similar number to the report that we have before us today. The 2001 report covered a range of issues relating to the standards and location of accommodation, on-site facilities, the management and cost of local authority and private sites and the lack of facilities for roadside encampment.

So, what has changed? Virtually nothing has changed, according to the new report. On education, worrying evidence highlighted key areas of difficulty in accessing services for Gypsy Traveller children and in the management—or lack thereof—of interrupted learning. So, what has changed? Clearly, not much. On health and community care, institutional discrimination in health service provision was identified as an issue. So, what has changed? Little, if anything. On police and criminal justice, key issues were raised about the lack of awareness of Gypsy Traveller lifestyles and culture. So, what has changed? Not very much—next to nothing.

When we debated the report in 2001, the committee took the unanimous view that the then Scottish Executive's response was a disappointment that fell into two categories: the problem was someone else's responsibility, or the issue was already covered by a Scottish Executive policy. Sadly, I have to ask again: what has changed? We concluded that if all those issues were already covered, it was obvious that the policies were not working, because Gypsy Travellers were still facing discrimination in every area of public service delivery.

How disappointing it is that here we are 12 years on and the Equal Opportunities Committee in the fourth session of Parliament has also



completed a report on Gypsy Travellers after hearing virtually all the same evidence, and has arrived at more or less the same conclusions.

Yet again, the key findings of an Equal Opportunities Committee report point to Gypsy Travellers' widespread experience of the systematic failure among local authorities and organisations to ensure that they have access to the levels of service and legal rights that are available to other inhabitants of Scotland. I could not agree more with the EHRC that absence of leadership lies at the heart of the problems that are faced by Gypsy Travellers and the settled community. That means that instead of focusing on solutions, we get short-term action that is more about fighting fires than about sorting out long-standing problems.

No one can dispute the fact that Gypsy Travellers have the right to travel or that local residents have the right to be protected from unacceptable behaviour from anyone. With all rights come responsibilities, and a balance has to be struck, but it will require more than warm words to achieve that. We need real understanding and commitment and, in my experience, those remain all too sadly lacking.

In responding to the debate in 2001, the minister who was then responsible for the matter said that it had been painful to hear the criticism that had been levelled by the committee at the Administration, but that

"it is to the credit of the committee and the Parliament"

that we had a debate that

"puts the Executive under pressure to account for itself".—  
[*Official Report*, 5 December 2001; c 4514.]

Some things have clearly not changed when it comes to equal opportunities. I hope that the Scottish Government is equally discomfited by this latest report.

More regrettably, the Gypsy Traveller community is still facing a situation in which far too few local authorities understand its issues and make the necessary provisions. Just as in 2001, the Scottish Government has pleaded in its defence that it is doing what it can to address all the points that the committee has raised. Unfortunately, the evidence is just not there to support that assertion. As was the case 12 years ago, Government policies could be identified and resources highlighted that pointed towards solutions for the issues that were being raised. Much of what we have today points to the fact that the buck is being passed and that the relevant policies are little more than dead letters that have never been delivered.

Let us hope that this latest report takes the issue further forward than the last one did, so that

in a decade, those who take part in any reporting on the condition of Gypsy Travellers in Scotland do not have to suffer from the *déjà vu* that we have had here today.

In conclusion, I will recount an anecdote that other members have brought up. There is a tale of the pilgrims arriving in what we now know as America. When they asked the natives, "What did you call this country before we came here?" they said, "Ours". That is part of the problem and we must bear that in mind when we are talking about the Gypsy Traveller community in Scotland.

16:08

**Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** I am grateful to Linda Fabiani for a comment that I was not expecting: her reference to the lady who said that in a house, people have to stand up to look out of the windows. That took me by surprise as much as it surprised anyone else, and what followed that comment was right. We do not have to understand; we just have to solve the problems. It might be that a lot of what the Government will try to do will involve trying to get the settled community—the vast majority of us—to understand Travellers when there is some inability to understand. Travellers are just different and we have to respect that difference, even if we do not understand it. It might be an important lesson for us to see that we do not necessarily have to understand everything to work through it.

That does, however, bring me to the other point that colleagues have made all the way through the debate. We have instinctive prejudices in our attitudes as a society, and they are in all of us. We have our way of doing things and if someone else does it another way, we instinctively say, "Hang on. That's not the way I'd do it. I'm not sure that I want you next door."

The crucial point that we all seem to understand is that it all comes down to accommodation. If Travellers do not have decent accommodation, we cannot solve their education and healthcare problems. It is just not going to happen. I suggest, therefore, that accommodation has turned out to be the centre of the issue.

I have a site in my constituency in north Angus. I checked up on it this morning, and it seems to be very well run. It is more or less permanently full, and is quite close to a town, and I am delighted to say that it does not appear to give any particular problems. The children are integrated into the local school and are dealt with accordingly.

Plainly, as a society, we can deal with that. However, we need to address the particular situation—which will often be the norm—of people who want to be able to travel but nonetheless need somewhere where they can stay for most of

the time and fit in broadly with the society around them, even if they keep themselves as a separate group, as most of us do anyway.

The problem that we face in getting more of those sites, and particularly in getting transit sites—or halting sites, as I think they have been described today—is that, as councillors, we do not want to make that happen. I am not the only ex-councillor in the chamber right now, and there are hundreds of councillors throughout the country.

If I may state the blindingly obvious again, a local authority councillor does not really want to be championing a site of any kind that will be seen as a bad neighbour in their area. That is not the case only with people—it might concern an incinerator, for example; I make the comparison only in planning terms. If councillors know that their constituents are naturally prejudiced against what they are proposing, it is very difficult for them to suggest that it will be a good idea in their community. I do not much enjoy stating the obvious, but I must say to the minister, who is in front of me right now, that she has an incredibly difficult job in that regard. We know that local councillors are the people whose job it is to solve the problem of accommodation, but they do not really want to do so because it will very rarely be seen as being in their interests.

Solving the problem will require skills that are well beyond those that are needed for running the Commonwealth games. Running the Commonwealth games will be seen as an absolute walk in the park—

**The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison):** Nigel Don does not know the half of it.

**Nigel Don:** I do not think that it matters what the half of it is. The point is that, when we are dealing with natural human prejudices, it is incredibly difficult to get councillors to do what they need to do.

The Government must work with councils to make them put sites in place—not just with stick-and-carrot stuff—because without those sites we are going nowhere. Once that problem is solved, there will be a way forward.

I will pick up briefly on a couple of Murdo Fraser's points. I recognise entirely the plight of the private landowner from my experience in Stonehaven, although I do not think the person involved in that case would want us to rehearse it on the record. However, although Gypsy Travellers might drop litter, I have only to walk half a mile from my home in Brechin—as I do frequently—to find the verges along the roads in and out of the centre strewn with litter that is thrown out of car windows by people leaving my city. Those are not Travellers, but people who

happen to drive cars, who have litter and who throw it out of the window. We need to be extremely careful to acknowledge that although there are occasions on which we can blame littering on people who have been on an illegal site, littering is something that we as a society, generally speaking, seem to be able to do. We need to be careful not to point the finger at others when a large number of us seem to be responsible for that type of behaviour.

16:14

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):** I am grateful to all the organisations that have provided briefings for today's debate, which indicates the widespread interest in the subject.

A great number of traditional stopping-off places in the Highlands and elsewhere were blocked off in the 1980s in order to deal with a phenomenon of the time: new age travellers. Many of those new age travellers are now back working in the City of London, but the stopping-off places remain blocked off, and the vested interests are keen for that to remain the case.

There is a place for talk and for strategies, but I am interested in practical solutions. When a site is blocked off, it is done by placing a handful of large boulders. If the Scottish Government is genuinely interested in maintaining the “traditional way of life” of the Gypsy Travellers, as it says it is in its response, it will play its part in making available some of those sites. I accept that not all the sites are in public ownership, but it seems to me that the transport minister could get in touch with Transport Scotland and the local authority minister could get in touch with councils. To me, that would be a wee bit more proactive than the examining that we have been promised. It would also have the benefit of showing leadership to other landowners.

Bulldozed tracks cover the hills of the Highlands and farmers have the status called “permitted development”. Those are both planning issues that are facilitated as a result of central direction. If that can be the case, why not also do it for Gypsy Traveller sites, both settled and transit sites? If that involved compulsory purchase on the part of the Scottish Government, I would be very happy with that.

The local authority sites have rightly been criticised. There are three permanent ones in the Highland Council area: one is built on a rubbish tip, one is in a sand quarry and the other is in a stone quarry. If a people's accommodation is in such places, it sends a very clear signal about the priority that is given to them.

An awful lot of good work is going on with the Gypsy Traveller community—for example, with

MECOPP, as has been mentioned. I also mention Karen MacMaster in that regard. She is a development officer on interrupted learning—which Mr McMahon mentioned—with Highland Council education service, from which between 64 and 97 Gypsy Traveller children a week receive education. I mention that because any needs assessment would have to recognise that the Gypsy Traveller community is not a homogeneous group of people; their patterns of work and travel vary, which needs to be taken into account.

I know of a traditional stopping-off site on the outskirts of Inverness that is fenced off by the local authority. There is no mention in the local plan of new or additional Gypsy Traveller provision. The site is certainly coveted by developers.

**Margo MacDonald:** We have talked about the difficulty, because they vary in size, of assessing the needs of Gypsy Traveller communities in order to deliver services to them. Has anyone approached Highland Council and asked how it deals with providing steady education to a population of children that varies from 64 to 97? Nigel Don referred to the tremendous difficulties for local authorities in that regard.

**John Finnie:** A bullet-point briefing from Highland Council indicates what its education service does:

“Support families in accessing education

Provide guidance and teaching support to schools

Support a multi-agency approach to working”

as per getting it right for every child, and

“Develop resources and deliver training”.

That is the sort of thing that can be done with education. There are a number of very articulate young Gypsy Travellers.

Halting sites were mentioned by Mark McDonald, which I thought was considerably more interesting than his reliving of the politics of Aberdeen City Council. The sites issue is the sort of thing that needs to be discussed.

The committee report that went to the Government was quite intentionally very forceful in many respects, which was what was needed. We know that public authorities have a general duty to eliminate discrimination. I commend the words of Malcolm Chisholm in relation to that. If we are going to advance equality of opportunity for these people as regards accommodation, I would like to see a situation in this chamber at First Minister's question time, for instance, whereby in addition to reeling off commendable statistics about house building, mention was made of provision for Gypsy Travellers. The action plan is certainly very welcome. However, there is a need for elected

representatives of all parties and no party to be very mindful of their words.

Mention has been made of the UN rapporteur who is in Scotland and who met young Gypsy Travellers. I hope that the young women from Article 12 Scotland will have made a significant impression on the rapporteur. I do not know what impression the accommodation will have made, because I have to say that a lot of it is extremely embarrassing. So what future is there for those young Gypsy Traveller women? What prospects have they? Where are they going to settle? Where will be their base? Does the Scottish Government want them in houses, too? Quite bizarrely, it is still suggested by officials—as I know from my dealings with constituents who are Gypsy Travellers—that everything would be sorted if they were housed. It is not all down to the housing minister, but I certainly welcome the issue around the tenancy agreement. However, the message must go to all the minister's colleagues that action is needed—by action I mean new sites, both permanent and transit sites—and that it is needed now.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):**

We move to the closing speeches. I call Alex Johnstone. You have up to six minutes, Mr Johnstone.

16:20

**Alex Johnstone:** It has been an interesting debate. After all the shouting and screaming that we heard in the past few days about the Government's programme, it has been nice to get down to a quiet debate on a serious subject on which this Parliament can actually deliver, in conjunction with the Scottish Government.

Being able to speak twice in the debate gives me the privilege of being able to say in my second attempt all the things that I forgot to say in my first. One thing that I forgot to do was pay tribute to Mary Fee, who is the retiring convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee. I have great respect for Mary Fee, not least for the way in which she managed to put up with my unsophisticated right-wing attitudes on a number of things during the time that we shared on the committee.

It was difficult to convene the committee through what was a difficult process, in that there were seriously competing views. I think that the committee treated one or two witnesses quite badly, so it was important to have a strong convener to ensure that we did not make that mistake too often. When people such as Christopher Ahern, the chairman of North Muirton community council, and James Brownhill, the vice-chairman of Nigg community council, came before

the committee, they were treated quite robustly, although all they were doing was expressing the minority view that exists around Scotland and the view that is put directly opposite the one that is expressed by many of those who speak out in favour of the traditional Traveller community.

It has to be said that I agree with a number of things that have been said, and perhaps I should have agreed with them earlier. John Mason, for one, and both members of the McMahon family, for another two, pointed out that when we talk about Government failing to give leadership, it is not just this Government that is a problem. We have been through a 12-year process and successive Governments have failed to deliver. Earlier Governments and, of course, this Government in an earlier form took the view that the subject should be dealt with by local authorities, but the evidence now increasingly points to the fact that local authorities are unable to achieve the objective through the local democratic process. That is why strong leadership is so important.

**Dennis Robertson:** Does Alex Johnstone mean that local authorities are unwilling, rather than unable, to deal with the issue?

**Alex Johnstone:** I do not mean that they are unwilling. They are keen to achieve the objective. I am saying that they are unable to achieve the objective through the local democratic process. The reason why is simple: they go all the way down the road of producing the halting sites that we all want them to produce, but then the democratic process stops it because local councillors are unable to face up to the responsibility of delivering in the face of local opposition. That is why strong leadership is important.

John Mason described the need to deal with the issue with more urgency, although I would perhaps not put it quite as strongly as John Finnie did in his speech a few moments ago, when he suggested proceeding with compulsory purchase, because that might enflame the situation.

We have to remember that we are dealing with a distinctive group that has been subjected to discrimination but which, nonetheless, does not want to be forcibly integrated into the settled community. Gypsy Travellers enjoy their privacy and we have to respect their differences and their independence. Above all, the Gypsy Traveller community does not like outsiders interfering in Travellers' lives, so we need to ensure that what we supply is what they require without that interference. There is, in avoiding the accusation of discrimination, a need for us to recognise that there is a difference, and one that we should respect.

It is also important that we take steps to alleviate the concerns that exist within the settled community. I believe that I and my colleague Murdo Fraser are the only two members who talked about the presumption against prosecution. It came out in evidence that the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland's presumption against prosecution relates exclusively to unauthorised stops and does not apply to fly tipping, offences under the road traffic acts and other offences. There is concern that there is lack of effort on the part of the police to integrate the Traveller community into normal enforcement of the law.

**Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Alex Johnstone mentioned his "unsophisticated right-wing attitudes". It seems to me that he shares Murdo Fraser's view that camping without permission should always be prosecuted. He will be aware that wild camping is a very popular recreational—

**Murdo Fraser:** Not with vehicles—

**Mike MacKenzie:** If members are selectively reinterpreting the law, I think that they are exceeding the bounds of this Parliament, but it would be interesting—

**Murdo Fraser:** Read the Trespass (Scotland) Act 1865—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Alex Johnstone has 15 seconds left.

**Alex Johnstone:** There will be arguments about the issues, and perhaps we have found the boundaries within which they will take place.

I am not directly critical of the position that ACPOS takes. I am trying to emphasise that the presumption against prosecution applies exclusively to unauthorised stops and not to any other offence.

It is important that we take matters forward in a timely and constructive way. I genuinely believe that the time has come for the Scottish Government, with the support of all parties—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The time has come for you to close.

**Alex Johnstone:** The time has come to show leadership and to deliver on behalf of the Gypsy Traveller community.

16:26

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to close the debate for Labour on the Equal Opportunities Committee's report on where Gypsy Travellers live. I congratulate the former convener, Mary Fee, and all members of the committee, on the comprehensive and

inclusive approach that they took in arriving at their recommendations.

As other members have done, I welcome Margaret McCulloch to her new role. She clearly has big feet—I mean big shoes to fill. *[Interruption.]* I know. It has been a long afternoon.

As members said, this has been the third committee inquiry on the same subject and the same set of issues since the start of the Parliament. I struggle to think of another policy issue that has been the subject of three reports. It is clear that there is still much need for substantial improvement, as was made clear in virtually every speech that we heard this afternoon.

In the main, the debate has been helpful and consensual. There is much agreement across the Parliament about what needs to be done. However, we all recognise that we need to move beyond that.

I am not having a pop at the current Government. There is a problem for government in general, because we must surely ask ourselves this: if we all agree on what needs to be done, and we highlight our concerns and recommend potential solutions, why does nothing happen? That is a fundamental matter for members and for the Government, because there is little point in making policy decisions if they are not carried through. John Finnie was right to ask what is going on.

Margaret McCulloch and Mary Fee vividly described the challenges that people face when they have no running water, overflowing septic tanks, children bathing in ice-cold water, no toilets—the list goes on. We should be angry about the conditions in which people are living.

Members of all parties talked about the persistent problems of ensuring that children are appropriately educated and all members of the community have access to healthcare. Such access is patchy, to say the least, as John Mason said.

There are 20 recommendations in the report, each of which presents a myriad of challenges. I will focus on just a few. If the Scottish Government can prioritise and deliver on the recommendation on accommodation, there is the potential to transform lives. Minimum standards for accommodation and housing services, which are monitored by the Government, are essential.

I acknowledge the difficulty that is caused by Gypsy Travellers pulling on to roadside sites and the tension with people in the settled community. There are regular problems with seasonal unauthorised encampments in many areas of Scotland. However, the existence of sufficient

well-serviced sites might help to make a difference.

Many members this afternoon have highlighted the difficulties faced by local government in not only identifying but delivering actual sites. However, we cannot stand back and leave local authorities to do this alone. The EHRC suggested that we adopt a regional approach that would be sensitive to the community's traditional travelling patterns, and the Scottish Government has a clear role in brokering that.

The EHRC also mentioned resourcing. I recall that, under the previous Government, specific funding was available for local authorities to establish suitably serviced sites. However, that money has now been rolled up into local authorities' general budget allocation and I have been told that not a single site has been established since. Again, the Scottish Government can play a clear role in that matter.

I was very taken by the unusually thoughtful contribution from the unsophisticated right-wing Alex Johnstone—as he will now be known—who called for leadership on this issue from the Scottish Government and said that, instead of having any more discussion groups, there should be practical action. I think that John Mason also expressed frustration and wanted the Government to get on with this. However, we will also agree that we all have a part to play and that we should stand ready to lend our support.

In a powerful speech, Christian Allard focused on challenging racism and discrimination against Gypsy Travellers and urged the Government to move quickly, and those points were echoed by Siobhan McMahon and Linda Fabiani. I also noted Mr Allard's refreshing honesty about when he became a member of the committee; indeed, other politicians in this chamber would have claimed parentage of the report.

The committee deserves our thanks for considering the position of Gypsy Travellers, and I hope that it comes back to this report in six months, 12 months or even two years from now to measure progress against each of the recommendations. Maybe—just maybe—we might then see change.

Michael McMahon's speech and analysis were striking. As the minister who responded to the debate all those years ago in 2001—I was younger then, Presiding Officer—I have to say that he was right. The Government was criticised—and rightly so—by the Parliament. At that time the received wisdom was that local authorities were best placed to deliver, but we need to learn the lessons from that experience. Responsibility is owned by too many, which means that people do not feel the need to deliver on it and, as we have

heard, local authorities have experienced challenges in dealing with the issue.

We need the Scottish Government to assume responsibility with one focus and one ministerial lead. I cannot think of anyone better than Shona Robison to see progress on this issue. If she takes up that challenge, even I will be happy to support her in taking forward this agenda.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Appropriately, I now call Shona Robison to wind up the debate on behalf of the Government. You may have up to eight minutes, minister.

16:32

**The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison):** I have been left almost speechless by that offer of support, which does not come very often. Indeed, I will come back to it in a minute.

This has been a welcome debate with good speeches from across the chamber, some of which I will touch on in these closing remarks. We have heard about the many challenges and barriers that the Gypsy Traveller community faces every day and, as has been pointed out, I, as minister with responsibility for equality, have the overarching ministerial responsibility for this area of work. I always relish a challenge, but this issue gives me the opportunity to be the glue—if you like—in the Government to ensure that responsibilities that lie elsewhere are being met and actioned.

Of course, the Scottish Government recognises that the Gypsy Traveller community is among the most disenfranchised and discriminated against. We have seen as much in attitudinal surveys that, although showing huge progress in many other areas, have also highlighted attitudes towards the Gypsy Traveller community that have had their time.

I welcome the opportunity to take this work forward through not just a cross-Government approach but—I hope—a cross-party approach. A concrete result of today's debate would be for me to take up members' offer of cross-party support and leadership; after all, we need the leadership not just of the Government but of parliamentarians. As we move forward with the national awareness campaign, we will have an opportunity to put in place local ambassadors for change to challenge certain attitudes and I will be coming back to members across the parties who have expressed a willingness to help to discuss how we might put that into practical effect.

I want to turn to some of the specific points that were raised in the debate. I might not get to everybody's points, but I will try my best.

First, of course, I welcome Margaret McCulloch, the new convener of the committee. It cannot be easy to speak on behalf of the committee after only one day in the post, but she did a very good job. Clearly, this is an issue that the committee should come back to—it is not one that should be dealt with just in a one-off report. We can look at ways of working together to ensure that progress is monitored.

When Margaret Burgess responded to the issue of the awareness-raising campaign, she mentioned discussions with Amnesty International with regard to how to take the issue forward. There is a need for a clear action plan, with some timeframes for when matters will be taken forward. I am happy to come back to the committee with an action plan that contains some of that. I think that we can certainly come up with a timeframe for the awareness-raising campaign without too much difficulty.

I pay tribute to Mary Fee for the work that she has done as convener. Had Margaret Burgess been closing the debate, she would have done so. However, as she is not, I will do so on behalf of us both. I congratulate Mary Fee on her new position.

One of the themes that have been evident in the debate is the balance of rights and responsibilities. It is a difficult issue but an important one. I join with others in noting that politicians always have to watch their language. However, we also need to dig a bit deeper into what the issue is actually about. In the situation in Dundee that was mentioned, the issue was actually poor business practice, but it became an issue of ethnicity. The issue should not have been the ethnic background of the person who was carrying out the work when it was really to do with poor business practice, which included not providing an invoice or a quote and the ramifications of what happens when disputes about what was agreed take place on people's doorsteps. We need to look at what the issues are. However, the overall issue is to do with rights and responsibilities, and how to balance them.

Alex Johnstone attempted to lay out some of those challenges. Issues such as new sites and unauthorised camps will be difficult for local authorities to resolve, and they have been identified as early priorities with regard to how we can build relationships locally. I am not sure that the answer is that the Scottish Government should come in with a pair of tackety boots and say where a site is going to go, as that will please no one and solve nothing—to be fair, I do not think that Alex Johnstone was suggesting that.

We need to try to replicate some of the good practices that exist. We have heard this afternoon about areas in which sites are working well. If they can work well in some areas, they can work well in

all areas. We need to learn from that good practice and try to replicate it.

Mark McDonald made a good contribution. He got beyond the rhetoric that has been a problem for all parties. Again, we have to provide the leadership that enables people to move beyond what might be seen as easy political hits in the local context.

Siobhan McMahon asked specifically about the timeframe for the awareness-raising campaign, and I can reassure her in that regard. That campaign will be a good start. However, I was struck by Nigel Don's suggestion that an awareness-raising campaign should not be about trying to explain what Gypsy Travellers are about. It is not about that—it is about respecting difference without having to understand everything about the Gypsy Traveller community. When we think about how to pursue the awareness-raising campaign, such ideas will need to be taken on board.

Murdo Fraser came back to some big issues around unauthorised sites. The rubbish that is left and the cost of the clean-up generate negative local media headlines. However, some of the biggest critics of that bad practice are members of the Gypsy Traveller community, who know that it generates bad headlines. They are angry when it happens because it does nothing to promote good relations.

Dennis Robertson called for a bugle. I am not sure that I can be a bugle, but I give a commitment that I will work closely with the committee and spokespeople from other parties in a genuine attempt to move the issue forward.

16:41

**Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP):** I pay tribute to Mary Fee for her determination and grit—that may be code for something; I do not know. She has been a strong convener and has served the Equal Opportunities Committee well. On her first day as convener, Margaret McCulloch not only opened the debate in the chamber but presided masterfully over stage 1 of the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill, which was not an easy first task.

The inquiry was perhaps unlike a lot of inquiries because the process that was gone through was extensive. Committee members visited sites in Edinburgh, Dalkeith, Perth, Pitlochry, Oban and Lochgilphead, and a formal committee meeting was held in Clinterty, near Aberdeen. We really wanted to reach out and deal with the barriers, to overcome the difficulties and to deliver something that manifestly had not been delivered in the past.

I quote from the report the kind of barriers and stigma that we heard about from Gypsy Traveller witnesses. One said:

“My wee sister ... has lied about her address when filling out applications for jobs because, at other times, employers who have found out her address have told her that she is not suitable.”

Another said:

“If I purchase something from a shop and try to return it because it is faulty, when the person behind the counter asks for the postcode, it comes up on the computer as “Gypsy Traveller person’s site”. ... We cannot use the site address to hire a DVD.”

Those are the kind of everyday obstacles that are faced. There is also evidence, which Siobhan McMahon cited, that 47 per cent of the public think that Gypsy Travellers would be unsuitable as primary teachers—a figure that has barely changed since 2006. That shows the extent of the problem.

This is not the first time that we have debated the issue. If one core message has come out of the debate and the report, it is about the frustration that has been cited not only by Siobhan McMahon and John Mason but eloquently by Linda Fabiani, whose experience of the previous committee along with Michael McMahon's shows that the more that things have changed, the more they have, unfortunately, stayed the same. As Dennis Robertson pointed out, many Gypsy Travellers who come into contact with the parliamentary process are starting to ask, “What’s the point?” We must be incredibly careful, as hopes that are raised and dashed repeatedly do not rise as high again.

Members have touched on what has changed since 2001. There are one or two examples of progress. For instance, in 2001 one of the main calls was for the clear establishment of the ethnic status of Gypsy Travellers and we now have that. Unfortunately, although that may strengthen our hand in theory we are yet to see much impact coming through. Nevertheless, that is progress that we can see.

However, most of the other issues—in particular, access to services was an issue that went right through the 2001 report—broadly remain. As other members have referred to, those include the subjects of the committee's recommendations on health, education and social work and on the relationships with local authority departments. Nevertheless, we have what the committee considered to be a positive example of progress in the police's relations with Gypsy Travellers.

Our report recommends that the Scottish Government explore how successful pilots and projects can be replicated. One such project,

which the committee came into contact with but has not been talked about much, was the north-east dialogue day, which brought people together. When the committee visited Clinterty, we attempted to duplicate that, because it is important to have that link. The old cliché about “Nothing about us without us” very much applies in a community like this, which in many cases is so distanced from the statutory authorities simply because of disillusionment.

The main ways forward broadly fall into three categories: site quantity, site quality and leadership. Site quantity is a major issue, given Gypsy Travellers’ requirement to stop at informal sites. John Finnie reeled off the traditional stopping places across the Highlands that have been blocked off. We heard differences of opinion on the alternative, which would involve transit sites for short-stay formal encampments. Some Gypsy Travellers would support transit sites, whereas others would not want to use them—that shows that we need their involvement. In suggesting temporary sites as a solution, we must be careful not to see the issue simply through the lens of those in the settled community who feel that they need to get rid of a problem. In that regard, I would be cautious both about defining Gypsy Travellers as opposed to ordinary people and about language referring to “innocent victims”. At the time of our report, there were 28 all-year sites operational throughout Scotland, but a study in one region of Scotland has suggested that 35 additional sites are needed in that area alone to deal with the demand.

Another issue that has come up is the quality of sites. As Malcolm Chisholm said, decent housing is a basic human right, and we need to remember that. In our visits, the committee saw the standards that are endured on a day-to-day basis. However, there are good sites, so let us single them out. Perth is always cited as a top-quality place by experts and observers, although we heard some from the Gypsy Traveller community suggest that Perth is too close to becoming a settled community—again, the sensitivities of the people we try to help need to be considered. Providing a standard tenancy would be a start. Post-2001, Amnesty established a model tenancy agreement, but when it last surveyed local authorities, only three of them had introduced it.

Our other recommendations are mainly about leadership, which has been the dominant theme in today’s debate. Leadership has been a difficult balance for the committee. John Mason was right to point to the carefully chosen language in paragraph 49 of the committee’s report, which covers a range of perspectives. Some people believe that there is a strong role for central Government, whereas others believe that there is

a role for government more broadly, in which local government would be important.

The stories from, as it were, the coalface of local government that Nigel Don and Mark McDonald gave perhaps emphasise the importance of bringing the local community with us. A councillor who cannot overcome the barrier or mental block that many in the settled community might have will have difficulties in supporting the introduction of a new transit or permanent site. Unfortunately, that difficulty will only be exacerbated if someone comes in on a white charger and makes the situation worse.

Our point about supporting the development of sites is that everyone—local government and national Government—must face up to their responsibility. There is clearly a role for national Government. It is fair to say that, at local decision-making level, we would not tolerate the kind of derogation of responsibility that we have seen. Given the transient or mobile nature of the Gypsy Traveller community, there is a need for a degree of standardisation on access to services. For example, Scotland has one national health service, for which local authorities are not the decision makers. In that regard, the example that has been given by the police is very welcome.

The committee—as I was—was disturbed by COSLA’s response, which Christian Allard and others mentioned. It is important that COSLA is brought with us on the issue. We would all struggle to live a life according to our values and traditions if we faced the same obstacles as the Gypsy Travellers.

The committee has received the Scottish Government’s response. Action can only come from the steps that have been set out in the report. However, inaction might be possible, as was the case 12 or 13 years ago when similar promises were given but not acted on. Consequently, the committee will be watching and scrutinising what the Government does, how ministerial mainstreaming is working, the development of the campaign with Amnesty, the potential updates to site provision, and the exploration of a standard Gypsy Traveller tenancy agreement.

Although I am sure that we would all have welcomed much more concrete and immediate commitments, we will be watching to make sure that those turn into concrete actions this time around. If this Parliament is to mean anything, the Government, the agencies and all the relevant authorities must take action when a committee, with cross-party support, sounds an alarm.



## Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies (Draft Code of Practice)

### The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-07209, in the name of Dave Thompson, on the Standards, Procedures, and Public Appointments Committee report on “The Draft Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland”.

I call Helen Eadie to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the committee.

16:51

### Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab):

Unfortunately, Dave Thompson is unable to be here. As deputy convener of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, I am standing in for him.

The draft code of practice for ministerial appointments to public bodies was laid before the Parliament by the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life on 20 May 2013. It was formally submitted to the Scottish ministers and the Parliament under section 2(4) of the Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc (Scotland) Act 2003. That section requires the commissioner to consult the Parliament and the Scottish ministers on the draft code.

We took evidence from the commissioner on the code on 6 June and published our report on 26 June. To summarise, our report welcomes the commissioner’s intention in the code to make the appointments system more effective, cost efficient and attractive to potential applicants by ensuring that the processes are more straightforward and proportionate and reduce bureaucracy.

Simplifying the processes in those ways will lead to there being a wider range of applicants for appointments. That said, the committee is keen to ensure that the crucial scrutiny role that the commissioner performs is not watered down as a result of changes to the code. We have made that clear in our report, while welcoming assurances given by the commissioner that that is not the purpose of the code.

The report also welcomes the fact that the commissioner has added “diversity” to the overarching principles of the code. That is a positive and progressive step.

Overall, the report makes a number of recommendations for the commissioner. We encourage the commissioner to take full account of the findings of the report when finalising the code over the next few weeks.

The committee welcomes the code and commends the commissioner for developing a simplified yet robust document. We look forward to the publication of the final code.

I ask the Parliament to endorse the committee’s report as its formal response to the commissioner.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, 6th Report, 2013 (Session 4), *The Draft Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland* (SP Paper 371), together with the *Official Report* of the Parliament’s debate on the report, should form the Parliament’s response to the Public Appointments Commissioner for Scotland’s consultation on the draft Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

## High Speed Rail (Preparation) Bill

16:54

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-07573, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the High Speed Rail (Preparation) Bill 2013-14, which is United Kingdom legislation.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the High Speed Rail (Preparation) Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 13 May 2013, relating to preliminary investment in preparatory works for the construction of a high speed rail network, in so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—  
[Nicola Sturgeon.]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

## European Public Prosecutor's Office (Proposal for European Union Legislation)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-07576, in the name of Christine Grahame, on behalf of the Justice Committee, on a proposal for European legislation. I call Christine Grahame to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the committee.

Ms Grahame, you have up to five minutes.

16:55

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** As I heard a groan from my colleague Colin Keir MSP, I will try not to use up the five minutes—I had not even started.

The Justice Committee is breaking new ground today—we are that kind of committee. This is the first time that a committee has brought a motion to the chamber on a breach of the subsidiarity principle.

Before I get into the nuts and bolts of the matter, I will comment on the timescale for consideration of European Union legislative proposals. The committee had one meeting in which to consider, and decide on, an extremely complex proposal, which could have had serious ramifications for the Scottish criminal justice system. It was fortuitous that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice was able to come along to our meeting at very short notice—I thank him for that—to assist us in our scrutiny.

I understand that the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee will, in due course, look into the handling of EU legislative proposals that raise subsidiarity concerns. I make a plea—I am sure that other campaigners feel the same—that that committee examine the timescales for scrutiny as part of its inquiry.

It is late in the day, so I will not go into the details but, for those members who do not have an in-depth knowledge of EU matters, the subsidiarity principle is that, unless the EU has exclusive competence, action should be taken at the lowest level of governance consistent with the subject matter and objective.

The proposal that was before us would establish a new body—a European public prosecutor's office—to tackle EU fraud. The motivation for that was EU fraud. The European Commission has identified that suspected EU fraud amounts to around £425 million a year but suggests that the actual amount could be much higher, and we agree. The Commission believes that member

states are not able to identify, investigate and prosecute EU fraud effectively and, therefore, that a European public prosecutor's office, operating supranationally, is needed to protect the EU's financial interests.

In fairness, I should say that the UK Government does not intend to participate in the proposal and, therefore, it will not affect the UK directly. That said, the precedent that it may set in establishing a supranational body dealing with criminal matters was, in itself, worrying.

The EPPO would have had exclusive competence to investigate, prosecute and bring to judgment those connected to offences against the EU's financial interests. We understand that that power could be extended to include other related offences. Given the fact that the EPPO would be able to direct investigative activity at national level—the Scottish level—and not only in relation to the EU fraud offences, the committee was unanimously concerned that the proposal would cut across the role of the Lord Advocate as head of the prosecution system in Scotland.

Our EU reporter, Roderick Campbell—who is handy to my right—will explore that and other issues in a little more detail.

We agreed with the Scottish Government that EU fraud could be tackled effectively at member state level. Indeed, that appears to be the case in the UK. We also agreed that the Commission has not made a strong enough case for EU action.

Therefore, the committee agreed that the EU legislative proposal to establish an EPPO does not comply with the subsidiarity principle, as set out in article 5 of the Treaty on European Union.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the European Commission Proposal for a Council Regulation on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office (COM(2013) 534 final) does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity as laid down in Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union.

16:59

**Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):**

As the EU reporter for the Justice Committee, I will add a few comments to the convener's.

Although our remit is subsidiarity alone, it is often difficult to distinguish between matters of subsidiarity and proportionality. I will explore in a little more detail some of the evidence that we gathered that led to our decision.

The UK Government was particularly concerned at the lack of robust evidence from the European Commission to justify the creation of an EPPO with rules of evidence that would apply across the board in all member states, working across the

whole union and in all member states. We echo that concern.

We also heard from the cabinet secretary that there was no evidence that the Commission had examined alternatives to establishing the EPPO, such as providing support to member states to improve their effectiveness in tackling EU fraud.

As the convener has said, recorded fraud amounts to about 0.5 per cent of the European budget, or between £400 million and £600 million. Scottish Government officials told us that, currently, there is only one case of EU fraud in Scotland, and about 25 in the UK as a whole, which suggested to the committee that the EPPO proposal was very much a case of a sledgehammer being used to crack a nut.

We were concerned that the EPPO would apply one-size-fits-all rules of evidence to member states, which have their own legal systems. In Scotland's case, we have our own legal system, although we are not a member state. The proposal could create difficulties in relation to the direction and operation of investigations carried out by the police and other law enforcement agencies. In addition, the one-size-fits-all approach would apply to Scotland without any evidence that the Scottish legal system, or indeed the legal systems elsewhere in the UK, were defective.

The committee, on examining the evidence, was unanimous in its decision that the proposal does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity, and would urge the Parliament to endorse that view.

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

## Point of Order

17:00

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

On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I refer to the "Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament", section 7.3.1, on conduct in the chamber or in committee, which requires that:

"Members shall at all times conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner".

Earlier today, the First Minister responded to the leader of the Labour Party:

"I know that Johann Lamont and the Conservatives are welded together in the better together campaign, but her quoting a Conservative MSP, as definitive proof, really is evidence that the rest of Scotland would find rather tame and insubstantial."

The comments referred to were made by me, as I stood in for the Labour Party convener at this week's proceedings of the Public Audit Committee. Standing orders state with regard to the Public Audit Committee:

"no member who represents a political party which is represented in the Scottish Government may be convener of the Committee."

Therefore, as deputy convener, I convened this week's proceedings.

The remit of the Public Audit Committee is to consider and report on financial control, accounting and auditing in relation to public expenditure and to hold to account those in government tasked with spending money.

In June, the previous convener, Iain Gray, wrote on behalf of all members of the committee to the permanent secretary and the principal accountable officer for the Scottish Government, Sir Peter Housden, to ask several questions to assist the committee to do the job that it is tasked to do. I did not consider the permanent secretary's responses adequate. He stated that he

"would speak with Ministers ... carry out reviews and consultations"

and

"reflect how best to respond".

In truth, he did not answer the questions that were put to him, and I stand by what I said.

I was fulfilling my duties as a parliamentarian and a member of the Public Audit Committee of the Parliament. I do not think that it was courteous or respectful for the First Minister to dismiss my comments in such a manner. Whatever side of the political or constitutional debate members of the Parliament are on, I ask that the views of every MSP must be responded to in a courteous and respectful manner as we carry out our

parliamentary duties on behalf of the people of Scotland.

If the First Minister wants "definitive proof" of the inadequate and insulting answers given by the permanent secretary, they are available in the committee papers.

Presiding Officer, I find it very insulting, discourteous and disrespectful to refer to any member of the Parliament's comments as "rather tame and insubstantial." I seek your response on this matter.

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was part of the committee meeting that Mrs Scanlon was speaking about. This is not something that I would like to raise in the chamber, but I have to be honest: her comments were so rude that I had to disassociate myself from them at the first opportunity at the committee. I agree with Mrs Scanlon that respect is very important. It should be given to witnesses as well as to members of the Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** I say to members that I am not prepared to rerun the Public Audit Committee's meeting. Anybody who wants to find out what happened there can read the *Official Report*.

**Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** Further to the previous points of order, Presiding Officer. As a new member of the Public Audit Committee, I suggest that its convener was not in the slightest bit disrespectful or discourteous. Ms Scanlon is known to all members as always courteous and respectful to all MSPs and is certainly not—

**The Presiding Officer:** I have already said that I will not have a rerun of the Public Audit Committee's meeting. [*Interruption.*] I ask you to resume your seat, Mr Macintosh. That was not a point of order and your microphone has been shut off.

I thank Ms Scanlon for advance notice of her point of order. I appreciate that she feels strongly about what was said, but my view is that it was part of parliamentary debate and did not breach standing orders.

## Decision Time

17:05

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S4M-07209, in the name of Dave Thompson, on the draft code of practice for ministerial appointments to public bodies, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, 6th Report, 2013 (Session 4), *The Draft Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland* (SP Paper 371), together with the *Official Report* of the Parliament's debate on the report, should form the Parliament's response to the Public Appointments Commissioner for Scotland's consultation on the draft Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-07573, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the High Speed Rail (Preparation) Bill—United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the High Speed Rail (Preparation) Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 13 May 2013, relating to preliminary investment in preparatory works for the construction of a high speed rail network, in so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-07576, in the name of Christine Grahame, on a proposal for European legislation, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the European Commission Proposal for a Council Regulation on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office (COM(2013) 534 final) does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity as laid down in Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union.

*Meeting closed at 17:06.*



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