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Official Report

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Tuesday 27 May 2014

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 27 May 2014

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Right Rev Joseph Toal, who is the bishop elect of the diocese of Motherwell and administrator of Argyll and the Isles.

The Right Rev Joseph Toal (Bishop Elect of Diocese of Motherwell and Administrator of Argyll and the Isles): Good afternoon. As I prepare to move from the diocese of Argyll and the Isles to become bishop of Motherwell, I have been bidding farewell to friends and places around the west Highlands and Islands. There is sadness in doing so and some nostalgia for what I leave behind.

It was good to spend a Sunday on Iona recently, as I have found it to be a haven of peace and prayerful reflection, in my time as bishop. The journey there can be uncomfortable and the weather unpredictable, but it is always good to arrive there and to experience its special atmosphere and the rich Christian heritage from the time of St Columba and his monks, to the modern Christian presence in the local community and pilgrim visitors.

I joined a number of pilgrim groups last year travelling to Iona to mark the 1450th anniversary of St Columba's arrival; notably, a group of 50 Spaniards—the friends of the way to Santiago de Compostela—with whom I celebrated mass in the abbey on 25 July, which is the feast day of St James, their patron. Earlier in their visit, they had walked part of the medieval pilgrimage route from Edinburgh to St Andrews. They were greatly enthused by our beautiful country, despite the summer showers, and by our Christian heritage, and returned to Spain to pass on the good news about all that Scotland has to offer—not least, the welcome and generous hospitality of its people.

In Scotland's Celtic monastic period, the local princes and politicians from Scotland and beyond sought the counsel of the monks of Iona, perhaps seeking God's guidance in prayer and in the holy scriptures, which were so lovingly transcribed in the beautiful illuminated manuscripts. One would hope that those same words, particularly those of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, will continue to touch the hearts and minds of yourselves, the Scottish politicians of today, and so will continue to be recognised and valued as a

precious element in the future development and growth of Scotland. When on retreat on Iona before my ordination as bishop in 2008, the words from the Prophet Micah stuck with me:

“This is what the Lord asks of you; only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.”

I offer them to you and ask the Lord's blessing for you and our country.

Topical Question Time

14:03

Glasgow School of Art (Fire)

1. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what support it will provide to the Glasgow School of Art, following the fire at the weekend. (S4T-00712)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The First Minister has today announced a package of support for the Glasgow School of Art, following the devastation of the fire at the Mackintosh building on Friday last week. That includes the development of a phoenix bursary scheme to support students who are most affected by last week's fire to rebuild their portfolios.

Up to £5 million in match funding has also been announced for Glasgow School of Art's Mac building fire fund, and for additional support for any longer-term funding requirements for building recovery and restoration, following full evaluation of insurance liability.

The Scottish Government and our agencies have been working tirelessly to support GSA staff since Friday afternoon, and we will continue to provide technical, logistical, survey and conservation advice and support.

In closing, I restate our gratitude for the remarkable work of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, whose professionalism and early strategic decision making saved 90 per cent of the building and 70 per cent of its contents.

James Dornan: I, too, thank the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for its fantastic work last Friday.

I am not alone in finding it difficult to remember an occasion when a fire that—thankfully—resulted in no fatalities or injuries has been met with such an outpouring of shock and loss. However, we should be eternally grateful that, thanks to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's work, way above and beyond the call of duty, we will be able to rebuild that iconic masterpiece.

I know that my colleague, Sandra White, who is away on parliamentary business, would have asked a question had she been here. I am also aware that she has spoken to the cabinet secretary, residents, students and the community council. She wants—as I do—to know what assessment has been made of what can be salvaged from the fire-damaged west end of the building, and what has been lost.

Fiona Hyslop: I have tried to keep all the interested parties updated. On Saturday, I spoke to Sandra White; I have also communicated with regional MSPs to ensure that they have been updated.

On what can be salvaged, it is very early days, but I can say that in terms of conservation, the early emergency actions that have been taken over the weekend and which continue are really important for restoration. We have world-class expertise in Glasgow School of Art working with Historic Scotland to 3D-scan the building. On what has been salvaged, we are trying to ensure that not only the historic artworks and the building's content, but the students' work, are conserved. It is very important that we retrieve their works of art and conserve as much as possible. Historic Scotland is taking a lead on both those exercises.

James Dornan: I am delighted to hear about the work that is to be done to protect the artworks and to help the students with the work that has been lost.

I mentioned people's shock and loss, which shows the deep affection in which the Mackintosh building is held not just in Scotland but around the world. What support will the Scottish Government provide to Glasgow School of Art for it to take advantage of international interest in order to raise funds to return the building to its former glory?

Fiona Hyslop: The Scottish Government will use all its networks and agencies internationally to raise the Mackintosh fire fund's profile and encourage contributions to the fund. I reiterate that we love the building. It has iconic status—it is a work of art in itself—not just in Scotland, but internationally.

At this time, I stress the importance of supporting the students because they are the artists and the genesis of ideas for the future.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): I associate myself with the comments that have been made by the cabinet secretary and by Mr Dornan on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. I am sure that the whole Parliament would echo those comments. I also thank the cabinet secretary for updating Glasgow members over the holiday weekend.

We do not know whether a more advanced fire prevention system would have been of great assistance in this case, but it is a tragic irony that that work was planned but had not been completed before the fire broke out. Has the cabinet secretary asked Historic Scotland to review the fire risk that is faced by other buildings that may not have quite the significance of, or be held in the same affection as, Glasgow School of Art but are significant nonetheless? What is the

state of the many other significant buildings in Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: The Glasgow School of Art Mackintosh building had appropriate fire protection for a grade-A listed building. It is always difficult to ensure an appropriate system. The school was doing the right thing in implementing that, but the interruption over the period—for understandable reasons—meant that the work had not been completed.

Historic Scotland is constantly working with the heritage sector. Many of the buildings in the sector are privately owned—they are not all in the public sector or under the protection of Government agencies. The situation is under constant review. I am absolutely clear that Glasgow School of Art has always been very conscious of fire risk. Unfortunately, over the weekend, that risk was realised.

On tributes and thanks that are owed, on Saturday, I met the staff of Glasgow School of Art, including Professor Tom Inns and Muriel Gray and their senior management team. They had all been through a great deal over the previous 24 hours, and had been working tirelessly to ensure continuity for students. I will feed back to Historic Scotland the question and the points that have been raised.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I associate my party with the tributes to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

I heard what the cabinet secretary said about recovering as much student work as possible. What measures have been put in place to support students whose degree work has been damaged or lost, and who might currently be embarking on their future careers? I am thinking of not just students' academic results, but the retail value of their paintings and other work.

Fiona Hyslop: The insurance assessment is on-going, of course. We want to help the students to rebuild their portfolios where necessary, and to take advantage of opportunities and support that are being offered by other art schools, not just in Scotland—Edinburgh College of Art was one of the first to respond and to offer support—but in the rest of the United Kingdom and internationally.

I emphasise that the phoenix bursary scheme that I have announced today is designed precisely to help students. The students will have a bright future; we will all rally to their cause, as we will to the cause of the building. We have talented young artists and we owe it to them to ensure that the recovery of Glasgow School of Art is about not just the building but support for its students' on-going careers.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): As the member for Orkney, I confirm that the strong affection for Glasgow School of Art is shared by people throughout the country and far beyond it. I associate myself with the comments of James Dornan and the cabinet secretary, and I record my gratitude and that of my party for the efforts of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

The fire has affected students who were coming to the end of their degree studies. What is the duration of the bursary? Will specific help be given to students who are at the very end of their courses? Will the cabinet secretary give a little more detail about the nature of the support that might be available to such students?

Fiona Hyslop: My colleague Michael Russell has been in close contact with Glasgow School of Art—indeed, we were in constant touch over the weekend. Discussions are taking place with the Student Awards Agency for Scotland and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council. More detail on that will appear in the coming period, but consideration is being given to financial support for students who might need additional time to complete their portfolios. We are very conscious of the importance of that. That is why, although a lot of the international and media focus has, understandably, been on the internationally iconic building, it is incumbent on us all to ensure continuity for students in their academic work, and to ensure that students who are in their final year can complete it. I assure Liam McArthur that every effort is being made by all the agencies and especially by Glasgow School of Art, given its responsibility to its students.

Devro (Job Losses)

2. Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I declare an interest. I am a member of Unite the union, which organises at Devro, and I have friends and family who work at Devro.

To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to support Devro and its workforce following the announcement of major job losses. (S4T-00710)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): John Swinney, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, has met Peter Page, the chief executive officer of Devro plc. Since the announcement, the Scottish Government, through Scottish Enterprise, has worked closely with the company.

The majority of employment at the Scottish sites is protected, and our partnership action for continuing employment—PACE—initiative is actively involved, providing support and advice.

The Scottish manufacturing advisory service has also been actively involved.

Devro has been manufacturing in Scotland for more than 50 years. Scottish Enterprise has met Devro and will actively support the company through this difficult phase, to help to develop future plans and ensure the long-term sustainability of its business. My ministerial colleagues and I will be kept fully informed of all developments.

Elaine Smith: I thank the minister. The news has come as a shock, given that Devro is investing and prospering abroad.

Does the minister agree that the potential loss of 130 jobs—a quarter of Devro's Scottish employees—is a devastating blow for the workforce, the local economy and the community, because Devro is one of the biggest private sector employers in my constituency? What firm commitment can the Scottish Government give to fully supporting the workers who might lose their livelihoods? Can further meetings be held with the company to see whether practical Government assistance can be given to keep the jobs in Scotland?

Fergus Ewing: I respect and appreciate the member's close interest in the matter. She mentioned that friends and family are involved at the factory.

This is an extremely serious matter and is taken in that light. That is why John Swinney met the chief executive of the company, and that is why Scottish Enterprise has met the company at top level—discussions included Lena Wilson, chief executive of Scottish Enterprise. I am able to further advise the member that a follow-up meeting with the company is due on 30 May.

Plainly, we will take every possible step to help to secure the long-term future of the company, which has about 520 employees at its plants in Moodiesburn and Bellshill. The member is correct that the proposed reduction is 130—a very substantial number of employees indeed.

The PACE initiative, which has the function of assisting those who are made redundant to find other opportunities, has already been alerted and advised, and the people at PACE are ready, willing and available to provide assistance to those employees, as they do to all other people in Scotland who find themselves facing the unpleasant threat of redundancy.

I am happy to assure the member, first, that we are doing everything possible with and through Scottish Enterprise and, secondly, that I will personally ensure that she is kept fully informed of all major further developments.

Elaine Smith: I thank the minister for saying that he will keep me informed of developments. However, is he aware that two years ago, Devro moved its financial team from Moodiesburn to London and that a letter from chief executive Peter Page, whom the minister has mentioned, says that the current changes

“are part of a programme to refocus and streamline the group's manufacturing worldwide”?

Can the minister give any examples of practical assistance that can be given to Devro to ensure that it continues to manufacture here in Scotland and that it keeps its headquarters in Moodiesburn? More generally, can the minister comment on the Scottish Government's plans to stop the overall decline of Scottish manufacturing?

Fergus Ewing: Yes I can, and yes I will.

In 2007, Devro was offered regional selective assistance of £1.64 million as assistance in implementing a project to improve productivity and product quality, to safeguard 200 permanent jobs and to incur capital expenditure of £9.1 million on plant and machinery. That grant was paid in full and the final instalment was in 2012. Project jobs and assets are due to remain in conditions until 21 June 2014.

I understand that, in the discussions with the cabinet secretary, Mr Page stressed that the decision was very much part of a review of the company's global operations. From her local knowledge, Elaine Smith will know more about the company than I do, but I understand that Devro is a global company that operates in many countries, including the USA, the Czech Republic and Australia. Mr Page took pains to stress to the cabinet secretary that the review of Devro's global operations reflected difficult market conditions.

Members will know that the difficulties that Vion—a main sausage producer—faces have led to on-going problems for the sector. Devro produces collagen sausage casings, and Vion was a major customer. We are aware that the market situation has been difficult, but through Scottish Enterprise we continue to provide every possible support in relation to ensuring that there is investment in the technology at the factories where possible and that that helps to secure the long-term future of operations in Scotland, as the member correctly exhorts us to do.

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, declare an interest as a member of Unite the union, which organises in the Devro plants. I put on record my appreciation of Peter Page, Devro's chief executive, taking a conference call on Friday morning to discuss the plant at Bellshill and particularly the one at Moodiesburn.

Will the minister give the assurance that not only Elaine Smith but the other constituency member with an interest, Michael McMahon, and the list members for Central Scotland will be kept up to date with developments? Because of Devro's long association with Bellshill and particularly Moodiesburn, we all have a duty to keep not only the workforce but the communities in those two areas fully informed of any developments in the future of both plants.

Fergus Ewing: I am happy to provide Mr Wilson with the assurance that all members who have an interest, through either their local constituency or their regional constituency, will be kept advised of any major developments in relation to the Scottish Government's involvement.

I also agree with Mr Wilson that these are extremely important matters, and we treat them with the utmost seriousness. The 45-day redundancy consultation period began a few days ago, and I believe that it is planned that redundancies will be operative in July, with a further tranche in quarter 1 next year. It appears that it will be a two-stage process.

Because there is more time, PACE is better able—with the benefit of some notice—to be of practical assistance to many of the individuals involved. People are made redundant in units of one, and each one must be provided with whatever assistance PACE can reasonably provide. PACE is very good at providing that function in Scotland and has had a relatively high success rate in the work that it does in helping people to find other opportunities, whether employment, training or other fruitful activity.

I am happy to give the undertaking to keep all members advised of what work we can do. As I mentioned, Scottish Enterprise will meet the company again in a couple of days' time.

Regeneration

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's inquiry into the delivery of regeneration in Scotland.

I note that Sarah Boyack, who is due to open the debate for the Labour Party, is not in the chamber. That is something that the Presiding Officers deplore. We expect members to be here.

I call Kevin Stewart to open the debate on behalf of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. Mr Stewart, you have 14 minutes.

14:22

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): It gives me great pleasure to open the debate on behalf of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. The debate follows our year-long inquiry into best practice and limitations in the delivery of regeneration in Scotland. It was a detailed and thorough inquiry that resulted in a unanimous cross-party report that sets out 55 specific recommendations and numerous conclusions.

Our inquiry had a focus on regeneration involving the community and looked closely at the progress that has been made since the publication in 2011 of the Government's regeneration strategy. To set the scene, I quote from the foreword to the report.

"For most of the last 60 to 70 years, the concept of regeneration was often identified in most people's minds as relating to just the physical development, or redevelopment, of the communities in which they lived. That development could be as small as the development of a local play area for children in a given community, to as large as the construction of whole new towns in the post-war development years in the 50s and 60s. Today public policy on regeneration is interlinked with issues such as economic development, health inequalities, social integration and educational development as much as it is with the construction of new houses, schools and roads.

We see regeneration as a vision delivered through a focus of effort and strategic approach across all public policy areas. First and foremost regeneration is about reducing poverty, decline and inequality of opportunity in areas of disadvantage. It is about improving outcomes for communities. This theme runs throughout our report."

I thank those who supported us, including the clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre. I especially thank our adviser, Professor Ian Wall of Heriot-Watt University, who performed a sterling job not least in chivvying up responses from across the country. We received many responses and spoke to a large number of people from across Scotland, and I thank them all. We are extremely grateful for the people's input.

The report provides some historical basis. It may be the first report of a parliamentary committee that has referred to the work of the Romans; quoted David Lloyd George, who promised

“a country fit for heroes”

to grow up in; covered the Wall Street crash; mentioned Sir Winston Churchill; and addressed the demolition of slum tenements in Glasgow.

It discusses the various 20th century initiatives of the post-war years, including the Glasgow eastern area renewal project, urban development corporations, new towns, enterprise zones, the new life for urban Scotland project, social inclusion partnerships and the enterprise agencies. Those initiatives culminated in the work of community planning partnerships across Scotland, which are currently the main focus of regeneration activity.

All the well-intentioned schemes and initiatives told the people and communities what to do, but fundamentally regeneration is about reducing poverty, inequality and long-term decline and we made it clear that the old top-down model requires to change. We visited local communities across Scotland and saw and heard about the difference that involving people can make. We made a number of recommendations about how the community can and should be supported and empowered. I am certain that every member of the Parliament wants sustainable long-term achievements, and we could not have made it clearer in our report that that is best achieved by working with the community.

There is a strong linkage with what we expect to be included in the community empowerment (Scotland) bill, when it is introduced shortly. That bill can be a catalyst for a change in attitudes and for a move away from the view that local people are merely consumers of services to one that sees them as active partners in design and delivery. It can also serve as a way of helping local authorities to change their view of themselves from being mere service providers to being bodies that are, principally, service enablers. The bill will be vital in many ways and, as a Parliament, we must ensure that we get its provisions right so that it meets aspirations.

Our report was written to examine the Government's strategy and to add value to it. However, we see regeneration not as a strategy per se but as a vision to be delivered through focused effort and a strategic approach across all areas of public policy. Our report included a range of suggestions that we considered should be progressed, highlighted actions that could be taken and sought comments and responses on a range of ideas that emerged from our work.

The successful delivery of the strategy is dependent on implementation of the Christie commission principles and effective public sector reform at all levels. It requires better partnership and joined-up working but, fundamentally, it must take place alongside greater community participation in service design and delivery. As a committee, we understood that the strategy sets a vision, but we saw precious little evidence of the vision being embedded at a national or—more worryingly—a local level. In particular, we were not convinced that strategic co-ordination to embed the vision across Government policy and guidance has been established. Perhaps the minister will give us some reassurances on that aspect.

Of even greater concern is the absence of a general oversight and co-ordinating function for regeneration efforts across Scotland. Nobody appears to be responsible for ensuring that best practice is shared or impacts measured across the country. We suggested that the national community planning group should provide a leadership role in relation to CPPs. Although the Government accepted in its response that such a need existed, it suggested that our views were misplaced. I will be extremely interested to hear the minister's view on who is to provide leadership in this area, how impacts are to be measured and what role single outcome agreements may have to play in that regard.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): It is very easy to agree with everything that the member is saying. Does he agree that it is important that we are ambitious enough about seeing some of the initiatives that do not work and learning things not to do? Although we want everything to succeed does the member agree that we want ambition to be displayed and that we should send a strong signal that when failure occurs, the lessons from that should be disseminated as well as the lessons of success?

Kevin Stewart: I agree completely and utterly with Mr Stevenson. Sometimes, we are too risk averse in implementing various aspects of policy and strategy. Mr Stevenson was wise in what he said and I hope that we can change our approach.

One of the key questions that we faced was how much money the public sector spends on regeneration in Scotland. We thought that it was vital to understanding the activity that takes place and to measuring progress to have the level of input available. We discovered a veritable Aladdin's cave of schemes to support regeneration. Although we accept that mainstreaming an activity makes the identification of specific spend difficult if not impossible, we expected to be able to identify the level of funding that was directly available. Sadly, despite our best

efforts, we were unable to achieve that. We invited the Government to assist us in mapping the resources available, principally to allow stakeholders to understand the sources available to them. Unfortunately, that seems impossible to do.

Time and again we heard from organisations and community representatives of funding difficulties. Those fall into two parts: difficulty and competition in obtaining an initial grant or award; and, once funding is received, the need to devote significant resources to obtaining repeat funding. The latter difficulty is particularly concerning as it has the effect of focusing significant amounts of energy on seeking to maintain funding, drawing effort away from a focus on delivery of the purposes for which the original funding was provided. We recommended that the resources that Government allocates directly to regeneration be provided for a longer term. Regrettably, that recommendation has not been accepted, but I hope that that decision will be reconsidered so that we can drive forward preventative, sustainable spending approaches.

I am conscious that my speech can thus far be viewed as somewhat negative. I have been reflecting on that and can assure members that there were many positive aspects to the inquiry, not least the enthusiasm, drive and determination to improve local areas that we encountered on our visits, some examples of which I will provide shortly. On the potential negativity charge, I suggest that when discussing a report with 50-plus recommendations for improvement, it is almost inevitable that some negativity will creep in.

The undoubted highlights of the inquiry were our visits. In total, we made six visits during the inquiry, as we were anxious to engage with people on the ground. Often, we split the committee, so that we could cover as much ground as we could in various locations. Boy, did the clerks love us for the organisation involved in that! Again, I thank them for their sterling efforts.

We started by visiting Cumbernauld. Several people counselled against a January visit, but the weather was kind and the community turned out in force. Indeed, they turned out in such numbers that we held an additional evening session to meet them all. It was no indoor visit, because we traipsed across fields, up hills and over fences, and were treated to a magnificent display of mountain-bike riding by local schoolchildren using a regeneration facility. We left Cumbernauld thoroughly satisfied and convinced of the benefits of people power. I thank Mr Stevenson for a shot of his wellies that day.

We went to Maybole in Ayrshire and saw what was being achieved by the local community there. We followed that with a public meeting in Ayr. Part

of the committee then visited Glasgow and met several groups including the wonderfully named Tea in the Pot. At the same time, the remainder of the committee were in Aberdeen touring the Seaton backies area and hearing about all the achievements there, which have largely been funded by private donations and contributions that the community worked hard to get.

Some of us visited Dundee and saw the regeneration in the Whitfield area. We heard about community budgeting there and, to return briefly to negativity, heard how jealous other communities were of the work going on there and the community budgets. We were impressed by Whitfield, as were our colleagues who visited Ferguslie Park, where they saw much good work being led by the local community.

We also visited Dalmarnock and toured around the various projects and sites that Clyde Gateway is responsible for. That tour was impressive, as is the work that Clyde Gateway is doing. Inevitably, the officials there were at pains to explain all their good work and the level of engagement that they had with the community. Of course, we were a bit cynical about that, until wee Jimmy from the local area turned up at one of our community breakfast events in Edinburgh a few months later. Not only did he agree with the version of the improvements to the community that we had heard about but, if anything, he went further, praising the effect of the regeneration work in the east end of Glasgow and the close collaboration that was occurring with the community there.

Mention of our breakfast events reminds me of a range of characters who attended and spoke freely to us. We are indeed indebted to a large number of individuals who gave—indeed, give—of their time to help others. We were heartened to see that there is a thriving community spirit right across Scotland. Given encouragement, support, the right tools and a small amount of money, they can deliver and are delivering significant and lasting benefits for their communities.

It is fair to say that as a committee we were convinced that regeneration works best when it is done by ordinary people. Indeed, it needs to be developed with people, to involve them and to fire up their enthusiasm.

I turn to the reply from the Scottish Government, for which I thank the Minister for Housing and Welfare, although I am bound to note that it is not as comprehensive as we might have wished. Although it refers to most of the recommendations that apply to the Government, in a number of cases it does not. Given that, I think that the best way to proceed is for us to write to the minister highlighting those areas where we believe elaboration is necessary, and I will ask my

committee colleagues to agree the terms of such a response in the coming weeks.

I end with the committee's overall conclusion:

"regeneration must involve the people in the communities from design to delivery; our evidence shows regeneration can only be truly and long lastingly effective if 'done by people'. We are clear that all partners are not placing enough emphasis on true community participation, particularly in the design stage; and must place the community at the heart of decision making and involvement throughout."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

I now call on Margaret Burgess. Minister, you have about 10 minutes. There is time to take interventions if you wish.

14:36

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I take the opportunity to thank Kevin Stewart and the members of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee for the significant amount of time and effort that they expended on their evidence gathering. I welcome many of the key recommendations in the committee's report.

The changing financial landscape meant that we as a Government needed to take a new approach to regeneration and that our policies needed to evolve if they were to make a real impact that could be sustained over time. Responding to those challenges, the Scottish Government launched "Achieving a Sustainable Future: Regeneration Strategy" in December 2011. Now, two years on, it is good to have the committee's assessment of progress, which draws on the extensive evidence that it gathered.

The committee's work supports our view that people no longer think of regeneration simply in terms of physical redevelopment. As the committee states,

"many stakeholders and communities across Scotland share our clear understanding that physical, social and economic considerations are integral to, and interdependent with, the policy of regeneration".

That is one of the key changes that we set out in our strategy, and it is reassuring to hear that it is being put into practice in a wide range of local initiatives that are being delivered across Scotland.

I welcome the fact that the committee deliberately focused on the community-led angle of regeneration as it is at the heart of the Scottish Government's regeneration strategy. I was pleased to see that the evidence that the committee gathered supports our approach. The committee's report states:

"There was a sense from all stakeholders that the strategy has rightly placed a new focus upon community participation and ownership."

There was broad agreement that regeneration can be sustainable and effective only if it is "done by people" rather to them.

Although we recognise that it is for communities to take this forward, we know, too, that such activity can succeed only with the help of a variety of partner organisations. Those organisations take their lead from Government, and although regeneration is not always badged as such, it is at the heart of Government policy. "The Government Economic Strategy" recognises the important role that regeneration plays in contributing to Scotland's economic performance. As the committee notes, regeneration outcomes are not unique to regeneration policy but can be achieved through mainstream budgets such as those for health, education and justice. The Scottish Government remains committed to pursuing a transformative cross-sector programme of public service reform to improve outcomes for people and to tackle the inequalities that persist in society.

While the strategic lead on this agenda must come from the Scottish Government, local delivery is vital if we are to tackle disadvantage and achieve the outcomes that are required in Scotland's communities. We have always believed that local authorities and community planning partnerships are in the best position to co-ordinate both economic development and regeneration activity, as they are the bodies that understand local needs. That is why more than £140 million of funds from the former fairer Scotland fund was transferred to local authorities through the local government settlement.

The Scottish Government welcomes the committee's support for our holistic approach to regeneration. Although we have directed significant funding to local authorities, we have retained some central funding, which allows us to make moneys available to our most disadvantaged areas to support a range of physical, economic and social activities.

Since 2007-08, we have invested more than £270 million in regeneration activity and have offered a range of funding, including dedicated funding to community groups through our people and communities grant fund. The fund is helping to enable established community groups, such as housing associations, to do this.

Interest in that fund has surpassed our expectations, so we have found a new and innovative way of augmenting the budget with moneys that have been released from a charitable bond. Some 136 projects have already been approved, which represent a commitment of more

than £16 million by 2015. The supported projects range from projects on training and upskilling, volunteering and employability advice to funding for community facilities and for diversionary activities for young people.

I noted that Kevin Stewart talked about visiting a number of projects. I, too, have been fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to visit a number of projects. In February, I enjoyed a visit to Twechar Community Action to see an employability project that provides on-the-job training, volunteering and a school placement programme for local residents. I met a number of trainees there, one of whom—Ross McDervitt—is hoping for a career in horticulture when he completes his Scottish vocational qualification. He told me just how much he and the other trainees appreciated the opportunity to get vital work experience in a job that they really enjoyed doing. It is important that that is local. I hope that, with application, all the trainees will be able to move on to permanent jobs in the local community. As Kevin Stewart said, it is about regenerating communities, getting people into work and preventing poverty.

Not every community is mature enough to take advantage of funding from the people and communities grant fund. Some communities need help to grow and flourish. Through the strengthening communities programme, the Scottish Government will provide direct investment to our community anchors to help them to build capacity and be in a stronger position to respond to the needs of their communities.

I launched the strengthening communities programme at the Glenboig Neighbourhood House life centre in North Lanarkshire. The organisation delivers a wide range of services to the local community. It delivers healthy eating initiatives, youth services, adult learning, a community cafe and services for older people. The positive benefits of such activities are achieved by local people working together to deliver change within their communities.

We are investing in the North Lanarkshire project and others like it to help communities to take ownership of local assets. By taking that ownership, Glenboig Neighbourhood House life centre will be in a position to develop new social enterprise opportunities, improve the services that it offers to local people, and even take ownership of the local post office to ensure that that vital service is maintained in the community.

Kevin Stewart: The minister has outlined all the good work there, but can she tell us how we can ensure that such good practice and expertise in communities is exported throughout Scotland so that communities that are currently disempowered can be empowered?

Margaret Burgess: The purpose of the strengthening communities fund is to share that good practice in communities that are not yet ready or able to access it and ensure that they get support—a leg-up—to get them into the same position as other communities are in. In the past, we have often found that the same organisations and communities manage to access the bulk of funding. We are clear that we want to spread the funding across Scotland, and we will certainly engage with the Local Government and Regeneration Committee on that. Our clear aim is that all communities in Scotland should be able to access the funding to help them to grow and develop.

The strengthening communities programme is collaborative. We have engaged Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Development Trusts Association Scotland, the Carnegie Trust and the Scottish Community Development Centre to maximise the type of community anchors that we will support. That relates to what Kevin Stewart asked. I am pleased to say that, with our investment, around 150 community organisations will be supported through the strengthening communities programme.

The committee made it clear that a holistic approach is best for regeneration activity, but we realise that positive outcomes can still be achieved through physical regeneration projects. Through the regeneration capital grant fund, we are supporting 22 successful capital projects that focus on community engagement and will drive greater community participation. The committee stressed the need for focused funding, and that fund primarily supports areas that are suffering high levels of deprivation and disadvantage.

We continue to support urban regeneration companies such as Riverside Inverclyde and Irvine Bay that are doing a lot of good work in some of our most disadvantaged communities. I can confirm the First Minister's announcement this morning of additional funds for Clyde Gateway URC. Part of that funding will support the purchase and renovation of the Aspire building in Rutherglen by the Healthy n Happy Community Development Trust to enable service provision and delivery tailored to the needs and, importantly, the desires of the local community. It will accelerate works that will contribute to the Commonwealth games legacy.

That is just one example of how we will put more power into the hands of communities and allow them to influence the important decisions that matter to them.

I also welcome the committee's support for community planning and the work of community planning partnerships. They deal with the complex issues facing individuals and communities,

interlinking economic development, health inequalities, social integration and educational development. Such issues require local solutions to address the differing needs, priorities and circumstances within communities. We need community planning partnerships to provide the shared leadership that drives the pace of partnership working locally. That is, after all, the mechanism that we have for improving local outcomes for people and communities. There are numerous examples of CPPs demonstrating a strong, evidence-based understanding of place and people.

In Kilwinning in North Ayrshire—in my constituency, so I declare my interest—the Pennyburn regeneration youth development enterprise's community hub, with the help of a wide range of partners, has refurbished a disused public house to open a new multipurpose community hub, providing services to all age groups.

Those are just some examples of good practice but, on their own, they are not enough. The challenge is for community planning to be truly effective across the board in improving outcomes and reducing inequalities. The Scottish Government is committed to strengthening community planning further and is doing so in a number of ways.

The forthcoming community empowerment bill will place new statutory duties on CPPs and public sector bodies to improve outcomes for local communities. The Government will continue to work with stakeholders and the Local Government and Regeneration Committee to ensure that the aim of creating and improving sustainable communities continues, and we will need to work together to meet that.

14:47

Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): I began serving on the Local Government and Regeneration Committee in the middle of its evidence gathering on regeneration, so I am pleased to have followed the report through the Parliamentary process.

I must say that, at first, the scale of the inquiry and the breadth of different issues that it covered were daunting for one who was not only new to the committee, but was new to being an MSP. However, it is clear that so many of the issues that have cropped up go beyond regeneration and touch on other areas of our work—in particular, things such as flexibility in local government and community empowerment. Bearing that in mind, it appears that the lessons that have been learned could positively affect regeneration and far wider policy areas.

One of the first such lessons became apparent during our visit to Whitfield in Dundee, on the very day when I joined the committee. As the report makes clear, regeneration has existed as a concept for a very long time, and in recent years all Governments have invested time and money in regeneration policies in a bid to reverse real and lasting deprivation and decline. However, although that investment was undoubtedly well intentioned, we must accept that it has not always been successful; indeed, there have been some total failures. Investment in and of itself will not deliver long-term improvements or reverse long-term decline. Of course, funding is needed, but in recent years there have not been the resources that there were previously. That means that when funding does become available, we should spend it wisely and monitor it closely to ensure that it is being fully utilised.

There are plenty of examples of regeneration projects throughout Scotland that have delivered meaningful change, and which could be considered as genuine success stories. I would like to highlight one or two aspects that have struck me. First, not all those success stories were large scale; Blue Sea Consulting argued in its written submission that small projects with a fixed level of funding and clear short-term objectives are often very successful. The role of such projects should not be overlooked when we are considering our regeneration strategy.

We need to move beyond the idea that regeneration means completion of one large-scale infrastructure project after another—particularly given how many large-scale projects fail to be completed or suffer huge delays, for a variety of reasons.

I was also struck by the submission by PARC Craigmillar, which has pursued a piecemeal approach to regeneration and, as a starting point, worked hard to establish what were the existing needs and demands in Craigmillar. Far too many regeneration projects have attempted to generate both the demand and the supply. That is almost like the Kevin Costner syndrome of, "Build it and they will come." As I said in committee, retail units are often built despite there being long-established shops nearby and no evidence that there is demand for more. The hope is that the new units will bring custom and greater investment but, years later, those shops still lie empty. Shops are often built because developers see it as an easy way of making money through shop rents, which means that little thought is given to the mix of shop types—for instance, there is often a high concentration of charity and betting shops. That approach to regeneration is simplistic and—I am afraid—it rarely succeeds.

The strength of a phased approach is that it meets the existing needs in a community and can adapt to future developments. That is at the heart of the regeneration issue. Regeneration can take any number of forms and be of any scale, but community engagement is a must. As the committee report makes clear, the extent to which communities are involved with the decision-making process varies markedly among communities and even among projects, depending on who is delivering them. There seems to be some denial of that fact, but from the various community groups from which we heard there was a clear and consistent message about the perception of being excluded. In particular, the failings of the CPPs have been exposed in that regard, so we must have action to ensure that local communities are meaningfully involved, and we must move beyond consultations that are merely tick-the-box exercises. As the committee convener stated, it is the people who matter.

When we consider what regeneration means in its broadest sense, we find that a core group who must be engaged are local businesses and entrepreneurs. Again, the success stories are projects that identified the needs of businesses or identified barriers to their growth and helped them to overcome them. When local businesses attract employment and investment into an area, the success is shared locally, which is the key to sustainable development and reversing long-term decay. As Scottish Enterprise suggested in its evidence, investment is at its most effective when it is used to pump-prime locally based economic development.

Our report highlights barriers to community engagement that must be overcome. Although I hate this policy wonk phrase, there is undoubtedly a need for “capacity building” in communities in order to encourage participation in the design and running of services. Communities must be able to articulate their priorities and to affect the system. Far too often, bodies or small groups of individuals assume that role on behalf of a community, but that is not sustainable not only because those groups do not always reflect totally what is in the best interests of the areas that they serve, but because communities must be able to hold to account those who make decisions and distribute resources on their behalf.

There are already a number of regeneration success stories out there. We must learn the lessons of the report, put the community at the heart of our future strategy and reconcile ourselves to the various forms of regeneration that that will bring.

14:53

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I thank the Local Government and Regeneration Committee members, and I thank the many community groups that gave evidence to the inquiry. The report of the inquiry reads well. In particular, I welcome its publication in a form that I suspect is accessible to anyone who gave evidence to the committee. That is welcome, because the conversation has to continue beyond the committee’s report, in our communities. Part of the purpose of the debate should be empowerment of the communities that we will talk about this afternoon.

The headline statement is that, in order to deliver a lasting change and successful regeneration, we need to ensure that communities are involved at every step of the way. That is absolutely correct. Communities need to be empowered and supported in the long term if we are to tackle and reduce poverty, and create new opportunities for people in some of our most disadvantaged areas. When reading the report, one feels that the committee has taken time to talk to communities, which strengthens the recommendations.

On the strategy and policy issues, to one who is not a member of the committee the key finding that comes across is that regeneration must be part of the Scottish Government’s overall vision and cannot be an add-on. The principles of the Christie commission need to run right across Government departments. The fact that the new people and communities fund ran out within three months and was massively oversubscribed demonstrates that more support is needed if the agenda is to be implemented successfully. The committee’s recommendation on revenue funding is absolutely crucial.

Many members will know of community groups that struggle from year to year. The fact that they are in disadvantaged areas means often that they do not have a private sector to fall back on, or other groups that can put money in, so long-term funding and support from the public sector are crucial.

Kevin Stewart: I mentioned the Seaton backies project. With a little bit of public money, the people in that project managed to pull in quite a lot of private investment to deal with environmental issues, and to create new play areas and green spaces. I would like the best practice that they have garnered to be exported elsewhere, because it is not impossible for any community—disadvantaged or not—to go out there if it has the initial back-up. It is not always about money; it is about expertise. We need to export that expertise from one place to another.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give you the time back for the intervention.

Sarah Boyack: Thank you very much, Presiding Officer; that was more than the average intervention.

I say to the convener that the point that I am making is in support of the recommendations in the report, which talks about the need for sustained long-term funding. It is difficult to build capacity in our most disadvantaged communities without a core group to champion the local community and to deliver in the long run. The recommendation on funding was one of the best that the committee made.

The committee identified some important benefits of partnership working, in the form of staff secondments from local councils to community groups. That struck a chord with me, because the relationship is often a client relationship in which the community group applies for money to the council, but does not necessarily have its capacity built, which is what it really needs. The experience of joint work and better partnership working gives councils better understanding and knowledge of the value of the work that community groups do, and better insight into how such groups might be supported in the future, which might help to shape other council policies. It is also useful in order that community groups get a better handle on how councils work and how the groups might be more empowered to ask for future support and investment, which other communities might be better equipped to ask for.

The recommendations about housing associations also strike a chord with me. They match my local experience of organisations such as Castle Rock Edinvar and Dunedin Canmore. Such organisations do more than act as landlords; they act as key players in regeneration in the community. The projects that they support benefit social landlords in the long run but, crucially, they also benefit their tenants because they give them more support, more opportunities for employment and more confidence in their areas.

The report's finding on access to buildings for community use is also important. I would go beyond the point that is made about schools, which are important, because there is also an issue about better access to buildings and joint use of them. It is not viable for many community groups to pay for a building on their own; they need to network with other groups. That is why community centres and joint projects are needed. The proposed community empowerment bill could be important in providing new opportunities for communities to access land and buildings and to use them in the community interest.

Sharing of best practice—the point on which Kevin Stewart intervened—is crucial. Best practice needs not only to be shared among community groups, but to be fed back to the wider public sector because all organisations need to learn from what works best. That is also likely to give them much more of a shared sense of purpose and an understanding of what will work effectively in long-term regeneration.

The point that the committee made about capacity building, not only within community groups but through mainstreaming regeneration across public sector organisations, is crucial.

We could do with more from the minister, in her closing speech, in response to points about European funding. I am aware of projects that were not able to go ahead or were disrupted because of questions about their being too small or because of an issue with state aid. If regeneration is to be successful, it needs to be bottom up, which means that small community groups are important and need to be supported. That means bringing together projects so that they do not miss out on European funding simply because they are small. A problem with Government funding is that it often looks for the big winners and forgets the importance of there being a network of community-based bottom-up organisations.

We could do with better advice from the Scottish Government on how not to fall foul of state aid rules. This morning, I was at a seminar at which I spoke about fuel poverty and community renewables. I have read about best practice in some English local authorities with regard to the problems that they experienced in energy production and the extent to which state aid rules have been used against them. I see the same issues in relation to projects in Scotland. Better advice and guidance about how to overcome those barriers and how not to fall foul of state aid rules are important. Other European countries have managed to power ahead with community projects and regeneration projects around renewables that have not fallen foul of the same regulations as apply to us.

The committee's report used a striking phrase when it said that communities do not yet feel involved in regeneration and see it instead as something that is "done to them". I hope that the aspiration to change that will be shared across the chamber today. We need clear leadership and a much clearer strategy from the Scottish Government, and we need a more joined-up approach that links regeneration with a commitment to tackling poverty. That needs to be at the heart of the Scottish Government's response to the report. The committee's

recommendations make a lot of sense; the challenge will be in implementing them.

A number of the committee's conclusions addressed the need for more transparency about the funds that are available for communities and how funds are spent. A key recommendation was that allocation of public expenditure should be reviewed in order to divert more of it to disadvantaged areas. We need to know that that is happening. Unless we have greater transparency, it is simply not possible to track what is happening where, and what its level of success is.

I hope that, in today's debate, we are able to focus on what more can be done to deliver regeneration in our communities. That requires long-term commitment in terms of aspiration and vision, and it also needs long-term investment. The strategy needs to have anti-poverty measures at its core and it must be in place right across Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now come to the open debate. At this stage, I can give members up to seven minutes.

15:02

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): As a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, I add my name to those who agree with the convener's comments about the huge level of assistance that we received during this inquiry.

I found the inquiry to be hugely interesting and extremely informative. I think that the approach that we took—going from regeneration activities of the past to those of the present day—will be advantageous to all readers of the report. Also, the number of community representatives whom we spoke to in Parliament and outwith it added hugely to our findings and recommendations. Clearly, there is no one-size-fits-all strategy for regeneration; various models have been and will need to be deployed.

As we have heard, the inquiry was wide-ranging. One of the areas that we considered was the role of the urban regeneration companies. As we know, in 2006, following the recommendations that were made in the cities review of 2002, six URCs were established in Scotland to lead the physical, economic, social and community regeneration of some of the most deprived areas of the country. URCs are formal partnerships of key representatives from the public and private sectors, and they operate at arm's length from partner organisations.

There were some differences in the set-up and aims of the URCs. Raploch Urban Regeneration Company and PARC Craigmillar were aimed at

community regeneration; Clyde Gateway was aimed at both community and economic regeneration; and Riverside Inverclyde, Clydebank Rebuilt and Irvine Bay were aimed mainly at economic regeneration. However, in general, the committee was disappointed that the response of some of the URCs was inflexible when they were unable to run their original ambitious plans. The committee accepted that economic conditions played a part in that, but that cannot be used as the sole reason for the inflexibility.

I agree with the Scottish Government when it states in its response to the committee's report, that

"URCs have made a difference to their communities and are continuing to do so."

Many positive differences have been made. However, as we say in paragraph 309 of the report:

"We received evidence that demonstrated different degrees of success but no evidence that the original objectives were being achieved, nor that their social and economic needs were being met."

Paragraph 443 of our report focused on our considerations of Riverside Inverclyde. We stated:

"It was clear to us that governance was lax and arrangements would benefit from improvement. Furthermore, those funding Riverside Inverclyde were not scrutinising adequately its targets and work. We were reassured when told that action was being taken in this regard."

We acknowledge that a number of URCs have community representation on their boards, but we believe that more could be done by the URCs to embed the community in their decision-making structures, and improve accountability for such large public investment.

One of our recommendations, in paragraph 483, was that

"the Scottish Government reviews URCs' progress to date, including their governance arrangements, and reviews the aims of the URCs in light of the economic climate to ensure that they are appropriately placed to deliver on their objectives. The review should re-establish a strategy and funding appropriate for the tasks in the current ... economic climate, to ensure full benefit from the public investment."

In its response to the committee, the Scottish Government said that it feels that it would be inappropriate to do that. I ask it to reconsider its position, because it appears to be the case that not all URCs have enough local input to ensure that they are meeting local aims and needs.

That brings me to community involvement, which has been mentioned already. For a regeneration project to have the best chance of success, community involvement is imperative, but it is clear that not all partners are placing enough emphasis on true community participation in their

approaches to regeneration, or are doing so too late in their decision-making processes. The committee heard the same message during the public services reform inquiry.

On page 3 of our report we state:

“For regeneration to be truly community led, particularly when it is being delivered by mainstream budgets of local authorities and other partners, communities need to be able to actively contribute to the decision making process on public services at an early stage.”

That will mean providing resources to encourage communities to get involved, and equipping them with the skills, knowledge and confidence to be active participants in the process. Furthermore, on page 5 of the report, the committee states that

“Community capacity building is a concept yet to be ‘mainstreamed’ throughout delivery of public policy.”

Paragraph 471 indicates that there is still a huge job to be done, in that

“the message at community level is that they don’t feel truly part of the decision making process, and that regeneration is ‘done to them’.”

Communities must be given opportunities and, crucially, they must feel that they are fully involved in all aspects of regeneration activity, from the initial ideas, through to identification of priorities and projects, and on to implementation and completion. They must feel that they have a voice and that that voice is being listened to at all times.

Regeneration is about people. The best people to take decisions about an area are the people who live and work in that area, wherever it is. No one else knows as much about their priorities and challenges, and no one else cares as much about getting those decisions right. That is why we must have strong community involvement in any decision-making process or in any organisation that is dealing with regeneration.

The committee’s inquiry was fascinating. At the same time, however, it highlighted a number of issues relating to the general feeling among communities that they are not involved in what is happening. The work that the committee has undertaken will help the country in the future, so I am delighted to be a member of the committee that produced that piece of work.

15:09

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Kevin Stewart and the Local Government and regeneration Committee on the report, which makes a useful contribution to the on-going discussion about community renewal and regeneration.

I draw the minister’s attention to some of the work of the Carnegie UK Trust. One area of regeneration is town centre regeneration—Boots

UK kindly sent a briefing on that to members. Last year in Dunfermline, the Carnegie UK Trust launched a project called TestTown, which had some interesting results. The project has since been rolled out across the United Kingdom. One of the issues that it raised is the amount of rent that is being charged for some properties in town centres, which is a major barrier to people who want to try out new businesses.

I am big supporter of moving community planning forward, and it is moving apace. When the committee took evidence from local authority chief executives, the chief executive of Fife Council set out how it was progressing community planning at strategic level, and how local community plans were being established at a more area-based level. We have also heard evidence from elsewhere. Community planning is at different stages in different local authorities across Scotland, but it is an important development that will engage local communities in determining local priorities, and I welcome it.

We need joined-up policies, joined-up strategies and joined-up government at the local level. Priorities need to be agreed and moved forward, but the Scottish Government fails to do that in its response to the committee’s report. It does not look at how it can provide joined-up government.

I welcome the recognition that regeneration is not just about physical regeneration, but has to be about social and economic regeneration. I am old enough to remember that 30 years ago some areas in my constituency qualified for the old urban aid programmes, because of their levels of deprivation and poverty. If members went into those communities today, they would not recognise them, because of the physical regeneration that has taken place. However, the social and economic stats for those areas show that very little has changed over those 30 years and that is why we need to focus on economic regeneration if we are serious about tackling poverty and inequality across Scotland.

It has to be about jobs. I have said time and again that, throughout history, people have never marched for benefits or higher benefits; people have marched for jobs. The answer to getting people out of poverty is to give them the ability to earn a decent wage—earn a living—and to look after themselves and their families.

If we are going to do that, we need to tackle the skills agenda. We need to look at a much more radical approach to education. There is a general view from educationists that schools in areas of deprivation will perform at a lower level than schools in wealthier areas with better local economies. I have never believed that we should accept that. That problem needs bold Government policy to redistribute resources and focus more

resources into areas of deprivation, and focus them on areas where they will make a difference. That needs to take place through the early years and through primary schools into secondary schools. Better links with colleges are needed so that young people have the opportunity to gain the skills and education that will set them up for the rest of their lives and enable them to access employment. That is not happening at present.

I mentioned joined-up Government policy. There has been a 54 per cent reduction in the number of students who attend Fife colleges. The number who were registered to attend who had no formal qualifications has fallen by a staggering 73 per cent. If we are serious about tackling inequality and deprivation and regenerating the communities that suffer from them the most, we need to invest in further and higher education. We need a national strategy across Scotland for numeracy, literacy and information technology skills—the three skills for life that people actually need if they are going to progress and get a job. We need to see investment going into those areas. We need a joined-up strategy that targets resources, is clear about the outcomes that it is trying to achieve and is bold enough to say that there has to be a redistribution of money.

I finish by drawing attention to a policy that the Scottish Government introduced recently: free school meals. Nobody has a problem with the idea that everybody could be given free school meals. However, at the top side of my constituency, which has the second-highest level of deprivation in Fife, more than 50 per cent of the children in one of the schools already qualified for free school meals based on the deprivation and poverty figures. At the bottom side of my constituency, which is a wealthier area, only 1 per cent of the children qualified for free school meals based on the deprivation and poverty figures. The reality is that, given that we have finite resources, if we are serious about tackling poverty and inequality and regenerating our communities, we need to be bold enough to target the resources at the communities that suffer the most. That is where this Government is failing at present.

15:16

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Although I was not a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee during the evidence taking and the compilation of the report, I was on the committee in time to attend the launch of the report. The launch event that I attended took place in Aberdeen. Unfortunately, it coincided with the day on which Scottish Government and UK Government meetings were also being held in Aberdeen, so perhaps it did not

end up quite as far up the news agenda as the committee might have hoped.

The key, overriding message, which has been emphasised throughout the speeches thus far, is that in order for regeneration to be a success, the community needs to be in the driving seat of the process, rather than being a passenger in it.

As a councillor in Aberdeen, I spent time as the vice-chair of the housing and environment committee and I had specific responsibility for the council's regeneration policies during that period. A lot of work was being undertaken to try to ensure that communities were leading regeneration in their areas, rather than the process being officer led. Communities had often held the view that regeneration was something that was done to them, not with them. What comes through in the report is that there has been success in some areas, but that a lot of work needs to be done to get the bureaucrats in our local government to let go of the powers a little bit and hand some of them down to communities. I hope that the forthcoming community empowerment (Scotland) bill will help with that process.

The other thing that struck me when I was dealing with regeneration at a local level—it stays with me to this day—is that regeneration has to be everybody's business. All too often, regeneration is viewed as the sole preserve of the minister, the council convener or the council officials who have initial responsibility for it. The same emphasis and priority are perhaps not attached to it in other departments and portfolios, and I hope that that view is starting to ebb away. When I was dealing with the issue, it was striking that people did not necessarily see the links that can be fostered between education and regeneration; the links were not always initially apparent.

Sarah Boyack highlighted funding. I echo the point that Kevin Stewart made. I agree that funding needs to be provided to groups and organisations to allow them to advance proposals. However, even from my experience locally in bringing forward the regeneration of play facilities, an opportunity exists to bring in private sector funding.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark McDonald: If the member allows me to develop the point, I will come back to her.

Most private sector companies are looking for ways to spend their corporate social responsibility budgets in local communities. An opportunity exists to link that to some of the on-going regeneration work. We need someone to bridge the gap between the communities and the private sector. The local authority could often be much

more proactive in playing that role, particularly through its economic development departments. If the responsibility of regeneration were to be redistributed—

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Mark McDonald: I said that I would give way to Ms Boyack, and I will do so now.

Sarah Boyack: My point was not just about whether money is available but, crucially, about revenue funding that allows local groups to make demands, have a local campaign and keep going while they draw in money from other organisations. I was saying that public sector funding is needed to keep the groups in place, rather than that there is no scope for getting any private sector investment in an area.

Mark McDonald: I accept that. However, it is more complicated than saying that the same situation applies across all groups. The question that follows on from that is, whether we have groups that require on-going revenue funding to support their work or whether we have groups that do not require such funding to support them in order that they can hold meetings and have discussions, should revenue funding be available for them to apply for at the point at which they want to take the plans from the discussion to the implementation stage, rather than given to them throughout the process?

I turn to my particular concern about regeneration and the work that needs to be done to ensure that the community is at the centre. Middlefield, in my Aberdeen constituency, is a regeneration community that will be significantly affected by the infrastructure improvements at the Haudagain roundabout. A number of properties will be demolished and a triangle of land will be left. At the moment it would contain a large amount of housing, but it would be bounded on three sides by major roads. When I was in the council administration, the clear policy direction was that the land would be cleared of housing and that people would be rehoused because we did not want them to live in what would be, in essence, an island surrounded by roads. The funding that was to be released from the sale of land for commercial use would then be reinvested in regeneration for the wider Middlefield community that would remain following the works.

A question mark hangs over whether that remains the case. Over recent years, that commitment has been watered down. The council has now accepted the need to follow the plans and the timescales that the Scottish Government has put in place. However, in my discussions with the community, I have found that it still feels that it is caught in the middle rather than being in the

driving seat of the process. Therefore, I encourage the local authority to get involved and work up a plan with the community on how that process will proceed, what the council's plans are for the land and what the community would want to see in order to arrive at a strategy that would give some certainty to the people of Middlefield.

I will mention a final element of work that is on-going in my constituency. The Station House Media Unit offers a range of opportunities for people in the regeneration communities. It offers a positive transitions employability scheme that takes young people through a 12-week placement, during which they learn a range of different employability and media skills. Following that, SHMU tries to place them into work. It also offers media output by regeneration communities for regeneration communities. That is important, because many of those communities do not feel that a voice is out there speaking for or to them. SHMU offers that opportunity through its radio output and local magazines, which highlight the work in those areas.

A lot of important work, which needs to be supported, is being done in our communities. I hope that the committee's work, through its report, will help to act as a bridge between the Scottish Government's regeneration strategy and the forthcoming community empowerment (Scotland) bill. The links between the two are there and it is important that we ensure that all the work leads to the same conclusion.

15:24

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the debate and the inquiry, which was as detailed and thorough as Mr Stewart said that it was. In the long term, nothing is as important as regenerating our communities, galvanising our neighbourhoods and handing power back to local people.

Regeneration of local government and communities is about not physical development but people on the ground, as the report says. In the long term, that probably means that some of the myriad of centralised support from Government agencies must be swept away. In the medium term, it means that consideration must be given to what we mean by local government and how it should be structured.

Local government as we have come to accept it must be changed and reinvigorated, so that we can be rid of the scourge of deprived and disadvantaged communities and achieve a fairer society. We must accept risk, by accepting further devolution and community empowerment, with the appropriate support of central—but not always central—funding in the short term, as we make the

changes that will enable action to be taken to restore citizens' pride in their communities and local government.

The challenges and opportunities in that regard lie primarily in four areas: demographics; vision and outcomes; leadership and organisation; and directed investment and funding, not least in housing. The committee was right to focus on those and many other areas, and I underline its recommendations on intervention during the transition to local democratic power and responsibility.

On demographics, let us consider projected population change over the next 25 years. I make no apology for using the South Ayrshire Council area as an example. It is projected that, over the next 25 years, South Ayrshire's population will reduce by 2.4 per cent across all ages, while Glasgow will experience a 15.1 per cent increase. Over the same period, the number of children aged 0 to 15 is expected to reduce by 6.7 per cent in South Ayrshire, while Edinburgh will experience a 27 per cent increase.

The same trends apply in projections of the number of people of working age and pensionable age. If we are to improve people's lives by regenerating their communities and supporting environmentally sustainable economic development, discriminatory proposals and funding will be required in the short term, based on the demographic projections.

People-led community regeneration requires vision. We need a vision that embraces the will and skill of the people and which secures the training that is required to fill skill gaps in communities. We need an element of acceptable risk, in an approach that marries skills to local and private investment—we should not be afraid of private investment. That is why I welcome the proposals for a community empowerment (Scotland) bill, which will have to develop to enable communities to push the boundaries in relation to people, investment and ownership, as experience is gained.

The third sector, the care sector, social enterprises, the voluntary sector, co-operatives and collectives are integral and important ingredients in successful renewal and regeneration. They are independent yet co-dependent.

The delivery of a local regeneration strategy will depend on strong, community-based leadership. We need leadership of broad experience, which embraces local needs, the vision that I talked about, strategy and the community's aspirations. Such leadership will understand and accept the need for investment, outsourcing, partnerships and accountability in achieving the community's

anticipated outcomes. That is why the proposed community empowerment (Scotland) bill and the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill will be essential in laying the foundations of the approach.

Properly directed funds and investment will be key, and community oversight and audit of how funds are spent will be necessary. Last year, for example, we had the ridiculous situation of South Ayrshire Council loaning £4 million to Birmingham City Council at a rate of interest that was half the standard bank rate. That would not have happened had there been proper community oversight. Regeneration requires leadership that secures focused local investment and which provides a social and financial return.

I do not denigrate the many funding regimes that are currently available to communities; I would like to see them streamlined. It is safe to say that we need to consider the cost of administration and of distributing those funds to communities. We need to get those funds to the front line as quickly as we possibly can. The committee's demand for a review of the few URCs—their governance, their aims and their funding—is laudable and, indeed, urgent.

In Ayr, Ayr Renaissance has been in existence for several years, with considerable central Government funding, yet there has been no discernable change in achievement. Government funds—even short-term funds—should be directed to investment and to operational opportunities and outcomes. Those funds are not there just for a cosmetic makeover; it is about what is happening underneath.

The committee recommendations and the Government response are laudable but, in the motto of Ayr, we should "Ne'er forget the people". Let us dispense with as much as possible of the overarching bureaucracy and centralisation of local government and regeneration needs and let us trust in the people and their communities. Many will succeed. Some will fail, but that should not be an inhibitor to setting free our communities and our people.

15:31

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde)

(Lab): I congratulate the committee on its work and its report. There is much in the report that we recognise from a Health and Sport Committee perspective, such as the importance of building community capacity and of dealing with the issue of powerlessness. There is no doubt that tackling those issues can improve the health and wellbeing of our country.

Perhaps the committees will have the opportunity to share and even take on some of that work.

I am interested in aspects of regeneration. The regeneration game has been played in Inverclyde for many years—Kevin Stewart mentioned 60 years, but it feels longer than that.

Regeneration has gone through phases. We remember that the private sector withdrew suddenly. At the heart of some of the failings there is the fact that we have not got the relationships right. Constant change will take place in industry, particularly when large numbers of people are employed, but there was no notification, planning, rundown or strategy at the beginning, so communities such as Greenock and Port Glasgow were left with a challenge.

In the past, there were better times. The private sector led regeneration, because house building was on the go and it could sell houses. The private sector rushed out of the heart of the community in Greenock and Port Glasgow and started to build in surrounding areas. That built up new communities and exaggerated the decline and deprivation in the central areas. The brownfield sites were left for many years.

Well-meaning Governments of all descriptions have come along and said that the lost jobs need to be replaced with other jobs. They replaced overdependency on shipbuilding jobs with overdependency on electronics jobs, and the cycle began again.

We have been there and done it. We have seen well-meaning Governments come along with quick fixes. We have seen successes—for instance, Greenock processes two thirds of RBS's mortgages in the United Kingdom. That came from innovation, but too much has not been followed through.

Influences such as that brought about the urban regeneration company many years later. We can debate whether it succeeded, but in Inverclyde the urban regeneration company tried to avoid the mistakes that had been made in the past—an issue that Stewart Stevenson referred to earlier. It tried to get away from the quick fixes and establish secure funding over a long period. It tried to engage local authorities and the private sector. It had all those ambitions, but how can it survive when, 10 years into the project, we have pulled the funding? We are making judgments and comparing the declining population and all the past problems in Inverclyde with growth in Inverness.

The Scottish Government understands regeneration to be

“the holistic process of reversing the economic, physical and social decline of places where market forces alone won't suffice”,

but how can we take seriously its objective of

“a Scotland where our most disadvantaged communities are supported and where all places are sustainable and promote well-being”?

If the Government believes in that and accepts, as John Swinney and other Government ministers accept, that we are more vulnerable to recession and decline, why has the funding been pulled from the urban regeneration company in Inverclyde? Why has our local college been facing cuts? Why has our housing budget faced cuts?

We need to get serious about regeneration. I say to Chic Brodie that physical reconstruction matters to those who voted in great numbers to get investment in the housing sector in order to transform their lives and where they live in Inverclyde. All those things were happening and were delivering. It is a different matter to say, when we examine the facts, whether the outcome has been good or bad. We should not have withdrawn the funding completely, but that is what has happened. We believed that we would eventually win the regeneration game only to find, now, that we are losers.

Notwithstanding that gripe, I think that the report is a serious piece of work that raises issues that need to be raised. We need to do things better. Empowering our communities through regeneration is the only way forward, but we must be consistent and, as Stewart Stevenson says, test it. We must learn from our mistakes but accept that in any project or regeneration there will be success and failure. Our ambition should be for success for communities such as Inverclyde.

15:37

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I congratulate my former colleagues on the committee on the excellent report that they have produced.

The convener's foreword defines regeneration as being

“aimed at reducing poverty, inequality and decline with a clear focus on people in the most disadvantaged communities.”

It is hard to disagree with a single word of that, but there is something missing. In the long run, we must make the communities self-sustaining. If they continue to depend on outside support, regeneration is a non-ended task.

I take a rather iconoclastic view of the debate that is a bit different from those of colleagues around the chamber. However, I do not disagree with what I have heard—indeed, the genuine

passion that Duncan McNeil just contributed is exactly the sort of thing that we should be hearing. He has perhaps got closer to the issue than almost anybody else.

As has been mentioned, the committee visited the Seaton backies project in Kevin Stewart's constituency. What was inspiring about that visit was that the excellent things that were going on in that community were nothing whatsoever to do with any centrally brought regeneration activity. They were grassroots changes that were inspiring people in that community who were so disconnected from any of the organisations that were involved in regeneration that nobody had ever told them that what they were doing could not be done—so they just got on and did it, and they succeeded.

With people like that, we must not use the word "regeneration", because it is not their word. The moment we use a big long word with multiple syllables that people are not familiar with, we are saying, "This is someone else's responsibility, not yours." We must use language that means something to the people who will make the difference—the Seaton backies enthusiasts.

I will take an example from another area entirely—that of Kip Keino, who won a gold medal in the 1,500m at the Olympics in Mexico City in 1968. He also won a gold medal in the 3,000m steeplechase at the Munich Olympics in 1972 and a gold medal at the Commonwealth games in Edinburgh in 1970. He grew up in a rural part of Kenya and his parents died when he was a youngster. When he rose to his feet to take his first steps, nobody knew that he was going to be a world champion. Nobody told him that it would be difficult. He did not know how difficult it would be; he just got on and did it. He was not surrounded by people who said, "Don't worry, son. It's our responsibility. We'll take it away." The people who are involved in the Seaton backies project are in exactly the same position that Kip Keino was in.

Sarah Boyack said that she wanted a more joined-up approach to be taken—no, we want the opposite of that. We do not want a joined-up approach, because a joined-up approach means waiting for someone else. If we do it ourselves in a granular way, we will succeed or fail in small steps, and then the little grains can join together and build their successes from the community upwards. The joined-up approach is the enemy of effective community regeneration.

Of course, I am exaggerating for effect, as members know perfectly well, but we must look at the issue in a slightly different way. I want space to be left for happenstance—for accidental success. I want things to be done on a small scale, so that no failure cripples the person who failed but, instead, encourages them to go and find a new solution.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I agree with much of what the member says, but would he accept that there are some issues, such as dealing with big areas of contaminated ground, that have to be addressed on a top-down basis?

Stewart Stevenson: Of course there are. Is there a role for the top? Yes, but only at the command of the bottom. That is the point. It is not that there is not space for the big things; the issue is who says that the big things get done.

In his wonderful book on project management, "The Mythical Man-Month", Fred P Brooks talks about the non-commutativity of time and effort. That is garbage, isn't it? We cannot understand a word of it. What it boils down to is that, if there is a hole that it would take six hours for a man to dig and you put six men on the job, it will not get done in one hour, because they will have to collaborate and co-operate, which is an overhead. One person will often do a job far more effectively than a team.

Fred P Brooks poses a second question: how do you make a late project later? His answer is that you add staff. When staff are added, the staff on the project have to train the new staff and stop doing the job that they are supposed to be doing. The corollary is to take away the people who are causing the problem and slowing things down and let the remaining bare handful get on with it. That is the recipe for community action.

The whole business of community regeneration is not new—far from it. Two and a half thousand years ago, Hippodamus the Greek was the inventor of town planning. His regeneration involved a different system. Aristotle criticised him and said that his ideas were loopy. In Scotland, Sir Patrick Geddes came up with terrific ideas. Of course, his mother was Janet Stevenson, so he was bound to be a good guy. He was actually a sociologist, not an engineer or an economist; he was a person who looked at people. If we do not look at people, we will not succeed.

We must not take those people out of their area of success. The Peter principle is that people get promoted until they have been promoted to a senior position where they are no longer capable of being promoted; in other words, they are no longer capable of doing the job into which they have been promoted. We must leave people in the communities where they can make a real difference.

I am delighted to advise Mr Stewart that my wellies have survived the visit to Cumbernauld and continue to prosper. They are available to other members, if required. We politicians are often guilty of saying "Think big", but I am here to say "Think small"—indeed, think very small. There is enormous capacity out there, and we have just not allowed it the space. There is one word that the

people in our communities must never hear—it is, of course, particularly relevant this year—and that word is no.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call George Adam, to be followed Anne McTaggart.

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): Follow that, George.

15:45

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): One of my colleagues just said “Follow that”, but I do not think that I will. I will try to do what I am good at myself, and I may mention the town of Paisley at one point.

I welcome the committee’s report and all the hard work that the committee obviously did during the inquiry. Remembering my time dealing with matters such as regeneration, I think that Stewart Stevenson is correct when he says that when we use words like regeneration we are taking power away from the very people who want to get the job done. For them, it is just a case of rolling up the sleeves and doing the hard work, so Stewart Stevenson made a valid point in that regard.

When I was involved as a councillor with Renfrewshire Council, we noted that, when we had engagement with local groups in terms of the community planning partnership programme, we heard all their good ideas and what they wanted. I found that extremely useful in giving me a reason for what we wanted to provide and do.

One of the first things that we did in Renfrewshire Council was to ensure that as an administration we created a local area committee structure in which community groups could have a say and vote on decisions about what we did with the Paisley common good fund and other funds that were available to the groups. That was done instead of what had happened in the past, which was that in a darkened council room councillors decided what they were going to do with the money. The new system was more open and a better way forward. I found it a lot better as well because it meant that, as the convener of the group concerned, I could ensure that the public were getting what they wanted and that things were successful.

Among the things that we did was get an investment of £220,000 from Tennis Scotland for tennis courts in the south end of Paisley. People thought that I was daft and that I would not get the money, but I got it because we thought big and decided to get it for that small area of Paisley. We also looked at getting other facilities, including an outdoor gym. I went past it the other day, and it is extremely successful. The idea was to ensure that we had intergenerational movement there so that

older people would not be scared to sit there or walk around the park because of younger people—the idea was to have everybody there together. That facility has worked, and it was one of the ideas that came from the public to the local authority, which then got on with it.

One issue that I constantly heard about during my time as a councillor on the scrutiny board that looked at various funding streams for projects was the on-going issue of building capacity for larger projects in areas and constituencies like mine. The committee’s report also referred to that idea: there are a lot of good smaller projects going on, but the larger, life-changing type of project is more difficult as people shy away from them because they do not believe that they have the capacity to push them forward. I do not think that that is the case. I think that it is a case of thinking positively and differently to ensure that we give the people in local groups the opportunity to use to good effect every bit of passion that they have for their town or local area.

For example, the Paisley Development Trust came to me because it wanted to use one of the older buildings in the area that was empty. At that time, the Russell Institute building was being left empty by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, so I said that we should go for that one. Two years later, following work with the local authority and other partners, including the Scottish Government, that building is going to be back in use again in the town. That achievement came from the bottom, because the group involved wanted to do something and engaged with local politicians of various party colours, who worked together and managed to deliver something. That just shows the difference that we can make when we all focus and start to work together.

During its investigation, the committee obviously went to the centre of the universe—Paisley. While it was there, it spoke to community activists from Ferguslie Park and it went to the home of the famous Paisley St Mirren. St Mirren is a perfect example of a community anchor organisation. The report mentions that as well. The work that it has done over the years, which it mentioned to the committee, includes its work with the local authority and various local businesses to deliver the street stuff programme, which I have mentioned before. It goes out into areas where there have been problems with young people and engages with them. As well as street football, there is a youth bus and a gym bus. That has brought down youth disorder in some areas by 25 per cent.

The committee mentions in its report—on page 66—that when it went to St Mirren it heard that there is an open door policy. Lots of football clubs talk about being community clubs, but St Mirren

actually opens the doors to the public because it knows that that is the future. It is a community asset. The only problem with the things that it is doing is that there is a basket of funding measures and the funding is provided on a yearly basis.

Mark McDonald was right to say that, although some people think that regeneration is something that the council or the Government does, it is bigger than that. St Mirren's chairman Stewart Gilmour said jokingly to the chief executive of Renfrewshire Council, "Why don't you second some of your social workers to St Mirren and I'll help you with some of the problems you have?" That might sound a silly idea initially, but it is valid because the other projects that the club has done have credibility and because the club is not looked upon by members of the public as the enemy so it can engage with them. The same people are doing the job but, instead of coming in as "the council" to discuss things from an enforcement point of view, they are there as people who are there to help others and they have credibility in that engagement.

I was on Mr McNeil's Health and Sport Committee for all of two meetings, and the committee was talking about sport hubs. It talked about the European model where all the clubs play multiple sports and everybody goes into their professional club's area, which makes such a difference to places. I had discussions with our local hockey team Kelburne hockey club, St Mirren Football Club, Renfrewshire Council, Renfrewshire Leisure Trust, the University of the West of Scotland, West College Scotland, Engage Renfrewshire—the third sector interface—and Scottish Government ministers, and we talked about how we could take that idea and make it happen in Paisley.

In an area such as Ferguslie, where St Mirren park is, we are in an area of multiple deprivation. As Mr Stevenson said, someone who is born in Ferguslie does not grow up believing that they live in an area of multiple deprivation; they live in Ferguslie and they just want to get on with their life. The idea that we had was to eventually get to a stage where they could get access to education. It is not about elite football stars; it is about using capital spend and regeneration and trying to make a difference in areas such as Ferguslie Park. We are working on that project now. All that we are short of is money, but we are looking for a four or five-year programme with the national lottery. That can make a difference in a place such as Ferguslie Park.

As Mr Stevenson rightly said, and as the report says, it is a question of galvanising support from local communities, giving them what they want and ensuring that we make a difference in their lives.

15:53

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): In my role as a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, I have had the opportunity to examine the evidence of current limitations on the delivery of regeneration across Scotland. I have also been presented with examples of how public and private bodies are working together to achieve regeneration in a way that reflects the aspirations of the communities that they serve.

I am satisfied that the committee began its investigations with a focus on what regeneration means to those who are tasked with delivering it. The idea that it seeks to reverse poverty, deprivation and long-term decline reflects well on those who have presented evidence to the committee, and it reassures me that there is a broad consensus among stakeholders on what regeneration should aim to achieve. However, the committee also found that regeneration is not considered to be achievable without genuine community involvement and that that process takes a significant time.

Stakeholders remain concerned that communities feel that they are excluded from decision making by public bodies and that local people are too often not invited to take part in local projects or initiatives until they are near their conclusion. That has been identified as a cause of poor relations between community groups and public bodies and is responsible for an on-going perception of tokenism.

It is clear that regeneration efforts need to be community led in order to be successful, but communities still do not feel that they are playing a strong enough role in the process. That imbalance needs to be addressed fully before significant progress can be made on reversing the long-term decline of some of our town centres and the significant levels of deprivation that too many people in Scotland face.

The allocation of funding is another issue that continues to affect the success of local regeneration efforts. Evidence presented to the committee suggested that funding for regeneration projects is patchy and that communities and local stakeholders are unsure about how to apply for the resources that they need. The application process to secure funding should be well advertised, transparent and consistent. I also believe that a focus on longer-term funding models would benefit disadvantaged areas the most. That would enable local projects to rely on a steady stream of support, which could be invested in the local community based on its changing needs and circumstances.

It is undeniable that the significant cuts in local authority funding are having a profound effect on regeneration efforts right across Scotland. Local government is tasked with maintaining its existing levels of service provision on a reduced budget while introducing new commitments in a number of areas. That is simply unsustainable, and it is inevitable that regeneration projects will suffer as a consequence. Local government is a key partner in the delivery of regeneration to local communities, and it is clear that much more could be achieved for local people if existing council services received adequate levels of support.

In my role as a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, I have found the process of gathering evidence to be helpful in determining where our efforts should be focused. It has become clear that we need to strengthen the role of communities in the design and delivery of services and learn from the experiences of those who have worked with public bodies to bring regeneration projects to their local area. Funding should be more readily available for groups that understand the nature of their communities and the means by which local issues can be addressed. I am confident that that approach will result in successful regeneration projects that have the ability to reverse long-term decline and to tackle trends of deprivation right across the country.

15:58

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I very much welcome the report and the opportunity to speak in the debate, although I am not a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee.

It is clear that regeneration is needed in a number of parts of Scotland, and we should welcome the good work that is going on. I am particularly pleased that there is joint working with European funds in many cases. The European Union may not be perfect, but we should certainly do all that we can to benefit from it.

I am glad that the Government has emphasised the importance of housing. Housing is not the only means of physical regeneration, but it is certainly one of the most important factors.

The importance of anchor organisations, which are referred to in paragraphs 232 to 236 of the report, is a key point. One of the disadvantages for some of our less well-off communities is their lack of access to professional expertise, which has sometimes meant that applications for lottery funding have been more successful in the better-off areas. The report refers to housing associations as anchor organisations in that regard. I totally agree that they can be key anchor

organisations that combine local involvement and professional expertise.

I take the point that Glasgow Housing Association made that we probably want to be flexible in how we define anchor organisations. It is also perhaps worth mentioning in passing that both Glasgow City Council and GHA are very big and have a tendency at times to be remote from their communities. Therefore, if we are looking at subsidiarity and pushing power down in Glasgow, that certainly needs to be below Glasgow City Council and Glasgow Housing Association level.

I will mention some of the challenges that we face later, but we can also be positive about a lot of the work that has been going on, especially in the east end of Glasgow. The Commonwealth games have provided a tremendous focus for regeneration in general, but Clyde Gateway is distinct from that, and we have seen huge improvements through its work.

Just clearing up contaminated land is tremendously important, although it does not always have the glamour or immediate above-ground impact of a new building or bridge. Around Bridgeton cross, there have been massive changes recently. The cross itself has benefited from public realm works, and right on the cross is the Olympia building, which has been virtually rebuilt. A minimal part of it has been kept, albeit the best part.

One of the key things in that building is the library that is on the ground floor. It is now much more visible and attractive than where the library was previously, when it was tucked away along a narrow road. Libraries are hugely important if we want to improve access to information technology for the general population as well as access to books. We need to get people into buildings where they can see them, use them and be comfortable around them. To be fair to Glasgow Life, which is the culture and leisure wing of Glasgow City Council, that has been happening around the city and it has certainly happened in Bridgeton itself.

Another development that is very close to Bridgeton cross is the Eastgate office development, which is within walking distance of the cross. That is now the home of Community Safety Glasgow, which used to be based in the city centre. We can sometimes assume that such large offices and headquarters should be in the city centre, but if we are serious about spreading investment and jobs around our cities, we need to look at the possibility of relocating offices away from city centres and putting them into some of the more challenging areas.

Relocated offices obviously need links to public transport, and Bridgeton cross has a station right at its heart. The station was already well used

before it was upgraded, but the upgrading means that it is now an easy route for new workers who have to come into the area to work in offices. It is only a few minutes on the train from Glasgow city centre.

I obviously welcome the earlier announcement—the minister repeated it—about extra funding that will go especially to make a difference to walking and cycle routes in the area. Those who know the area between Shawfield in South Lanarkshire and the east end of Glasgow will know that there were large areas that nobody ever went to, crossed, or visited, particularly the Cuningar loop just inside South Lanarkshire.

On a slightly lighter note, among the new office developments there are opportunities for smaller businesses to open offices, and there are often shops on the ground floors of those office buildings. One of those recent new shops is an underwear shop, and the health secretary was at the opening of it. However, there is a more serious aspect to that particular local business because it caters for folk who have had colostomies and others with similar conditions and gives them the opportunity to get underwear that is attractive and appropriate to their condition.

As I have said, there are challenges and the committee's report is realistic about them. A number of members have touched on the question of community involvement. I note that the report emphasises community involvement, which is obviously welcome, but it can be a problem if there is less of a sense of community, as I think there is in many of our areas. My experience is that fewer people are attending community councils, tenants associations, churches and other community organisations. Sometimes one or two people are appointed or self-appointed, but do they really represent the wider community? That issue came up on page 149 of the report about the committee's visit to Glasgow.

If a community is so run down that there are relatively few people left in it—an example of that is Dalmarnock in my constituency—and we need to get a lot more people to move into the area and to plan for that, there is a related challenge. Will the existing community be swamped by what is hoped for or planned to happen in future?

How much to spend on particular projects is another challenge. If we are trying to turn an area around, do we spend just enough to make it acceptable or do we go over and above that and spend extra in the hope that we will have a bigger impact? That is tricky. For example, residents in the Clyde Gateway area have asked whether £11 million was too much to spend on a little-used railway station at Dalmarnock and questioned whether it will give a big boost to the area.

Boundaries are another issue. Sometimes people within a boundary get a lot of money thrown at them when those just outside the boundary get no money whatsoever.

Overall, I am enthusiastic about regeneration in the east end of Glasgow. The public sector correctly takes the lead, but we need the private sector to follow.

16:05

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): The Local Government and Regeneration Committee is to be congratulated on producing the report "Delivery of Regeneration in Scotland". As the report acknowledges, the key to any regeneration project must be community involvement, which means agencies working with local people to deliver a shared vision. I believe that community-led regeneration is the key to the success of any project, and I agree with Kevin Stewart that people must be at the heart of the decision making. The Scottish Government and local authorities have the ability to physically transform an area, but it is only when members of the community come together to tackle their social problems that an effective solution can be found.

Back in the 1990s, the Broomhouse area of my constituency was known as little Bosnia as a result of the antisocial behaviour that was rife in the area at the time. The Scottish index of multiple deprivation rated it then as being in the worst 5 per cent for employment, health and housing and the worst 2 per cent for education, skills and training. Local residents decided that they had had enough, and a number of charities were established to tackle some of the root problems that were associated with the area. What we now know as the Broomhouse Centre was established in 1989 with the advancement of education and health and the provision of recreation facilities as its purposes. The object was to improve the conditions of life for local people, including those in need by reason of age, ill health, disability or financial hardship.

In 1993, the Broomhouse Health Strategy Group was established with the aim of promoting healthy lifestyles in the local community by providing access to good-quality and low-cost healthy produce and by raising awareness of health issues in the local community. The BIG Project was formed in 2002 to provide support for children and young people aged five to 16 to develop and reinforce young people's skills, confidence and self-image by providing a range of activities using the school's gym hall, Astroturf pitch and activity rooms. By adopting a preventative approach, the project has overcome issues of territorialism and has healed divisions between groups of young people. The project recognises, respects and

encourages the initiatives of young people, allowing them to be heard and to express their views, but it also challenges young people to understand the consequences of their actions and attitudes.

In 2005, the Broomhouse empowerment project inspired the regeneration of the open space at Broomhouse Grove with a new multi-use games area, play equipment, fencing and landscaping. The new ball court and play area give youngsters somewhere to congregate and play sport in a safe environment. Thanks to investment by the Scottish Government, the previous Scottish Executive and the council, there are new schools and housing in Broomhouse. In the latest housing development, Oaklands in Broomhouse Crescent, 40 per cent of the housing available for sale has been sold, and that is even before the show home opens this summer. Many of the people who have purchased homes are second or third-generation families returning to the area.

Over the years, various groups operating in Broomhouse have rebuilt the area's community spirit, which was reflected recently in the mural project that the Broomhouse Health Strategy Group instigated.

The Broomhouse market area was one of the few places that still reflected the vandalism of the past. The problem was that it was in private ownership, the landlord had limited resources to tackle the problem and the council was reluctant to invest limited resources in shops that were privately owned.

The members of the Broomhouse Health Strategy Group took it upon themselves to brighten up the area with the owner's agreement. They applied for a grant and, with free paint from a well-known paint company under its international community campaign, let's colour, transformed the market area.

Ideas for the decoration of the shop fronts and the walls of the market came from local schoolchildren, youngsters attending workshops at the BIG Project summer programme and sessions at the young carers project. The drawings and ideas became large-scale, vibrant mural works painted by a large group of volunteers. Nearly two years later, there has been little in the way of vandalism.

Another success is the BIG Project's choir, which put Broomhouse on the map when it sang at the opening of the Olympic games and the reception to present Sir Chris Hoy with the freedom of the city of Edinburgh. Then there is the fruit and vegetable shop that the strategy group operates. It has recently been refurbished as it gets ready to celebrate its 10th birthday.

All those initiatives have helped to turn Broomhouse around and, although it still has some of the problems that are associated with other inner-city areas, it no longer deserves the little Bosnia tag that it once had.

I agree with Stewart Stevenson that we must give communities the ability and support to regenerate their own areas. Many of the organisations that I mentioned work with small budgets but have big impacts on communities.

16:11

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): During my brief tenure as a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee—perhaps mercifully brief for the other members—I took part in the latter stages of the inquiry into the delivery of regeneration in Scotland. I am happy to say that I very much enjoyed my short time on the committee and found the inquiry to be not only interesting but important.

As other members have said, we spend a lot of time in the Parliament talking about what policies should be introduced for communities but somewhat less time on how we can ensure that those who are affected by policy and legislation can play their part in ensuring that it meets their needs. Throughout the inquiry, the emphasis was on listening to groups, communities and individuals to hear their views on regeneration policy and on how they should be involved in shaping the places where they live and the opportunities that they should have in the future. The committee engaged with local people to hear their views and saw the impact—or, sometimes, lack of impact—of regeneration policy on the ground.

I was pleased to take part in the committee's visit to Dundee and attend the launch of the report in Aberdeen. It was a refreshing and welcome change to take part in two committee events in the north-east, which may not be entirely unrelated to the weighty north-east contingent on the committee.

I hope that ministers will pay close attention to the recommendations that the committee made on community engagement as they take forward the community empowerment (Scotland) bill. I am sure that the report will play an important role as we seek to ensure that the bill is best equipped to meet the need of creating more genuinely empowered communities.

The role, membership and transparency of the CPPs—which have been referred to a number of times in the debate—will be an important part of that debate, because it is clear that too many communities feel disempowered and disengaged from the decisions that affect them. Perhaps that

is why so few people take part in their community councils, as Mr Mason said. I am sure that, if people felt more empowered and more listened to, they would be more ready to be involved. That is a big challenge not only for community planning partnerships, but for local and national Government.

The report supports the general thrust of the aims of the community empowerment (Scotland) bill but states that the committee is unclear about how the governance and accountability arrangements for CPPs will work in practice and how the partners will hold one another to account. That will require to be addressed during consideration of the bill. The convener highlighted a number of areas that the committee worked hard on to illustrate in our report and which still require a substantial response from Government. I hope that the committee is successful in obtaining that response and engagement from ministers during the passage of the bill, which we look forward to.

We heard about the difficulty that local authorities and regeneration companies have had in delivering regeneration strategies and reducing inequality in what is a difficult political and economic environment. We could debate at some length why that environment is so difficult—earlier, Duncan McNeil highlighted some of the issues that he has seen in this area—but the key concern for me in the course of the inquiry was to look at what strategies had been put in place, particularly by the regeneration companies, and to examine what had worked and what had not, and from that to explore what lessons should be learned for the future. In that, the inquiry was a very instructive process.

It was evident that a number of the plans on which URCs had embarked were predicated on economic growth and growth in the housing market that simply did not occur. Of course, it is easy to look back with hindsight, and that experience shows that such plans for regeneration—whether they are put forward by URCs, councils or others—must in future be more readily adaptable to changing economic situations.

It is also fair to say that within the experience of the URCs are examples of best practice that should be encouraged and shared. I welcome the fact that the committee has decided to revisit the work of the URCs towards the end of the year, and I hope that it will see evidence of the URCs taking on board some of the committee's valuable conclusions.

Of course, that was only one aspect of the committee's inquiry. As Cameron Buchanan said, one of the impressive things about the report is its scope. It makes recommendations to the Scottish Government on the importance of a wide number of areas, such as implementing the principles of

the Christie commission; it makes recommendations to councils on the role of community officers; and it makes practical proposals relating to, for example, the better use of community assets. It also highlights the need for effective use of Scottish Government and European funding streams, which are essential, because there is still a lack of private sector funding for these important initiatives. Further, it deals with the role that must be played not just by Government and councils but by other public sector agencies and housing associations.

At that point, I depart from the approach of Stewart Stevenson, who takes a rather more laissez-faire approach. The history of community regeneration is laid out in some detail at the beginning of the report, and that history shows that these are not issues that are easy to address or resolve and that there are issues with regard to Government action at every level. It shows that non-intervention is not a recipe for success but that progress on regeneration and community empowerment takes focused efforts over many years by many people—efforts that can all too easily be derailed. That is why I am pleased that the committee has already indicated its desire to revisit those issues in the future.

Kevin Stewart: I think that Mr Stevenson was saying not that there should be no intervention, but that there should be the right intervention, which also needs to have a huge degree of community input. I suggest that some of the failures of the past were down to the fact that local people were not listened to. I think that we are beginning to get that right, but that there is scope for more listening. Does Mr Baker agree?

Richard Baker: I do not want to misrepresent Mr Stevenson, so I certainly stand corrected. I hope that I have not been uncharitable in my interpretation of what he said. Of course, I very much agree with what Mr Stewart has said about involving local people in local decisions.

If ministers and the Parliament ensure that communities play a greater role in determining the strategies and policies that affect them and their regeneration, that can only give this important work a greater chance of success. That is why I again commend the report to ministers and to the Parliament.

16:19

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, am not a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. I believe that the report sets out a vision of a Scotland in which the most disadvantaged communities will be supported. I am sure that the report is intended to respond to the challenges that are faced by disadvantaged

communities, to help to create a Scotland in which all communities are sustainable places in which people want to live, work and invest.

In order for the vision to be implemented successfully, regeneration must be approached holistically and address the economic, physical and social needs of our communities. Those elements cannot be tackled individually. Each of them is connected and vital to the success of the strategy.

Further, the delivery of regeneration relies on the achievement of a wide range of support outcomes. Those are in no way unique to this policy and cross over into other Government policies including, but not limited to, economic development, planning, public health and housing. Those outcomes apply to every community in Scotland and not just to those that are disadvantaged. In light of that, there is a need for a co-ordinated approach across the public, private and third sectors, alongside community-led action. In order for those outcomes to be achieved in vulnerable communities, a concerted effort is needed across Government and all mainstream services to deliver the required results. Successful and sustainable communities should therefore be at the heart of the delivery of services at national and local level.

In my experience, from a previous project in Bellshill town centre, a number of key elements need to be in place in order to deliver successful regeneration so that it puts communities first; involves local residents effectively in the regeneration process; empowers communities; incorporates a holistic process to make connections between the physical, social and economic dimensions of the strategy; and adopts a long-term vision that focuses on the safety and quality of places.

The strategy applies to all of Scotland's communities, but some of our communities will need additional support in order to become economically, physically and socially sustainable. Most often, that extra help will be required in places that are in need of physical renewal and which underperform economically. As a result, the nature and scale of regeneration interventions will be different in different areas and the type of intervention will vary depending on local circumstances. The interventions will vary from large-scale development, focused on economic opportunity, to more localised activity that is intended to address the community's needs by tackling ingrained issues.

We should be aware of where extra support is needed, but it is important that our focus is on the assets that our communities have and not on the deficits of the area. Those assets may be economic, physical and social, and they should be

used to deliver sustainable positive change. That is important, because it is generally recognised that applying a label such as "deprived" or "disadvantaged" to a community can have a negative and stigmatising effect. If we focus on the positive aspects of our communities, that will help to overcome the perceived stigma. We should always ask ourselves what makes an area good and what the opportunities are, rather than view it as a problem area.

Focusing on regeneration plays a key role in ensuring that our communities are resilient and that they tackle deprivation and stave off decline. That in turn will reduce the need for regeneration in the future and help to support sustainable economic growth for the whole of Scotland.

Investment in regeneration will see a knock-on effect on associated budgets such as health, tackling crime and other social issues. A higher proportion of those budgets is usually spent in disadvantaged areas, as the budgets deal with the effects of deprivation across a wide range of negative outcomes. By tackling those negative outcomes, we should see a reduction in spend on mainstream budgets.

As previously said by Mr Stevenson, lessons should be learned from previous regeneration work. Yes, think small. The town centre regeneration that I was involved in took five years. Hindsight is a wonderful thing. I was convener of the Bellshill local area partnership when the council promoted a major regeneration project in Bellshill. We incorporated new pavements and a town centre to be proud of, with a one-way system and customer parking lay-bys. That was to encourage shoppers back to the town of Bellshill, but it caused problems when people wrongly parked all day in designated areas. With hindsight, I can say that we should have reversed the one-way system and I could make many further comments on that. I will say that there should be full consideration of any work to address any future problems.

Gordon MacDonald spoke of area regeneration. My best regeneration project was in Bellshill, in the council ward that I represented in the 1990s. It dealt with Bison-type houses in the Jewel scheme: damp, pre-fab houses and flats. We demolished five blocks—at that time I was called demolition Dick. I ensured that the land was sold for private housing and social rented housing, and was also used for council housing. That whole area, in the Jewel scheme in my former ward of Orbiston, has been totally transformed in terms of flat roofs, back and front doors and reclad flats.

We can improve areas if we take the time to do so. That is why I think that the committee's report is excellent. I compliment all the members of the committee for their work on it.

16:26

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

An often-used quote says, of empathy, that we should never criticise a man until we have walked a mile in his shoes. Today we learned that Kevin Stewart has already walked a mile in Stewart Stevenson's wellies, and Stewart Stevenson has informed us that that privilege—no, that opportunity—is available to any other member of the Parliament.

Stewart Stevenson: Is Alex Johnstone aware that it is also said that once we have walked a mile in someone else's shoes, the odds are that he has not kept up and so we get to keep them?

Alex Johnstone: I am tempted to ask Stewart Stevenson whether he got his wellies back.

The debate was introduced at some length by Kevin Stewart, who told us that in the report he went as far back as talking about the Romans. Once again, Stewart Stevenson was not to be outdone; he took us back to Greek times and talked about things that happened 2,500 years ago—although I presume that he did not know the gentleman personally.

The nature of the report is extremely important for the Parliament. Kevin Stewart quoted the opening paragraph:

"For most of the last 60 to 70 years, the concept of regeneration was often identified in most people's minds as relating to just the physical development, or redevelopment, of the communities in which they lived."

We have made that mistake time and again. Many members pointed out in the debate that some of our actions simply do not work. We need to concede that failure and ensure that we do not make the mistake again.

The post-war slum clearance programme in Glasgow was mentioned. As we all know, a vital job was done when many substandard houses and tenements were removed, but they were replaced by houses that themselves became undesirable in a relatively short period. The consequence of that was that those failed communities were redeveloped once again in little more than a generation. The fact that regeneration projects in Glasgow today demonstrate how things can be done much more effectively proves that we can learn from our mistakes.

Some aspects of the report do not tell us anything new. We know that the best regeneration projects are led by communities themselves—communities that have been empowered by organisations such as local authorities and housing associations to decide the best direction for their neighbourhood. Regeneration is an excellent opportunity to engage with hard-to-reach residents and ensure that they have a voice. It is

vital that regeneration brings with it training and employment opportunities, especially in areas of high deprivation.

There is much that the private sector can bring to the table when it comes to regeneration. I would have said that anyway, but I was delighted to hear members round the chamber raise that issue, too. I am keen to ensure that we do not miss the opportunities that exist to bring private investment, whether at a small scale or a large scale, to redevelopment projects. There is so much that can be used to achieve the kind of sustainable development that we need.

Mark McDonald pointed out that such development often needs to be led from the bottom up. I think he said that communities need to be "in the driving seat". I suggest that councils also need to put their shoulder to the wheel, not their foot on the brake. For that reason, I think that local authorities, however much they have achieved, need to continue to look to their responsibilities to do all they can to ensure that objectives are achieved.

We need homes, community facilities and accessible services. If we are going to achieve that across our redeveloped communities, we have to work in an effective way. This report goes into some of the more difficult areas of what we need to do to achieve our objectives. The proposal by Stewart Stevenson that we should allow an almost entrepreneurial approach to coming up with new ideas was a breath of fresh air. It was not the central focus of the debate, but nevertheless it indicates that there are people all around this Parliament who believe that supporting ideas from the community is the way to achieve our fundamental objectives.

It has to be said that for many communities regeneration is a threat. Quite often, when regeneration projects are put in place, individuals feel that they might threaten them in some way. We need to make those programmes successful, so that they become attractive to those who can benefit from them. The unity that we have had around the chamber in being positive about what can be achieved will go some way towards meeting that long-term objective.

However, as we move forward, we need to understand that the challenges remain strong and that, sadly, an inertia exists in many areas of civic Scotland, which resist change and tend to drag their feet. We need to ensure that what is stated in this report not only leads to achievements but does so in as short a timescale as possible. We cannot allow our foot-dragging tendencies to deny us the opportunity to achieve these objectives, with the opportunities that we have in front of us.

I congratulate the convener of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee on having gone through this enormous piece of work, which is reflected in the size of the report that he has provided. This is unusual, given my experience of being a member of the Welfare Reform Committee, but I think that on this occasion we genuinely can have unanimous support for the report and we can move forward and make it reality.

16:33

Sarah Boyack: This has been a really good debate, because it has enabled members from across the chamber and across the country to share their experiences of working with communities, and to stand back and think about what has and has not worked in the past couple of decades—or slightly longer. That has been very useful for our discussions this afternoon.

It is important to highlight that successes have taken place, but it is also important to focus on what needs to change. The committee's report was very useful as a prompt to us—especially to the Scottish Government—to think about what needs to change. There are clearly lessons to be learned for the future, and the report is good at identifying areas where change needs to take place.

In my closing remarks, I will address some of the funding issues that the committee has raised in the report, and I will try to relate those to what members have said. Everybody accepts that the funding landscape for community groups is incredibly complex and can be unclear. An obvious outcome from the debate would be to consider what additional practical support could be given to groups to help them to negotiate their way through that landscape so that, where money is available, they do not miss out on it just because they cannot fill in a 50-page report. Therefore, a practical outcome from today would be consideration of how better to support communities, irrespective whether they are bidding for local government, Scottish Government, European or lottery funding.

The achievement of a better balance in securing funding for community-led regeneration is a theme that has run through every speech, whether in relation to supporting money that is coming in through CSR from the private sector, or long-term support through public sector organisations investing.

A number of members talked about the need to review the funding allocation to ensure that we direct it effectively to disadvantaged areas. Anne McTaggart was right to highlight the tough climate in which local government finds itself, in which

there are huge funding pressures relating not only to the council tax freeze but to demographic change.

John Wilson: What funding was available to local authorities prior to 2008? We still have a problem with regeneration in many communities throughout Scotland. What happened to that funding?

Sarah Boyack: John Wilson knows what happened after 2008. Since then, we have seen much tighter control over local government when costs are rising, which was precisely Anne McTaggart's point.

On demographic changes, Chic Brodie mentioned that Edinburgh faces a 27 per cent rise in its population over the next 25 years. That has huge implications for investment in affordable housing, of which we are already short.

Gordon MacDonald's points were absolutely spot on: by focusing on an area that has had long-term social deprivation, and through sustained investment on very active communities with a range of groups, progress has been made. Therefore, it is crucial to fund at local government level. Anne McTaggart was right to warn us that some of that progress is potentially being put at risk by the extra work that local government now has to do.

Longer-term funding is really important. Disadvantaged communities find it harder to generate investment, so they need the skills and the support to ensure that they can seek funding from a variety of organisations.

Duncan McNeil's speech was passionate. He brought to bear his useful experience of the importance of developing brownfield sites. John Mason also talked about the need to tackle problem sites.

The key issue about not being overly reliant on one development or industry was mentioned. There is a powerful message in that about communities' vulnerability where the market has failed and where assistance is needed over the long term. Alex Rowley also made that point. He spoke authoritatively about the need for economic and social regeneration to run alongside physical investment, and he highlighted the importance of education and access to college and training in that regard, which is fundamental to young people who are potentially being discriminated against by the postcode where their parents live.

It is also crucial that we look not just at community-led regeneration but at what needs to be brought in on top of that by the rest of the public sector.

The report includes important questions about testing and Government finance, to which I will

return. In her opening speech, the minister mentioned that the fairer Scotland fund has been devolved. It would be interesting to know what analysis has been carried out of, and to find out what has worked from, the devolution of that money to local level. What has been achieved? What are the outcomes? How does it compare with previous investment in community regeneration and anti-poverty work?

We need to learn more from what does and does not work. We can give anecdotes, but we also need to follow the money trail. We need to know the strengthening communities fund's criteria and how the fund is meant to work in practice, and we need to ensure that communities have access to those funds and that they are not just for bigger organisations.

The committee's report mentioned the Scottish partnership for regeneration in urban centres fund. I am very interested in the criteria for SPRUCE funding. I am aware of a funded project that is very much about physical regeneration and not at all about community regeneration. We need to be absolutely sure that, where we get investment, it does what it says on the tin. If the funding is meant to be for regeneration, a project needs to have an impact on communities as part of the process, and that process needs to be driven by communities.

A few members mentioned best practice. Perhaps the minister will, when she sums up, talk about where we might take the idea. We have excellent organisations, such as SURF—Scotland's independent regeneration network. SURF organises a lot of discussions about regeneration, which are very much bottom up and involve communities themselves.

It would be interesting if more work could be done by the Scottish Government, based on this debate. An interesting recommendation from the committee was that other Government budgets be made more explicit about their contribution to regeneration. If the minister will not sign up to making the issue transparent, she might at least ask her Government colleagues what they are spending on regeneration and how they are bending the spend to ensure that moneys go to our most disadvantaged communities. That would be a worthwhile outcome of the debate.

On economic regeneration and community regeneration, we debated the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill last week and a community empowerment bill is coming up. Co-operatives and community ownership are part of the way forward. Members mentioned food co-ops, community business and community renewables. We must think not just about how communities get money from above, but about how approaches can be under communities' control. That must be part of the way forward.

16:41

Margaret Burgess: This has been a wide-ranging and good-natured debate, which tends not to be the case in debates to which I have to respond. As Sarah Boyack said, it has been interesting to hear members' views on a matter about which I think they all feel passionate, because regeneration impacts on every constituency and community.

We heard about many good examples of regeneration. George Adam talked about what is happening in Paisley and Gordon MacDonald talked about Broomhouse, in Edinburgh. John Mason talked about Bridgeton, where—although a larger regeneration company was involved—the community started projects such as the Olympia building project. I have had a chance to visit the Olympia.

Threads that have run through the debate include the need for an holistic approach that considers social and economic activity as well as physical outcomes, especially in tackling poverty, and the need for a community-led approach to ensure the sustainability of outcomes over the longer term. Members all agreed on that.

Community capacity has been another common theme. The strengthening communities programme aims to build capacity by investing in organisations to help them to access the next level, and to deliver for their communities. The issue is important, and the Government is considering it.

As a number of members have said, a one-size-fits-all approach to regeneration will not work.

Alex Rowley talked about town centres, which are an important element. Through the town centre action plan, there is a joined-up approach across Government to tackling town centre regeneration in a range of areas, such as business rates, planning, digital infrastructure and housing. That approach can help to tackle issues in our town centres. As Alex Rowley knows, Fife Council has been successful in securing funding for two town centre housing projects, which is important to note.

Sarah Boyack and Kevin Stewart mentioned the Christie commission. We are committed to deep-rooted public service reform founded on the principles that underpinned the commission's report: a decisive shift towards prevention, integration of and collaboration between public services, community workforce development and leadership, and a focus on improving performance. The principles are at the heart of community planning and public service reform at local level.

Duncan McNeil said that money has been taken away from URCs. We continue to support URCs and have met our commitment to URCs, including Riverside Inverclyde. The Irvine Bay Regeneration Company, Riverside Inverclyde and Clyde Gateway get core funding for administration, but they can access the regeneration capital grant fund and have succeeded in getting awards under that programme.

Stuart McMillan said that URC boards do not represent their areas. As he will be aware, all URCs are independent organisations whose committees have local representation. The URCs that I have visited have had a lot of local input into projects. Local organisations say to URCs, “We want to do this. Can you help?” I could give several examples from my constituency of things that would never have happened without the professional services of, and funding from, the URC. Although URCs are big companies, they can help at local level, as well as providing jobs.

The Government is providing targeted regeneration funding to support change, but we recognise the importance of local decision making and the lead role of local authorities in community planning and maximising impact from their budgets. We are working to ensure that our activity focuses on outcomes, and that we put communities first by involving residents and empowering communities to take action. A number of members, including Mark McDonald, Stewart Stevenson and Cameron Buchanan, mentioned that.

Other members talked about the role that housing associations and community anchor organisations such as development trusts can play in delivering change. I very much support that. I have visited a number of housing associations. One housing association representative said, “We are the community.” Housing associations have many projects going on. Such projects have come not from the top of the housing association but from tenants and residents who have said, “What can you do about this?” Housing associations have helped people to access funding and to get groups up and running.

I absolutely agree with what everybody across the chamber has said—if a project starts from individuals in the community, its chance of success is much higher. Communities know best what is needed in their areas and they know what will and will not work. That is why we always get better outcomes when communities are involved.

I am always impressed by the enthusiasm with which communities tackle activities. When I visited an organisation to see what it was doing with Scottish Government funding, one of the guys there said, “See that bit of ground out there? It’s covered in litter, but we’re going to do something

with it, because we know it can be sorted.” People are working on that now and I am convinced that they will get a project going, whether it involves creating an allotment or thinking about what the community wants. They will do something about that, because they know that that is needed. Such activity is important.

As I and Stuart McMillan have said, nobody knows the challenges and priorities better and nobody cares as much about getting the decisions right as those who live and work in the communities involved. It is critical to engage them. I have made it clear, and I said to the committee, that regeneration is every bit as much about people as it is about places or buildings.

I am running out of time. The forthcoming community empowerment bill has been mentioned a lot. It will provide communities with new opportunities to have their voices heard on planning and delivery of services, and it will redefine the focus of community planning so that public services work with one another and with communities to improve local outcomes, as a number of members mentioned. I recognise the challenge for community planning to be truly effective across the board in improving outcomes and reducing inequalities.

We will continue to engage with the committee and others to ensure that the regeneration strategy remains focused and relevant. As Kevin Stewart said in an intervention, there is always “scope for more listening” to communities. The Government will continue to listen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call John Wilson to wind up the debate on behalf of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. Mr Wilson, you have until 5 o’clock.

16:50

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I draw members’ attention to my entry in the register of members’ interests, and I declare an interest in the debate that will become apparent later in my speech.

The convener opened the debate by highlighting the work that the committee was engaged in during its inquiry into regeneration. Uniquely for any committee of the Parliament, we started our inquiry with five committee members who were former councillors. The experience of the convener and other committee members as councillors meant that they understood the issues that existed around community engagement. We also wanted to look at the proposition from the bottom up, not from the top down; hence, the report has been written as it has, and some of the conclusions have been influenced by that approach.

I welcome the mainly consensual nature of the speeches that we have heard in the debate.

Kevin Stewart talked about what is almost an Aladdin's cave of funding schemes that groups have to tap into.

The minister referred to her visit to the Glenboig Neighbourhood House life centre on 1 April to announce a funding programme, which is where my entry in the register of members' interests is relevant. I happen to be the chair of one of the organisations that is receiving funding. We very much welcome that funding from the Scottish Government, which will allow us to move forward.

Cameron Buchanan spoke about how money should be spent wisely and he said that we should monitor closely how it is spent.

Sarah Boyack referred to the committee's view that communities should be involved at every step of the way, which is made quite clear in the report. A number of members referred to communities being engaged, involved and part of the decision-making process.

Unfortunately, the committee heard that communities often feel that they are the last to be consulted about the developments that go ahead. As a committee member who also had experience of working in urban regeneration a number of years ago, I understood the point. As the committee's report highlights, some communities feel that things are being done to them instead of their being involved in doing things for themselves.

Stuart McMillan talked about urban regeneration companies. There is a further question that we need to consider around the future of URCs and what they deliver for communities. Duncan McNeil also alluded to that and to the work that is required.

Alex Rowley mentioned the Carnegie UK Trust's work in Dunfermline and the work that many voluntary, third sector and charitable organisations do. Other organisations that we could mention include Oxfam, Children 1st and Save the Children. Sarah Boyack referred to SURF. Clearly, a number of organisations are working with communities, but the resources that are available to them are limited. Communities are trying to work with the best that they can get, but it can be difficult for them to tap into the resources, particularly when someone else over and above them makes the final decision about where the funding should go.

Mark McDonald cited the example of what may happen with the Haudagain roundabout and the impact that that will have on local communities. The private sector investment that is taking place in such areas should benefit the communities and ensure that they see genuine benefits from the

developments instead of—as has happened all too often in the past—things being done to communities with the private sector moving in and then moving back out, leaving those communities behind.

Chic Brodie talked about the need to give real local power to our communities. He also referred to change within, and the reinvigoration of, local government. That debate is for another day, but it is an interesting one for us to have.

Interestingly, the convener of the Health and Sport Committee, Duncan McNeil, recognised that many of the issues that our report raises are reflected in the work of many of the other committees in the Parliament. Our committee will give close consideration to his suggestion that other committees should come together to draw some common conclusions on the work.

As other members said, regeneration does not affect just communities; it is about economic, social, health and other outcomes that might be achieved if we get the policies right and we engage with people at the right level. If we take people in deprived communities out of deprivation, we will see real benefits across many funding streams. That could have an impact not just on local government funding and Scottish Government funding but on many other funding streams. Genuine benefits could come from communities engaging with all the funders through the community planning process.

Stewart Stevenson again made some interesting comments. He mentioned the Olympic medal winner Kip Keino to highlight some of the things that might happen if people receive the correct support to engage on issues that they are enthusiastic about and want to engage on. That was an interesting analogy, which many communities should think about.

George Adam mentioned the great work that is done in Paisley. Interestingly, he referred to the Paisley common good fund. Many communities in Scotland do not know that a common good fund exists and, if they know that it exists, they cannot get their hands on it to do the projects that they want to do.

Anne McTaggart mentioned the cuts to local government funding. In my intervention on Sarah Boyack, I sought to raise the issue of what was done on regeneration prior to 2008. Where was all the regeneration funding then?

Stewart Stevenson: I will quote from the Common Good Act 1491. It says that the goods of the town will be held for the burgh "for all time".

John Wilson: I welcome that intervention. Perhaps the Scottish Government and the local authorities should take account of that. The

purpose of common good funds is to allow communities in towns to benefit from them. Unfortunately, common good funds are not always used in that way.

John Mason highlighted issues to do with the Commonwealth games and the work that is being done in the east end of Glasgow, Gordon MacDonald mentioned the work that is being done in Broomhouse, and Richard Lyle talked about his experience in Bellshill and other areas; I will not repeat the comment that he made.

The report tried to stimulate debate not just in the Parliament; indeed, it tried to stimulate debate mainly outwith the Parliament. We must get everyone to understand that regeneration is not the preserve of officials or bureaucrats, as someone described them. Regeneration is about genuinely working together to ensure that communities benefit from the investment that takes place. We need to ensure that communities understand that they have a vital role to play in the regeneration process.

The committee will now take forward its report. In doing so, it will take on board the Government's recommendations, which it will discuss as part of our further work in examining the community empowerment bill as it goes through the Parliament. From the report and the Government's response, I hope that we will get a clear idea of how regeneration can be advanced, so that we can genuinely engage with communities and they can be directly involved in decisions, particularly on funding.

I thank all those who gave evidence to the committee, whether written or oral, which allowed us to produce our report. In particular, I thank the communities that engaged with us during the course of our inquiry. It was important that the committee heard the voices of communities. From reading the report that we have presented to Parliament, many communities throughout Scotland, particularly those that engaged with us, will realise that we have listened to their voices and have reflected their views, aspirations and hopes for the future. I hope that, as a Parliament, we can work together to engage communities fully in the process and to get regeneration started once again.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): We now move to the next item of business, which is decision time. There are no questions to be put as a result of today's business, so we will move swiftly on to the members' business debate. Members who are in the chamber for decision time can now leave quickly and quietly.

Scottish Wildlife Trust (50th Anniversary)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-09777, in the name of John Wilson, on the 50th anniversary of the Scottish Wildlife Trust. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates the Scottish Wildlife Trust on celebrating its 50th anniversary; thanks the trust's current and former volunteers and staff for their contribution toward protecting, restoring and enhancing the country's wildlife and habitats and for inspiring people to engage with nature; understands that the trust is involved in many conservation activities, which include managing its network of 120 wildlife reserves, policy work that aims to influence decision makers to take biodiversity into account when developing plans and policies, natural capital work that tries to encourage businesses to lessen their impacts on the natural world, and work that seeks to inspire people of all ages through education, events, visitor centres and a Scotland-wide network of wildlife watch groups for children; notes what it sees as the important role that the trust has played in the Scottish Beaver Trial and the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrel project; considers that it has been innovative in developing a landscape-scale approach to conservation through its living landscape projects in Coigach-Assynt, Cumbernauld and Edinburgh, and applauds the Scottish Wildlife Trust on its continued hard work and its commitment to protecting the wildlife of Scotland.

17:01

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I thank the members across the political parties who signed my motion and particularly those who are staying on tonight to speak in the debate. I declare an interest in that I have been a member of the Scottish Wildlife Trust for almost 20 years. I will explain later some of the reasons why I joined the SWT.

This is an important debate in a number of ways, because it emphasises the contribution of the Scottish Wildlife Trust and celebrates its 50th anniversary, especially by acknowledging the important role that the SWT has played in sustaining the vital ecology of Scotland's ecosystem. The scale and scope of the SWT speaks for itself, given that the trust manages a network of 120 wildlife reserves across Scotland, with 12 located in the Central Scotland area that I represent. The trust now has in excess of 35,000 members, of whom I am one.

The trust's achievements have been vast in number, and since April 2012 it has raised more than £4.2 million to protect Scotland's precious wildlife and wild places. It has also successfully hosted an international conference on national ecological networks and has played a significant

role in projects such as the saving Scotland's red squirrels project and the Scottish beaver trial.

The SWT displays a great deal of energy in making a meaningful contribution to supporting and promoting Scotland's natural heritage. Equally, it is critical that people realise that, although the trust puts a lot of effort into aspects of conservation, it is not purely involved in conserving the past. Protecting living landscapes is an issue that the trust quite rightly takes satisfaction from, and it is of some interest to me.

For example, I am aware that the trust has now established planning volunteers in Glasgow and South Lanarkshire, thereby extending coverage to 28 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland, and that it has played a significant role in 20 major planning applications. I also know from my role in the Local Government and Regeneration Committee that the trust has provided useful contributions to the development of national planning framework 3 and that it continues to campaign in the Scottish Parliament on a wide range of issues affecting Scotland's ecological environment and wildlife.

The development and protection of Scotland's natural environment is down to the part played by organisations such as the SWT. That highlights the role of charitable organisations in developments at local and national levels.

In many ways, I come to this debate from the background that I mentioned earlier, as a member of the Scottish Wildlife Trust, and I have witnessed at first hand the work that the organisation does in Central Scotland. I have been a member of the trust for almost 20 years. Part of my reason for joining related to activities for my daughter at the weekends, and I will mention two places that we used to visit quite regularly.

The Falls of Clyde are not in my regional area, but I have some stories to tell about our experiences there, including the peregrine falcons and the pigeon fanciers who did not like them. We also used to visit the Jupiter urban wildlife centre in Grangemouth, which is on reclaimed land that was formerly an industrial chemical plant. I remember my daughter's enjoyment in going pond dipping and being handed a net to fish out whatever she could find in the water, from pond skaters to the various other creepy crawlies and beasties that were reinhabiting the area.

I also made informative visits to one of the sites in the SWT's Cumbernauld living landscape programme not long ago, and I was impressed by the progress that has been made so far. As part of the programme, the SWT will work alongside North Lanarkshire Council on a forthcoming project to celebrate the return of pine martens to the town. That is a unique project. The SWT could not believe its ears when it heard that a pine

marten was raiding a local resident's chicken coops, but when it did DNA testing it found that it was definitely a pine marten. We can see wildlife reinhabiting areas over which the SWT has stewardship, and other wildlife is coming in as well. Programmes such as that, which look to restore the Scottish landscape and preserve wildlife, are of real value to current and future generations.

One of the trust's real achievements is that it gets out into local communities and makes people aware of their wildlife surroundings and how they can contribute. Members and volunteers throughout Central Scotland have contributed a huge amount to conservation in the area through activities from tree planting to the building of boardwalks to improve access, and I am sure that that is replicated by members and volunteers throughout Scotland.

By reaching out to schools and local groups, the SWT is particularly sparking an interest in wildlife among young people, and communities are being given tools to explore and cultivate their local areas. I note that, since 2012, the trust has established eight new wildlife watch groups, and a total of 28 groups are now engaging young people throughout the country.

Scotland has been blessed with some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world, and the role that the SWT has played in the past 50 years has been crucial to its protection and development. I look forward to the on-going success of projects including the Cumbernauld living landscape programme and the saving Scotland's red squirrel project.

This debate is important as it highlights that the efforts of the staff—some of whom are in the public gallery today—the members and the volunteers who work alongside the Scottish Wildlife Trust do not go unnoticed. Their success over the past 50 years is a testament to the time and energy that all those who are involved put in to make Scotland's wildlife and landscape the best that they can be.

I wish the Scottish Wildlife Trust every success in the future in its campaigns and its work with other agencies to ensure that the hard work that has been done continues to be done. I look forward to hearing the Government's response.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That brings us to the open debate. I ask for speeches of four minutes, please.

17:08

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): As MSPs, we are approached or lobbied—if that is not a tainted word—by a wide variety of organisations

that seek to influence our thinking, and they adopt a wide variety of approaches.

Some organisations send us large glossy brochures or extended emails the middle of which, never mind the end, we will never actually get to. Others secure face-to-face meetings that are unlikely to be repeated.

Then there is that group of organisations that understand how, through advancing well-constructed, considered argument, they can make their case and how, by their actions, they can command respect. The Scottish Wildlife Trust is very much in that category, and I genuinely offer it my warmest congratulations on celebrating its 50th anniversary.

Perhaps I should declare an interest. Unlike John Wilson, I am not a member of the SWT, but I am something of a fan of the organisation. Indeed, as it knows, I do not just welcome its contributions to issues that the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee may be considering; I have on many occasions found myself proactively seeking its opinions on topics, such is the trust that I have in its knowledge and indeed integrity. As the turnout of MSPs who plan to contribute to the debate indicates, it is clear that I am not alone in holding the SWT in such high regard.

It is quite funny to look back at the comment of the SWT's founder, Sir Charles Connell, when the SWT set out. He said:

"some thought the Trust might not obtain adequate support or find work to do which would justify their existence."

O ye of little faith.

From fairly humble beginnings, the trust's membership has grown to 36,500 people. It manages 120 wildlife reserves and has three visitor centres, including at Montrose Basin in Angus. At long last, wider society has started to waken up to the importance of its purpose to

"advance the conservation of Scotland's biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations".

Only one of the trust's reserves is located in my constituency. Eighteen months ago, I had the great pleasure of visiting Seaton cliffs in the company of SWT's former chief executive officer, Simon Milne, and seeing the wide range of seabirds nesting there. Less enjoyable but just as important was getting a close-up look at the impact of coastal erosion on one side and the negative impact of agricultural practices on the other.

Elsewhere in Angus, there is the aforementioned Montrose Basin and the front line of the red squirrel project on the Southesk estate. Last year, I was delighted to join the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Paul

Wheelhouse, and my fellow Angus parliamentarian Nigel Don in visiting the estate and meeting Lord Southesk and trust officials to see for ourselves how that hugely important project is being implemented.

I was struck by the genuine partnership working that the project involves. Scottish Natural Heritage and the Forestry Commission Scotland are involved along with the trust, not to mention the landowning interests all along the battle front who seek to halt the advance of grey squirrels, with all the negative consequences that their presence brings for the iconic red squirrel. Almost as pleasing was hearing of the work that the trust was doing in educating primary school youngsters on the project and the need for it.

That visit confirmed something that I had picked up through other dealings with the likes of Simon Milne, Jonny Hughes and Maggie Keegan: that the real strength of the SWT is in the people who work for it, with their passion, commitment and, at times, pragmatism.

I am aware of the number of colleagues who wish to contribute to the debate, so I will conclude. I congratulate John Wilson on securing for us the opportunity to pay tribute to the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Contrary to the fears that were raised 50 years ago, it has undoubtedly gone on to justify its existence, and I am sure that it will continue to do so for many decades to come.

17:12

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I, too, thank John Wilson for lodging the motion. The wide range of members who have signed the motion, which congratulates the Scottish Wildlife Trust on celebrating its 50th birthday, is testament to the geographical reach and the robust range of the trust's work.

In my region of South Scotland alone, the trust boasts almost 6,000 members, 33 reserves, four watch groups and two conservation teams.

I first encountered the SWT over two decades ago, when I was a community activist in Clydesdale, for two reasons. First, the local community council saw a small piece of woodland—Ponfeigh glen—as being inappropriately threatened by opencast mining. An SWT ranger, David Wilson, advised on how our concerns fitted with planning policy, about which I did not have a clue, frankly. That enabled us to submit an objection to South Lanarkshire Council. As we heard from John Wilson, the SWT's input into the planning process has come on in leaps and bounds, and there is support across much of Scotland for volunteers who want to look at the planning process.

Secondly, SWT advice from the falls of Clyde ranger, John Darbyshire, helped us to change a dreadful fly-tipping site at Loudon pond on Douglas Water into a community nature reserve of some significance.

Such SWT advice for conservation volunteers over the years is one of the reasons why there are 1,153 local biodiversity sites across the south today.

One of the 33 South Scotland SWT reserves is, of course, the Falls of Clyde, which stretches along both sides of the dangerous Clyde gorge. The boardwalk that I opened this year has done much to help to make that safer. I have had the delight of visiting the reserve with my family over many years. When my children were small, we experienced the thrill of seeing badgers snuffling out of their setts at dusk. As the children became old enough to hold binoculars, we caught a glimpse of the peregrines nesting in the crevices across the Clyde, which are well protected round the clock by the peregrine watch volunteers. Alternatively, we simply absorbed the tranquil atmosphere along the walkway in the dappled sunlight and left the reserve refreshed. Since I had the honour of opening the new visitor centre earlier this year, there have been 20,000 visits to it; a further 50,000 people have visited the reserve itself.

The importance of SWT species projects also cannot be overestimated. Last summer, I visited the Laidlaw family's woodland, where they are helping to protect the red squirrel as part of the saving Scotland's red squirrels project.

At the recent Scottish Parliament reception we welcomed SWT volunteers from all over Scotland. Scott Bland, aged 20, started volunteering at the Falls of Clyde at the age of 6. The East Lothian wildlife watch group's helpers and young wildlife detectives have worked tirelessly and won a UK award. The trust could not operate without the contribution of volunteers and it is right that we thank them again today, as part of the 50-year celebrations.

At a strategic level, Europe-wide and Scottish biodiversity targets have been missed, and I know that the minister will agree with me that that must not be found to have happened again in 2020. The SWT makes a significant contribution to Scotland's biodiversity. I was especially pleased to see the conservation progress made by the SWT in all its sites, with 99 per cent of SWT sites of special scientific interest being in "favourable" or "unfavourable but recovering" condition, which is much better than what is being achieved across the SSSI range.

I hope that we can count on continued financial support for the SWT. Looking to the next 25 years

in “Natural connections: A vision for re-building Scotland’s wildlife” the SWT calls for

“Government to provide sufficient financial support for landscape-scale action for wildlife and a real recognition of the economic and social value of our environment

Full delivery of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy through an innovative and ambitious programme of actions

A strategic approach to tackling the key threats to ecosystem health”.

I am sure that the minister will agree that those calls are worthy of support. I wish good luck to the SWT for the next 25 years—indeed, the next 50 years.

17:16

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I congratulate John Wilson on bringing the debate to the chamber this evening. Fifty years of the Scottish Wildlife Trust is well worth celebrating, by the volunteers who work in it and by the wider public, because of the fantastic work that the trust has done.

I will mention a couple of items in particular. I have been involved in SWT’s bringing to our attention the policy problems that exist in our landscape. In my constituency, there are three reserves. I will mention two in particular; I hope that I will visit the third one this summer, although I pass through it often.

The first is Handa island, which belongs to the Scourie estate and is managed by the SWT. It was like a Robinson Crusoe island on the day that I and my colleague George Farlow visited it with Maggie Keegan. We could see the great skuas sitting about 10m away in the heather—and all the other birds—on a beautiful summer day.

It is important to ensure that people can visit and study in that area, which means that there is expense in making sure that the facilities are up to scratch: there must be modern toilets, meeting places and so on so that the summer residents can make sure that visitors get the best experience. The trust is interested in the biodiversity argument, as well as in ensuring that people get the chance to experience the island and benefit from it.

I was interested in the discussions about the national planning framework. One of the points that the SWT made in its briefing at that time was about getting children who have severe attention deficit disorder involved in nature. It gave us a quote from Richard Louv, the author of “Last Child in the Woods”, who said:

“Time in nature is not leisure time; it’s an essential investment in our children’s health”

and also, by the way, in our own. The hallmark of the SWT’s activities is precious indeed.

Biodiversity issues have been mentioned, particularly by Claudia Beamish. As my previous example shows, the trust has thought about the human aspects of the landscape.

The second area that I want to talk about is the Coigach-Assynt living landscape—CALL—project, which is a landscape-scale project with a 50-year time horizon. It allows us to think about not only the regeneration of biodiversity but the place that humans have in that, in the hope that we can have more people living in those areas, and that they can live sustainably.

At the Achiltibuie end, in Coigach, in the largest area of land that the trust owns, it has been able to support the local community. The community sought to use wind power to support local activities, and the trust saw no difficulty in supporting that, because it realised that, if there is to be a means to look after the whole area and its natural beauty and biodiversity, the local population must be able to sustain itself. That recognition of the symbiotic relationship between nature and people is one of the highlights of the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

I thank Allan Bantick for being the chair in a momentous period and the officers who support him, and I wish Robin Harper, the incoming chair, all the best for many years to come.

17:21

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): On such occasions, it is conventional to thank the sponsor of the motion, but this time I genuinely thank John Wilson for bringing the debate to the Parliament and for moving seamlessly from his speech in the previous debate to his speech in this one—I suspect that that rarely happens.

I note the wide range of Scottish Wildlife Trust sites, and I endorse everything that Graeme Dey said about its ability to influence us and its professionalism. The fact that the trust is sought out for its views says a lot about the organisation and the people who work for it and is indeed rare.

Talking about rare things, just down the road from where I live and in my constituency is Montrose Basin, which is one square mile of mud that twice a day gets extremely wet. It is an absolutely fabulous and iconic bird sanctuary. Of course, its importance is because of not just the birds but everything else that lives round the basin—a point to which I will return. When I visited the basin, the top brass turned up and the manager was there, so I got to see it the way that they wanted me to see it. However, the people who really make the SWT work are the volunteers. I want to point out that, without them, it just would not happen. They are the ones who are there when nobody else is and who ensure that the

12,000 or so visitors each year to Montrose Basin get a welcome and the information that they need. I notice that there are 2,500 educational visits each year, which adds up to pretty much every local school being engaged and getting there pretty often.

The programme tells me that one activity at the basin is called “Mud Glorious Mud!” but then boringly it tells me that that is for children, which I think is pretty unreasonable, really. Apparently, there is also a half-mile walk out to the middle of the basin—I have not done it, but I guess that people need Stewart Stevenson’s aforementioned wellies and that they must remember to come back before the water does, because it is a respecter of no man.

I guess that the highlight is in late September or early October, when some 60,000 pink-footed geese decide to take off at about half-past six in the morning to look for breakfast in the local fields. For those who are there, it is a spectacular sight—I have to say that I have not yet seen it, although I know just how noisy it is from living close by.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust has a good working relationship with GlaxoSmithKline, or GSK as it is known locally. That is an important indicator of how such things can be made to work. If organisations engage with the local community and local industry, there are ways and means of extracting significant sums of money not only to get a visitor centre built but to have it refurbished. That is an important part of what the SWT does. I note in passing that, as well as all the pink-footed geese and many other species, we have ospreys in the area, which are rarer in Scotland even than golden eagles. That is maybe something that we will develop.

I will close by going back to the issue that Claudia Beamish and Rob Gibson mentioned, which is biodiversity, because I would like to reiterate a hugely important point on that.

We can try to measure biodiversity. A report from the Scottish Wildlife Trust makes the point that it is easier to measure the bigger species, rather more difficult to measure the smaller ones and extremely difficult to count the bugs and beetles. However, I suggest that it is impossible to count the even smaller beasties. The wee ones are a struggle and the micro ones are impossible.

Therefore, although we will try to measure what we can measure—and I am sure that we should—I suggest that, when we are thinking about biodiversity, we should simply look after the landscapes. If we look after the habitats, we will be looking after the species that the habitats support without knowing how to measure them. Therefore, if we look after the habitat—the environment—the bugs and beetles will look after themselves.

17:25

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I stand here as a substitute and bring the apologies of my colleague Alex Ferguson. He was a signatory to the motion, a supporter of the motion and had hoped to be here to speak to it, but he has been called away on other parliamentary business and, as a consequence, asked me to step in at the last minute. What a pleasure it is to do so and express my personal support for the motion, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and its work over 50 years.

My local connection—the nearest reserve that the trust manages, which a number of speakers have mentioned—is, of course, Montrose Basin and I am a regular visitor. It is one of the unique habitats that we have in Scotland and it requires to be protected, which the Scottish Wildlife Trust does perfectly well. However, as I did some research into the trust’s activities, I was delighted to see that it is heavily involved in protecting the site at the Loch of the Lowes, where ospreys regularly nest. The trust also needs to be commended for the work that it is doing with a number of extremely rare species in Scotland, including the Scottish wildcat and the increasingly rare red squirrel, which is under threat from the grey squirrel.

My research caused me to discover that the Scottish Wildlife Trust is no stranger to controversy, having taken the lead in criticising Donald Trump for his activities in creating a golf course north of Aberdeen. It was also interesting to see that some people have criticised the trust for changing its position on wind farms. Perhaps Donald Trump had more to do with that than he realises. Sometimes, our enemy’s enemy should be our friend.

I note from my research that the trust is involved in the work with the Scottish beaver. That is topical, because there has been some television coverage this week of the Scottish beaver’s activities. The Government has done a great deal to support the public sector reintroduction in Argyll. The beavers have branched out far more independently in Tayside and far more interesting things are happening there. It is good that our wildlife is prepared to make an effort to preserve itself.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust’s work is vital. Sometimes, the RSPB has been criticised for being a bit too bird focused and that argument can be made, but the work that the Scottish Wildlife Trust has done over 50 years has demonstrated that it is an effective, very functional organisation that protects some of Scotland’s rarest species. It deserves full congratulation for the 50 years of hard work, the effort that has gone in and the good

work that I am sure it will continue to do in the future.

17:29

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate and to join other members in highlighting the good will that the organisation enjoys. I thank John Wilson for ensuring that the 50th anniversary of the Scottish Wildlife Trust is recognised in the chamber. It is undoubtedly an important milestone.

I note that John Wilson's motion makes reference to fantastic initiatives by the Scottish Wildlife Trust around the country, as other members who have spoken in the debate have done. I am pleased to say that there have been some exciting initiatives in my constituency of Falkirk East, all thanks to the Scottish Wildlife Trust. We have the unique Jupiter urban wildlife centre in Grangemouth, which John Wilson referred to. We also have the Carron dam local nature reserve, which I was pleased to open along with pupils from Larbert high school a year ago, and the exciting development of the Kinneil foreshore local nature reserve in Bo'ness, which was once home to Kinneil colliery.

Jupiter urban wildlife centre, the first good news story that I mentioned, was opened in 1992 by Magnus Magnusson. It sits cheek by jowl with the agri-chemical industry in Grangemouth and continues to attract a great deal of good will from the multinational companies that operate in the town. For example, the owners of the land—CalaChem, previously KemFine—rent it to the Scottish Wildlife Trust for the nominal rent of £1 a year.

Last summer, the Jupiter centre was the venue for the minister's launch of the 2020 challenge for Scotland's biodiversity, and it attracts a large number of local school pupils. Four Grangemouth primaries—Moray, Bowhouse, Beancross and Sacred Heart—are within walking distance and pay regular visits. In addition, primary and secondary schools from all across the Falkirk Council area come for formal education sessions, with an estimated 18,000 local schoolchildren having visited the centre over the past 22 years. In addition, students from the Falkirk and the Alloa campuses of the local Forth Valley College spend a lot of time there over the winter. Further, to have wildlife such as kingfishers, barn owls, greater spotted woodpeckers, sparrowhawks, willow warblers, eight species of dragonfly, 10 species of butterfly, toads, frogs, palmate newts and pipistrelle bats—to name just a few—only metres from firms manufacturing agri-chemicals is simply amazing.

The Jupiter centre has attracted funding from major firms such as Cala Chem and Syngenta and from Falkirk Environment Trust, and has recently secured funding of £36,000 from Veolia Environmental Trust for the wildlife garden redesign and of almost £10,000 from the communities and families fund to run a forest school programme for the local schools. Tremendous work is going on there, and I am sure that we all wish the centre decades more success and continued support from local industry—I continually remind local industry of the need to continue its support.

The Carron dam local nature reserve is another great wee success story that we have in the constituency, thanks to the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Through close working with Larbert high school, it delivers enhanced learning experiences and skills development for the young people and staff of the school, enhanced transition opportunities, enhanced outdoor learning and sustainable education experiences and enhanced community involvement and enterprise activities, which overwhelmingly fit the core ethos of curriculum for excellence.

Larbert high school has developed a very strong relationship with the reserve. The pupils are part of its management group, which was formed in 2013 and consists of the Scottish Wildlife Trust, representatives of pupils and staff at Larbert high school, members of the local community, Falkirk Council, the communities along the Carron association and the Larbert and Stenhousemuir environmental response group. There is a real sense of ownership by the community.

I see that I am out of time again, unfortunately. The projects that I have referred to all owe thanks to major input from the Scottish Wildlife Trust. In fact, without the Scottish Wildlife Trust, they simply would not have happened. Therefore, on behalf of the people of Falkirk East, I thank the Scottish Wildlife Trust and I wish it another successful half century.

17:34

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): As other members have done, I thank John Wilson for providing us with the opportunity to have this debate, which is—of course—about thanking the Scottish Wildlife Trust for the work that it has done over the past 50 years. I am sure that the current Minister for Environment and Climate Change will value—as I did, as a minister—the sage words that come from many of the forums that ministers find themselves chairing. I always found it useful to listen to what was being said.

One of the core things that the Scottish Wildlife Trust promotes is ecological diversity. When he was in office, my predecessor Mike Russell—our first Scottish National Party environment minister—introduced the beavers at Knapdale. As a minister, I visited the beavers, and was it not impressive? Those little chappies had done a huge job. The dam was twice my height and more than an acre of forest had disappeared under the loch that was thus formed. The evidence of the beavers chewing the trees could be seen all around. More fundamentally, the biological diversity that came from that reintroduction was substantial. The effect of that tiny number of beavers was quite large, which illustrates the need for care, monitoring and looking after the effects in the long term. It is grossly irresponsible to release new animals without supervision and management.

In this country, as in many other countries, we have experienced introductions that are not down to nature—starting, perhaps, with the brown hare. There has been a long debate about whether the Normans brought it here. However, an archaeological dig in Essex has found that the Romans brought it, so that is thought to have resolved the debate. The brown hare has, therefore, been here a couple of thousand years. The Romans brought the rabbits, too, though I wish that they hadnae, because they chew things in my garden that I would prefer they did not chew. On the other hand, the existence of the rabbit means that the buzzards are doing incredibly well; they are having a very good season. A month ago, they were still flying around with twigs in their beaks, building this year's nests. They are now avidly hunting the rabbits, and I hope that they continue to do so.

Some introductions are hugely damaging. One such example is the American signal crayfish, which—to be blunt—we do not know how to get rid of. It is possible to get rid of such things, though. We seem to be on the verge of getting rid of the mink from the Western Isles. We know that the Australians managed to eliminate the rabbit in 1973, so it can be done. However, Australia still has the dingo, which is a dog that was introduced to the continent.

The grey squirrel came here from North America and continues to threaten the red squirrel. In the north-east of Scotland, Steve Willis of the SWT is the saving Scotland's red squirrel project officer. We are making some progress there, and we are isolated from the main body of grey squirrels, which is helpful. I worry about some of the squirrels, though. I was driving up a country road last year and a grey squirrel was standing in the middle of the road. It would not move and I had to stop and wait for it to get off the road.

Nigel Don referred to ospreys. In 1971, the Loch Garten reserve saw the arrival of the first ospreys in Scotland. Since then, they have moved further south and are now breeding in Rutland. If we make a start, we can do well.

The SWT has made a huge contribution to biological and ecological diversity and is of significant importance for the climate change agenda. Its tentacles spread wide. Let us hope that they continue to do so.

17:38

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): I, too, thank John Wilson for securing the debate, and I thank other members for their contributions to it. I join them in commending the Scottish Wildlife Trust for the excellent work that it does for Scotland's wildlife and for reaching its 50th anniversary. I see that Maggie Keegan, Allan Bantick and Jonny Hughes are here.

My colleague Richard Lochhead was pleased to attend a reception in the Scottish Parliament recently to mark the 50th anniversary of the Scottish Wildlife Trust and I readily acknowledge the conservation work that has been carried out by the trust over the past half century and, in particular, the contribution that has been made over the years by volunteers. A number of members, including John Wilson, Claudia Beamish and Nigel Don, talked about the important role that volunteers play.

Others have talked about the membership numbers and the number of reserves; John Wilson started with that. I want to pick out some of the reserves that were mentioned. Loch of the Lowes was where I had one of my first ministerial engagements. I enjoyed the visit there to see the satellite data for ospreys, the red squirrels and, through the picture window in the main visitor centre, the birds that were feeding avidly. A number of members, including Graeme Dey, Nigel Don and Alex Johnstone, mentioned the Montrose basin, which is clearly important for communities in Angus and the north-east of Scotland. Claudia Beamish and John Wilson mentioned that the Falls of Clyde are important to them.

My first engagement with the Scottish Wildlife Trust was when I undertook some tree seeding at the wonderful Pease Dean nature reserve in the Scottish Borders, as part of a group of Cockburnspath and Cove community councillors. It was hard work, but it was hugely satisfying, and I commend the activity to others.

John Wilson mentioned the Jupiter urban wildlife centre, and Angus MacDonald talked about how it is an inspirational location for local schoolchildren to visit. When I visited there, I too thought that it is

hugely inspirational, and a fitting location—as Angus MacDonald said—for launching the revised biodiversity strategy.

Rob Gibson spoke about reserves in the Scourie area before talking about landscape-scale projects; I will come back to the latter. Angus MacDonald mentioned the Carron dams and the Kinneil foreshore, which are great examples of the local work that the SWT is doing the length and breadth of Scotland.

The trust has also been at the forefront of helping to conserve Scotland's red squirrels. A number of members mentioned that important work. I would like to take this opportunity to record my thanks for the work that has been done to date by the trust and its partners, who are now on the front line of red squirrel conservation. A special mention should, again, go to the very many volunteers who undertake that work.

As Graeme Dey said, last year I was fortunate to visit Kinnaird castle in Angus, which I did at his invitation. Nigel Don and I went to see the excellent red squirrel conservation work that is being carried out by Kinnaird Estates and the Scottish Wildlife Trust as part of the saving Scotland's red squirrel project. It was clear from the informative discussion on the visit that the public-private-voluntary partnership approach is the best way—the only way, really—to tackle the landscape-wide conservation effort that is required to ensure the continued presence of red squirrels in our countryside. Stewart Stevenson also referred to the project. I was very heartened to hear the positive view that is being taken by those who work on the front line: while the battle to contain squirrel pox virus goes on in the south, where greys are dominant, we seem to have a realistic prospect of safeguarding red squirrels and pushing back the non-native greys from parts of Scotland north of the central belt.

I am keen to mention the Scottish beaver trial at Knapdale, which Alex Johnstone and others mentioned. The SWT is a partner in the trial, along with the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and Forestry Commission Scotland. The project has been impressive and the trial has been very professionally run, and is supported by a lot of good work from a large number of volunteers. I was pleased to visit the trial last year on my way back from Mull, when I was fortunate to see a young beaver kit swimming in the twilight. It was a magic moment.

I was pleased to mark the achievement of the conclusion of the five-year field trial phase at a reception in Parliament earlier this month, when I addressed and thanked many of those who had been involved. I even met the project mascot, Bruce the Beaver. It is possible that there is a

photographic record of the event and no doubt a caption competition is accompanying it.

Rather more seriously, the Scottish beaver trial has won awards for its work, including the BBC "Countryfile" project of the year award. It deserves our congratulations on that.

The pressures on Scotland's landscapes need to be tackled at appropriate scale and they need commitment and ambition, as a number of members observed. The Scottish Wildlife Trust demonstrates all those things and can be proud of the outstanding living landscapes projects at Cumbernauld and Coigach-Assynt, which Rob Gibson mentioned. The projects demonstrate the trust's expert knowledge and its commitment to integrated land management. The Coigach-Assynt living landscape project is one of Europe's largest ecosystem regeneration projects, as Rob Gibson said, and is a testament to the trust's ability to tackle issues on a landscape scale. Nigel Don spoke about the importance of looking after the landscape and letting nature take care of itself. As well as excellent environmental work, the projects also provide local training and employment opportunities, and they strengthen the local cultural heritage links with the land in Coigach-Assynt.

Equally, the living landscape project at Cumbernauld will address a wide range of land use issues and provide many benefits for local people, as well as encouraging wildlife. Both projects represent the very best in partnership working and integrated land management, and they ensure that local people are involved in the important issues in their area and are able to drive land-use choices. That is vital if we are to address the many challenges of land management, such as responding to climate change and managing our natural resources now and in the future.

Rebuilding Scotland's natural capital is a key priority for both the new Scottish biodiversity strategy natural capital group and the Scottish forum on natural capital. The SWT will make an important contribution to the valuation and future monitoring of Scotland's natural capital through its membership of both groups.

The biodiversity strategy natural capital group was set up last year to take forward the Scottish biodiversity strategy 2020 challenge, and is looking at a broad range of issues on valuation and use of the environment. Jonny Hughes and his colleagues at SWT have championed this area of debate and were the driving force behind last year's world natural capital forum gathering in Edinburgh. SWT has a superb track record of promoting greater understanding of ecosystem goods and services, and its membership of both groups will be a tremendous asset, so I thank it for its contribution. The trust is at the forefront of that

debate. Aside from its role in the world forum, SWT is one of the five founding partners of the Scottish forum on natural capital.

I turn finally to environmental volunteering, which a number of members mentioned. The conservation work of the SWT, including its volunteers, helps to support the Scottish Government in achieving its conservation objectives. We are very grateful to all those who demonstrate dedication to protecting our environment. Graeme Dey spoke about how he trusts SWT's advice; I very much agree. Certainly Stewart Stevenson knows it from personal experience, as he mentioned in his speech. I record my gratitude and that of my officials for SWT's advice. I absolutely agree with Stewart Stevenson about how valuable its role is.

SWT has more than 800 registered volunteers. It has supported the Scottish beaver trial, which Alex Johnstone mentioned, and other projects. It is helping in numerous practical conservation-based projects, including conservation of the Scottish wildcat, which was also mentioned.

We should be very grateful for the contribution that SWT makes and I am glad to hear that everyone across the chamber is. I close by reiterating my very high regard for the work of the Scottish Wildlife Trust. I wish it well in its continued work in the future on behalf of Scotland's environment and wildlife. I hope that it continues not just for 50 years, but for many years thereafter. Thank you very much from all of us in the chamber today.

Meeting closed at 17:46.

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