

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

(GLASGOW)

Thursday 1 June 2000

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 1 June 2000

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I welcome Captain Christopher Connelly of the Salvation Army.

Captain Christopher Connelly (Salvation Army): Recently I read something about the 1969 moon landing that started off a train of thought. I was 14 when, with my family and millions of others around the world, I watched on television Neil Armstrong being the first man to walk on the surface of the moon. I remember his immortal words—which were given to him by his son before he set off on that historic journey. As he stepped on to the lunar surface, he said:

“That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.”

Although he was one man stepping on the moon’s surface, he was there as a result of teamwork on a massive scale, over a long period.

No one could deny that co-operation is a good thing—it is essential. It is the key to relationships, at home, in the workplace and, dare I suggest, here in the Scottish Parliament. Churches in Scotland are learning to work together. They co-operate with each other on a regular basis, promoting a wider acceptance of each other’s role in society and respect for differing views. God has made each of us individuals with individual gifts and talents. When we come together in any sphere, co-operation is essential for the good of the whole.

The early Church had to be made aware of that and, writing to the Church at Corinth, Paul said:

“The body is a unit though it is made up of many parts . . . So it is with Christ for we were all baptised by one spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free . . . The body is not made up of one part but of many . . . God has arranged the parts in the body just as he wanted them to be . . . God has combined the members of the body . . . so that there should be no division in the body but that its parts should have equal concern for each other . . . You are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.”

Those people had to learn the lesson that we must all learn—to co-operate, as members of a team, recognising that together everyone achieves more.

The words of Martin Luther King are as true today as they have always been when he said:

“An individual has not started living until he can rise

above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.”

With those broader concerns always in mind, let us work together in a spirit of co-operation.

Let us pray together.

Father God, we come to you today representing many differing parts of a diverse community. Our individual responsibilities may differ, Lord, but we ask that in all that we do we may work together for the greater good of all. Bless the work of this Parliament as its members seek to serve the people of our nation. In Jesu’s name I pray. Amen.

Civic Participation

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is a statement by Jack McConnell on civic participation.

09:35

The Minister for Finance (Mr Jack McConnell): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I would like to make a statement on the Executive's policy on civic participation.

This Parliament was elected on a promise: that policy making would be more open, participative and consultative. That is what the people of Scotland expect of us. Our success in meeting the promise of openness and accessibility will be a litmus test of our achievement of the wider aspirations for devolution.

We can no longer hide behind remoteness. We have no excuses for not meeting public expectations of the new politics of partnership—because partnership politics means better policies. I want inclusive and consultative policy making to be at the centre of our 21st-century Government agenda. The Executive is already acting to give that vision substance.

I announced some months ago that we would fund the Scottish Civic Forum to the tune of £300,000 over three years, and we remain committed to supporting the forum and working with it in the years ahead. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate Campbell Christie, who has been elected convener of the Civic Forum, and the other members who have been elected to it in recent weeks.

We envisage the forum as a reliable source of advice, for both the Executive and the Parliament, on how all relevant interests can have their say in what we do. If the forum succeeds in that, this new venture in participation will have proved its worth. Its success will be measured by the credibility that it develops in civic Scotland, and by the funding that it attracts to replace the pump-priming support from the Executive.

However, the Civic Forum will not replace the Executive itself as the only source of policy ideas. We see it as complementary to a raft of other initiatives to increase public participation in decision making, and the Scottish ministerial team is embracing the politics of participation.

We want to improve how we access the voice of young people. An early focus for that will be the youth summit later this month—a chance for young people to have their say and to tell us how we can sustain a dialogue with them.

We are working with Napier University teledemocracy centre to establish an electronic democracy site to survey young people's views. The site invites young people to record their opinions and to vote on priorities. It is a good new approach to encouraging young people to engage actively in the democratic process.

We are looking for ways to open up our public appointments system, so that more people have the chance to participate in public life. Our consultation on that issue closed recently, and I look forward to discussing the way forward with the Parliament.

We are using the people's panel to test the views of the people of Scotland on their experience of public services, and we are considering ways of increasing involvement and widening the participation of older people in particular, so that their concerns are heard and their contribution is recognised.

We are also working to help communities find a voice on the matters that concern them. The working for communities programme is encouraging new ways of involving communities in decisions on services in their area, and the listening to communities programme promotes community participation. The programme is funding the establishment of local people's panels in a range of social inclusion partnerships, to give local people a say in the actions that are taken in their area, and it is funding people's juries to allow in-depth discussion of local issues by local people to inform the decisions taken by public bodies.

Our commitment to civic participation is such that we want more than a series of ad hoc measures. Too often, consultations can appear as glossy documents circulated to the usual suspects, often with deadlines that are far too tight. That is not good enough. The Scottish people and this Parliament rightly demand more.

We are now more than a year into devolution. It is increasingly important that we refine our civic participation policy. Last month, the Scottish Cabinet committed itself to a series of concrete actions to improve how we consult on our policies. The document that we discussed will be published in full on the internet.

This is not about consultation overload, but it is about smarter consultation, building on the existing initiatives that I described. We will implement four clear, new rules for future consultations. First, we will allow more time for future consultations—12 weeks minimum, except in urgent cases or minor, routine exercises. Secondly, we will ensure that the issues on which we consult are clear and that the language is straightforward. I have spoken already to the Plain English Campaign about how it could help us to

communicate more clearly, and I will make a further announcement about that soon. Thirdly, we will ensure that all those who respond to a consultation receive feedback on the outcome of the exercise. Finally, we will work with the Parliament's committees, because we want MSPs to have confidence in the Executive's consultation exercises.

We will widen access and broaden the circle of those reached by our consultations, because targeting the usual suspects is not enough. We cannot allow those most adept at managing the system to monopolise consultation.

We will make better use of the internet to widen opportunities for consultation. All our publications are already available on the web and, increasingly, consultations can be accessed and dealt with online. However, we can signpost them better and we can make the process of responding to them simpler.

We cannot be simply reactive, waiting for the public to come to us, be that by the internet or by more conventional means. We must be proactive in seeking out the views of those who have not had the time, inclination or confidence to respond in the past to the questions that the Executive asks to support its policy making. Therefore, we must be imaginative in how we consult, and a raft of bland consultation documents will not be enough. We must engage actively with our electorate, which is why, for example, I will visit the four corners of Scotland over the next month, to elicit views on the budget document, "Investing in You", starting with an event in Dumfries next Tuesday.

I believe that we can achieve a new relationship with voters between elections, with genuine dialogue and engagement, renewing confidence in politics and government. No Government has a monopoly on good sense, creativity or expertise, and we have a responsibility to the people of Scotland to harness those qualities wherever we find them, from among our own ranks or more widely in civic society. That is why the Executive is committed to improving participation in the way in which we make our policies.

We have a wide-ranging and deep commitment to sustained participation, and we want to build real dialogue among the Executive, MSPs, civic society and the people of Scotland.

Those are not quick fixes. It will take time to invigorate the practice of participation, but we see already the benefits of our commitment to participation, with policies that focus on real need and that are designed to have lasting impact, and a partnership that delivers real solutions.

The Presiding Officer: We will now have questions to the minister.

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): I thank the minister for his statement. There is no question but that civic participation underpins this Parliament.

However, I wish to raise a couple of questions, and a couple of concerns, on the funding of the Civic Forum. As the minister said, we do not want a series of ad hoc measures for civic participation, but neither do we want an ad hoc funding structure. Therefore, it is somewhat unfortunate that, although the announcement of £300,000 for the Civic Forum was made last October, the funding was not given until 3 April 2000. Can the minister advise whether it is possible to tighten up that situation?

As we develop civic participation in Scotland, SNP members would like the Civic Forum to become involved structurally in the work of the Parliament's committees. We suggest that we should move rapidly towards that approach and that the minister should advise all committee conveners to make forceful use of the European rapporteur system. That would allow members of the Civic Forum, the business forum and the other forums to undertake work on behalf of committees. We also wish to see the proper introduction of the use of expert panels.

Mr McConnell: It was important that we reached a clear agreement on the purpose of the funding of the Civic Forum and on the way in which it would be delivered and monitored. By April, we had to respond to the Civic Forum's request to reschedule the money between years—to spread out the funding over a longer period—to enable it to build on that pump-priming money and to secure its own longer-term funding.

We have also reached an agreement with the Civic Forum about the process of reporting and engagement and, over the next few months, I hope to reach an agreement or concordat with it about its relationship with the Executive.

The relationship between the Parliament's committees and the Civic Forum is a matter that should be considered by the Parliament, the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body and the committee of conveners. I would not wish to interfere in that, but I commit ministers to supporting such engagement in every way that we can. The three-way relationship between civic society, the Parliament and the ministers who relate to each committee is vital for successful policy making.

It is for committee conveners and the corporate body to decide on the structures for involving civic society in the work of committees, and I would not want to interfere too directly in that process. At the same time, it is important that there should be a structure for that involvement. If there is not, we

might fail to meet the expectations that we are creating. More important, without a structure, those who can shout loudest, who are most active or who are best resourced might have the most impact. That would be wrong. It is important that there should be equality of participation. Any structure that ensures that will be a good structure.

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I, too, welcome the statement, the sentiments of which are quite laudable. However, will the Executive listen to the outcome of consultations? We have just experienced wide civic participation in the form of a referendum, but the view of more than 1 million people is being ignored.

I should also be interested to learn how community councils fit into the scheme of things. We believe that they have an important role to play, but they were not mentioned in the minister's statement.

Where does the funding for the people's panels and people's juries come from? We do not want to get into a situation where it is all consultation and no action.

Mr McConnell: The record of the whole Parliament—not just ministers—in responding to the consultation that has been carried out on legislation that has already been approved by the Parliament or is currently being considered has been good so far. During the debate on the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Bill, for example, we saw a genuine dialogue between interested groups, the people of Scotland and this Parliament, which produced good legislation, to which there is widespread consent, on what could have been a controversial and difficult subject for the Parliament to tackle.

Similarly, the land reform proposals are the outcome of two years' consultation and deliberation, aimed at improving the legislation and building consent for reform. That resulted in the chamber some weeks ago giving unanimous support to the first part of that package, the Abolition of Feudal Tenure etc (Scotland) Bill. The partnership that we are developing among the Parliament, the Executive and the people is making a difference to legislation. I hope that we can continue that.

The funding for the people's panels and juries has already been announced by the Minister for Communities. That funding is important, because there are communities across Scotland that need support in developing the skills and the confidence to have vocal representation. Through the social inclusion partnerships and the capacity-building work that is going on in community groups, we are giving people new opportunities and allowing them, rather than us, to be in control of their

participation.

Community councils were not mentioned in the statement, but neither were local authorities, which are the other elected tier of government in Scotland. I chose deliberately not to mention them, because to pick out any particular group of representative bodies would have been wrong. I am keen for people to be involved, when that is appropriate and when they want to participate. Community councils are important bodies. I know that, as part of the debate on the McIntosh review, work is being done to ensure that they have a role, and I am keen to support that.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I welcome the Government's and the minister's commitment to being open, accessible and transparent and to encouraging consultation and participation. However, we have heard it all before. I hope that on this occasion it will not be a ritual commitment, but the minister will forgive me if we wait to see what happens in practice.

Can the minister tell us when the Civic Forum will finally meet? It has been an awfully long time getting off the ground, despite its large budget.

What is the difference between a people's panel and a people's jury? How will people be appointed to them to ensure that they are representative? The last thing that we want is for them to be giant focus groups paid for by the public.

Can the minister assure us that—heaven forbid—the consultation will not be elitist? Relatively few people have access to the internet.

I commend the minister's criticism of the Executive's glossy documents. One might almost call it self-criticism, as lately he has been the principal culprit, having just produced "Investing in You", which retails at a very user-friendly £16.50. Does the minister agree that although it is important that documents are user-friendly, substance is as important as style? I am sure that he will never dream of importing the worst of Whitehall's habits—much worse than Westminster's—and recycle old money, pretending that it is new.

Mr McConnell: We would never dream of doing such a thing. I welcome the questions and the support, however cynical it might appear. I hope that we can dispel that cynicism in the months ahead.

As I understand it, the difference between people's panels and people's juries is that the panels seek opinions on specific matters from a representative sample of people. The juries look at matters in more depth, hear witnesses, ask questions and produce a report. That is an important difference, and one that presumably serves different purposes in different

circumstances.

The Civic Forum will meet, as I understand it, for the first time on Saturday 10 June. Among others who are involved, Mr Raffan's colleague Margaret Smith, the convener of the Health and Community Care Committee, is one of the representatives who will be there. I am sure that she will pass on his views.

There is a case for producing comprehensive documents that are clearly presented. It is important that we do not create the impression—and however right or wrong it is, the impression can sometimes be there—that consultation is about the publishing of a document and the publicity for it, rather than about hearing views on the document.

We need to ensure that when documents are published by the Executive, they are professionally produced, but that they also clearly explain the consultation process with regard to what people are being asked and how they can respond. Such documents should also explain that we give as much credence to, and put as much effort into, taking the views that come in as a result of a document's publication as we do to publishing it in the first place.

If we do that, we will improve consultation. I must say, however, that across public life—not just ministers, but other public bodies and other levels of government—people are learning about and improving on this matter all the time. I hope that through such dialogue and through the experience of publishing some of those documents we can improve further.

Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): I commend everything that the minister said about civic participation. Like him, I believe that it should be one of the defining characteristics of this Parliament.

The minister mentioned electronic democracy. Is he aware that the Public Petitions Committee is piloting, along with Napier University, a new system called e-petitioner, which allows petitions to be lodged with this Parliament electronically, and which also allows debates to be generated on those petitions on the web? Does he agree that that is one of the ways in which civic participation should develop in Scotland? Further, does he agree that the role of the Public Petitions Committee is absolutely vital to civic participation in this Parliament, and should have the support of everyone?

Mr McConnell: It is a matter for the Parliament to decide which committees it has, and MSPs should express views on that. Petitioning the Parliament is important. It was a fundamental founding principle of this Parliament. It is an integral part of the way in which we want to

conduct our business. The committee plays an important role at the moment. Engagement with people across Scotland is important, and is regularly commented on by our constituents from every part of Scotland.

E-petitions are a good innovation. The development of the internet, particularly if we can increase access to it and ensure that it is available to people across Scotland and from all walks of life, allows us to increase the potential for communication and participation in an exponential way. We need to harness electronic democracy, support it, and be part of it, and to make sure that it does not fail because of the weight of the work load that it creates. It is important that we are able to respond to it, and that we try to predict what will happen. I am delighted to hear that the Public Petitions Committee is conducting a pilot project on electronic democracy.

Mr George Reid (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Surely the fundamental difference between Holyrood and Westminster is that, with no revising chamber, we have to get things right first time round. Was not the consultative steering group right to argue that this Parliament is not the sole source of policy development? While it is entirely laudatory to end the discrimination of section 2A, can it really be done by ministerial fiat? Would not it be wiser in future to collect all the voices inside the tent of the Civic Forum and our committees, and to work our way towards a consensus? Is not that real social partnership, and much more preferable to the misrepresentation and the confrontation that have so besmirched debate on section 2A in Scotland?

Mr McConnell: That will be one of the benefits of the development of the Civic Forum. As the Civic Forum starts to meet and develops that partnership with the Executive and parliamentary committees, there will be consensus and a method of developing future legislation and policy making that will be beneficial for all concerned. I hope that the partnerships that we are creating and the method of working in this Parliament will mean that in Scotland the kind of policy making that has at times in the past—not always—characterised the Westminster Parliament will be a thing of the past.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I associate myself with John McAllion's comments about the Public Petitions Committee. When we read the deliberations of the Public Petitions Committee, it is clear that people are taking the opportunity to make their voice heard through it.

In relation to the participation of young people in the process, I recently had the opportunity to participate in a stakeholder jury in my constituency. I was concerned that there was no

representation of young people among those who were involved as part of the people's jury. From experience of working with young people over many years, I suggest that just to say that we will involve them more is not enough; resources, training and back-up must be provided. Will the minister say more about the youth summit and how he feels it would feed into the process?

Mr McConnell: Those are important issues in relation to young people's participation.

There is also an issue of confidence and a belief in politics, government and the ability through involvement to change things. There are political and cultural aspects as well as technical issues of training and resources. I believe that the youth parliament is a success—many of us have met our local representatives. One of the two representatives from my constituency has been elected as the convener of the youth parliament; I congratulate Steven Jack on that.

Through the youth parliament, the youth summit and a number of other initiatives, we can ensure that young people feel confident in taking part and are confident that we will listen to them when they take part. That will require resources and training, but it also requires an attitude on our part of listening to their views and encouraging them. When we act, we must act in a principled way, which builds their confidence that we are trying to change things on their behalf.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I put two concerns and one idea to Mr McConnell. First, will he give a commitment that we will not have a repeat, north of the border, of the sham consultation on the national health service south of the border, when 12 million people have been given five days to reply? That is an engagement in kidology, not consultation.

Secondly, will Mr McConnell tell us what will happen in relation to funding after the period of pump priming for the Civic Forum? What are the potential sources of funding once the Executive's money dries up? Will he guarantee that the Civic Forum will not rely in future on vested interests to fund its activities?

Thirdly, I will rekindle an old idea, from old Labour days, of an industrial parliament as part of the network of organisations to be consulted, which would bring together both sides of industry, perhaps twice a year, to examine the industrial and commercial future of Scotland. It would feed into this Parliament ideas from grass-roots trade unionists, managers and entrepreneurs about the way forward for the Scottish economy.

Mr McConnell: On the last suggestion, I was waiting for Alex Neil to use the word soviet, but I do not think that that is what he means.

I strongly support—and the Executive supports—engagement between the different sides of the industrial divide. However, I want to be careful not to step on the toes of existing organisations that could build that dialogue. There is a balance to be struck between our creating new structures and giving existing ones support to develop in that way. I will reserve my position on that specific idea, although the principle of dialogue is critical.

It is important that both we in Scotland and the Government in England and Wales consult on the future of the NHS. We have separate programmes on that, which are complementary but distinct. We in Scotland will ensure that the discussion on the future of the Scottish health service involves all those who have a direct and indirect interest in it. As ever, I am reluctant to comment on the work of another Parliament, but I hope that the current UK consultation exercise will bring vitality and a sense of direction to the reforms that will be funded by the biggest ever injection of resources into the NHS.

I am keen to ensure that the Civic Forum does not rely on the Government for funding. Alex Neil's point about vested interests would perhaps best be exemplified if we were the main funder of the Civic Forum for ever. That would be an unfortunate position. It is important that the Civic Forum should try to identify other sources of funding. Preferably, there should be a variety of sources, so that it has a sense of independence, both from us and from any of the major players or other external bodies. It is important that we provide funding in the initial years so that the Civic Forum can identify those sources of funding over a period, and does not have to rush immediately into the hands of anybody else. I hope that we have reached a good agreement on funding. We will certainly support the forum and give it ideas about where next to seek funding.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I warmly welcome the minister's statement. All members entered the Parliament to achieve effective participation by, and consultation with, the people of Scotland. Cathy Jamieson talked about young people; I wish to ask about older people, who often feel that they are left out of the consultation process. Will the minister say a little about the forums with which he hopes the Executive and the Parliament will communicate and about how we can make the process effective? I am concerned about issues such as the timing of meetings.

Mr McConnell: Obviously, in relation to older people, there are issues about the timing of meetings and consultations and the way in which they are held. Iain Gray and other colleagues have been involved in initial work as part of the UK better government for older people programme.

Over the next few months, we must consider how to develop that project in Scotland. We must both participate in the UK initiative, given that there is important legislation at UK level that affects older people, and develop initiatives in Scotland. I hope that in the coming months we will be able to spell out in more detail how that will be done.

Borders Rail Link

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is a debate on motion S1M-922, in the name of Alex Johnstone, on behalf of the Rural Affairs Committee, on a Borders rail link. As members know, in the chair, I do not have any views on anything, but it is a particular pleasure to be chairing this debate, as I was a passenger on the last train to travel down that line.

10:01

Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con): In deference to whoever is next on the list of speakers, I begin by saying that, as I am not a local representative and do not have expert knowledge on the Borders rail campaign, I do not intend to speak at enormous length; I will leave as much time as possible for those who have much more knowledge on the subject.

Public transport is an issue that is dear to the hearts of many of us—perhaps not quite as near to my heart before I was a member of the Parliament as it is now. The experience that I had this morning in encountering one or two problems as I tried to get here, which made me wonder whether I would be able to make this speech, has brought my mind into focus. The problems that I am likely to face tomorrow when three members of the Rural Affairs Committee and I visit Islay, after which I may have an eight-hour journey home, may focus my mind further.

This debate is being held as committee business. It is a tribute to the processes of the Parliament that we have managed to secure a debate on the Borders rail link. A few moments ago, while John McAllion was speaking, I made a note about the importance of the role that is played by the Public Petitions Committee, whose function is to put petitions into the committee system and to encourage discussion such as the one at the meeting of the Rural Affairs Committee that led to this debate. We have to acknowledge the success of the petitions system.

The petition on the Borders rail campaign was placed not with the Rural Affairs Committee, but with the Transport and the Environment Committee, which asked for comments from the Rural Affairs Committee. We discussed the issue at great length at our meeting on 2 May. It was the unanimous view of the committee that the issues raised in the petition were worthy of support. It was also the view of the committee that, as convener, I should write on behalf of all members of the committee to request that the petition's call for time to be given for a debate in Parliament be considered at the earliest opportunity. That is why

I, not the convener of the Transport and the Environment Committee, am introducing today's debate.

It must be acknowledged that, when it was announced that the debate was to take place today, 1 June, there was some dismay among the leading campaigners within and outside the Parliament, who felt that the debate was happening too early in the process. However, I hope that today's debate will focus the views of the Parliament and that we will be able to consider the issue in committee and in the chamber in future once further progress has been made and there are further issues to discuss.

We recognise that discussion of the project requires specialist knowledge. The committee is extremely grateful for the advice of Christine Grahame, Euan Robson and Ian Jenkins, who, at various stages, have attended committee meetings to assist us in our discussions and in the process of deciding how we want to progress the matter.

The issue is important within the context of a number of the campaigns and investigations being sponsored by the Rural Affairs Committee. In recent months, we have been gathering information and views for our investigation into changing employment patterns in rural Scotland. The issue of transport in rural areas has been raised time and again, which has gone a long way towards persuading all members of the committee that the Parliament should focus on the issue of constructing a railway through the Borders between Edinburgh and Carlisle.

The motion is an attempt to reconcile a range of views and to gain the support of the whole Parliament. It deliberately steers away from committing the Executive to any specific action that could result in concerns over the budget. At the same time, it points to a practical way in which to proceed at this stage and allows the whole Parliament to commit its support to the Borders rail campaign. I hope that everyone in the Parliament feels that the motion is worthy of support.

We recognise that the project may proceed in a number of stages and that, although some methods of funding may be easier to achieve than others, the project may go ahead with a range of funding sources. We hope that the motion does not commit the Parliament to any particular funding route.

On behalf of the Rural Affairs Committee, it is my pleasure to move motion S1M-922, in my name. I move,

That the Parliament recognises and endorses the case for the establishment of a railway linking the Scottish Borders to the national network at Edinburgh and Carlisle and urges the Scottish Executive to consult with the

Strategic Rail Authority and others to facilitate its establishment.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. I am grateful to the member for taking less time than he was allotted. More people want to speak than have given me advance notice, so we will have to keep to strict time limits to get everybody in.

10:04

The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack): I welcome the opportunity to speak about this issue today and would like to thank Alex Johnstone for moving the motion. I thank him also for the tone and content of his speech. I want to use my speech to outline the progress that has been made since we last discussed the issue in the chamber.

In April 1999, when Gus Macdonald, then the Labour Government's Scottish industry minister, commissioned the feasibility study into the reopening of the Borders railway line, the aim was to explore the practicalities and viability of the options.

I accept without reservation that improving the transport links between the Borders and the rest of the country is a prerequisite to the area's economic regeneration and for its social and environmental well-being. I am totally committed to securing a better-integrated and sustainable transport infrastructure for all rural communities.

However, one of the challenges is to manage people's expectations honestly. All who are genuinely supportive of the aspirations of those who seek the reinstatement of the Borders railway line must take a detailed, informed and considered view of what can be realistically achieved. We must avoid making rash promises. The people of the Borders deserve no less. That is why I welcomed the commissioning of the groundbreaking feasibility study into reopening the line. Earlier this year, I marked the publication of the study by joining key stakeholders in the Borders—including some MSPs—to highlight the fact that the project was moving into a new and exciting phase.

Having clearly demonstrated that reinstatement would be operationally viable to Tweedbank, the study was adopted by Scottish Borders Council and its partners as a sound basis for working up detailed project proposals. I am aware that a tender has been awarded to Turner and Townsend consultants for preparing the next stage of the work; I welcome that. I knew that the proposals would underpin a bid for public transport fund support and a couple of months ago I stated that I was looking forward to receiving these proposals. Since then, Scottish Borders Council has taken up the challenge enthusiastically. The

council has worked with Railtrack, ScotRail, Midlothian Council and City of Edinburgh Council, which are fully assisting the council to fulfil its desire to develop a robust economic, social and environmental case for reinstatement. That is an ambitious and sensible approach.

Nobody has claimed that, together, the construction and operation of the line, even to Gorebridge, is commercially viable, taking account of capital as well as operating costs. However, most people are convinced that the wider economic, social and environmental benefits of reopening the link to the heart of the Borders outweigh the costs to the public purse of assisting its construction. I have much sympathy with that view, although I am aware that at some point a line will have to be drawn. I know that there is a debate about whether Tweedbank or further on to Newtown St Boswells would be the best place for an integrated public transport hub and for park-and-ride options to link into a line. That is one of the critical issues that will have to be considered in the work that Scottish Borders Council has begun.

As the feasibility study ably demonstrated, we need to ensure that we get the assessment right. Viability is an important issue in considering the reinstatement of the line all the way from Edinburgh to Carlisle. After exhaustive analysis, it was shown that the very limited additional demand for passenger and freight services south of the heart of the Borders did not, at present, generate benefits that would justify significant levels of public funding.

I say "at present" advisedly. The study was at pains to point out that no option for reinstatement should be ruled out entirely. It acknowledged that future demand trends might justify a serious reconsideration of extending the line beyond the heart of the Borders, on to Hawick and possibly to Carlisle. However, right now, that is not feasible. On that basis, the study insisted that no partial reinstatement of the line should preclude the possibility of future extension. I commend and support that sensible approach.

It is worth reminding ourselves that, even at the height of the Victorian railway promotion, it took 17 years to join Edinburgh with Carlisle by the Waverley line. The incremental approach was appropriate then and most serious promoters of reinstatement are adopting a similar commonsense approach today. Indeed, having spoken to Scottish Borders Council, I know that it is playing the long game. It recognises that, at the moment, the sustainable case promotes reopening the line only to the central Borders. However, that does not rule out the potential for a southerly extension. The council's insistence on protecting the disused line for its entire length is important. That is a mature and realistic approach.

The feasibility study demonstrated how the direct and indirect benefits of reinstatement to Tweedbank could be used to justify public support. It also explored in considerable detail the potential for reopening a southerly link between the Kielder forest and Carlisle. The argument had been made that rail access to Kielder would open up the forest to the commercial movement of timber from the forest to customers outwith the area.

The feasibility study considered the whole issue of costs, in particular the extremely cheap cost of imported timber, which is undercutting many UK producers' prices. Again, the report did not discount the possibility that market conditions could change, but with the southerly extension from Tweedbank, the study concluded that a link to Kielder from the west coast main line could not be discounted entirely.

I believe that Scottish Borders Council is on the right lines in seeking the development of a project that sets a medium-term goal of developing the passenger rail link between the heart of the Borders and Edinburgh, without ruling out longer-term reinstatement options.

The motion urges the Scottish Executive to consult others to facilitate the reinstatement of the Borders railway. That is an important proposal that deserves our serious consideration.

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, but I will take an intervention from Mr MacAskill in a minute.

I have outlined in some detail my reasons for not raising expectations about the Scottish Executive's preparedness to support, at this time, the re-establishment of the line between Edinburgh and Carlisle. There will be bids, through the public transport fund, from the Borders and many other councils, for schemes that I will have to consider fairly, on their merits, alongside other legitimate claims on public resources. It would be inappropriate for me, in the chamber today, to make any pronouncements about the outcome of those bids. To do so could also justify indignation throughout the rest of the country from potential competing bidders, and would undermine any commitment to equity and transparency.

That has not prevented us from working fully with Scottish Borders Council in its preparation for the public transport bid. We would give the same assistance to anyone who was considering applying for support under the scheme. It certainly does not stop us discussing with Scottish Borders Council the potential sources of funding that the council can explore.

Mr MacAskill: Did the minister see the front page of *The Independent* yesterday, which said

“Prescott gets £140bn boost for transport” under a “Ten-year plan”? The article went on to indicate that

“the programme will include a £500m extension for Manchester’s tramlines, a new £180m system in Nottingham and extensions to the Docklands Light Railway in London and the similar Tyne and Wear rail network.”

Is that a rash promise, or is John Prescott actually delivering something? Why are we leaving the railway with Scottish Borders Council? Why do we not get our share of the £140 billion and just build it?

Sarah Boyack: That is precisely the issue that I have just addressed. There is not only the option of the public transport fund; there are other options that the Scottish Executive can explore in consultation with Scottish Borders Council. However, we must ensure that we get the process right. We have the feasibility study, which goes into great depth about the options. The next stage is to consider how the whole issue should be progressed. Looking for finance is one of the key issues; I have just said that we are more than happy to discuss that issue with the promoters of the Borders railway and to explore it with the shadow strategic rail authority.

As a result of the McLeish settlement, new responsibilities on rail will come to the Scottish ministers; a number of those are outlined in the Transport Bill that is before the UK Parliament. The most significant of those will be dealing with directions and guidance to the SRA for the franchise for providing passenger rail services that start and finish in Scotland.

Mr MacAskill: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No. I am answering the member’s question.

That will be underwritten by the transfer of full financial responsibility for the cost of the Scottish franchise. We will also have an input to the SRA on its GB strategy for the railways and on advice on cross-border franchises. Together, those functions make for a significant ability to influence how Scotland’s railways will develop in future. We are also having discussions with the authority about options that will come through a number of funding opportunities that it is developing.

I am committed to using our influence fully. I am committed to developing a set of robust and achievable strategic priorities for Scotland’s railways. That is why I will consider all sensible arguments that are raised today for developing our existing network and will take into account practical and cost-effective proposals for how we deliver that. The proposals that are being developed by Scottish Borders Council are firmly within the category of realistic, practical and cost-effective.

We have kept the SRA fully informed about developments regarding the Borders railway. The SRA is conducting a detailed consideration of the feasibility study and has met at least once in the past few months all the main players who are promoting the railway. Members will know that the SRA itself operates a funding scheme for developing passenger rail services and I am sure that that has not escaped the attention of Scottish Borders Council.

There has been progress since we last met to discuss the reintroduction of a Borders rail link, and I welcome this debate, which allows us to discuss the issue further. The motion asks me and Scottish ministers to continue the work that we are already doing. It is vital that we make maximum use of an excellent feasibility study and that there is further work between the key partners—Scottish Borders Council, Midlothian Council, Scottish Borders Enterprise and the rail industry.

That approach is underpinned by the feasibility study and will be built on by the south-east of Scotland transport partnership, which will be given new weight by our new transport bill. As we start our new century, I hope that every member in this chamber will work together to bring to fruition the wish expressed by so many people in the Borders to bring back the railway to the heart of the Borders. *[Applause.]*

The Presiding Officer: Although we very much welcome visitors in the gallery, they are not allowed to express approval or disapproval of any comments from the chamber. Please contain your applause until you meet your MSPs afterwards.

10:20

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I take slight offence at the suggestion that it is rash and raises false expectations to seek to re-establish a rail link in the Borders. For me and others campaigning on this issue, this is a matter of vision, justice and economic necessity. As has been stated, there is money around to fund the line.

First of all—rather like at the Oscars—I want to thank some people for getting the debate this far. The members of the cross-party group on Borders rail made me their convener and, although some minor party differences still exist, most differences have been put aside as we fight in common cause. I thank Alex Johnstone and the Rural Affairs Committee for securing this debate. Alex knows that I tried to make the motion tougher; however, it will suffice. Furthermore, I appreciate the support of the Equal Opportunities Committee, the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, the Transport and the Environment Committee and the Enterprise and Lifelong

Learning Committee, all of which wanted this debate.

In particular, I praise John McAllion and the other members of the Public Petitions Committee. John fights for that committee's special democratic role in the Parliament. That committee alone may have given 20,000 Borderers a voice in demanding a return of the railway that was axed by Beeching in very dubious circumstances and with devastating and continuing consequences for the economic and social well-being of the entire Borders area. John took the Public Petitions Committee to Galashiels to hear presentations of passion and clarity from petitioners of all ages before a packed gallery. Before that, the individual members of the Campaign for Borders Rail stood for months on end on street corners and in supermarkets gathering the petition's 20,000 signatures. We should also remember the campaigners on this issue over the decades. Even today, the small public gallery here is filled with Borderers, many of whom left their homes before six o'clock this morning to hear what Ms Boyack and the Executive intend to do.

What does the Executive intend to do? The case for the return of a Borders rail link is irrefutable. We need only compare and contrast the area with similar areas in Scotland. For example, the Scottish Highlands has 208,000 people and 57 railway stations; the Borders has 106,000 people without a metre of track, no railway stations, no ferries and no airports. Road links in the Borders are inadequate and tortuous; even if they were suitable for dualling—which they are not—such improvements would be more costly than a rail link. In an area where people without cars are almost disconnected, only one in three people own one and, for car owners, rural petrol prices are punitive.

This is not solely a transport issue; transport routes are the arteries where the life-blood of economic and social well-being flows. Alex Neil will deal with some of the social aspects; I want to headline some of the economic realities. The main industries in the Borders are textiles, farming, electronics and tourism. The chamber hardly needs reminding of the 2,000 jobs lost in textile manufacturing in the past three years alone; of the drastic fall in farm incomes; and of the ruthless closure of Viasystems, with the loss of 1,000 jobs. As a result, the Borders has suffered a population loss of young people in an area with the highest percentage of older people in Scotland. Furthermore, it now has the lowest average weekly income, which is £50 under the Scottish national average.

The Scott Wilson report estimated that 900 jobs could be created simply by making a line from Edinburgh to Tweedbank. The cost of investment

for that distance would be £73 million. For an extra £20 million plus, we could reconnect the Borders to the UK. That south link is essential, not optional. Together with a branch towards Kielder, the line could carry freight with the option of having a passenger service. Ms Boyack has conceded that Scott Wilson's report says that the line could be reinstated in a relatively straightforward manner. That would also clear heavy transport lorries off small country lanes, which would end the devastating effect that they have on the villages that they go through.

The SNP has long been committed to the creation of a link from Edinburgh to Carlisle. I have already given the reasons for that commitment. Only by opening the entire route can the Borders be connected to the markets of Scotland and England.

The benefits of a Borders rail link would be felt in Dumfriesshire. There would also be benefits to the city of Edinburgh with its crowded suburbs. The link would breathe life into the Borders and give breathing space to Edinburgh by alleviating congestion and opening expansion to the south. Think of the transformation that Fife has undergone in the decades since the Forth road bridge opened. Just as Perthshire and Fife were disconnected from the capital by the Forth, so has the Borders been disconnected by the loss of rail. Jobs and people have flowed both ways between the city and the kingdom. Why has a similar flow not happened with the areas south of the city, to Galashiels and beyond? It is estimated that a rail journey from Galashiels to the heart of the capital would take only 45 minutes. There is the potential not only for economic expansion and the dispersal of jobs but for the dispersal of population. People could live in a beautiful rural environment and counteract the effects of the aging population. Young people could live in the Borders and commute if they needed to. A reconnected Borders would also be able to tap into tourist potential. Day trippers on rail could rule, okay.

I will address some words to Jack McConnell. Some £60 million went on consultancy fees for the modernising of London rail, £250 million was spent on the Manchester metro and £1,250 million was spent on London's Jubilee line. Given the benefits to Scotland and the Borders of the investment of £100 million, the rail link is cheap at the price. Indeed, when did a road ever have to pay its way commercially?

Reopening the Borders railway line is necessary, but the petitioners expect more of the Parliament than good wishes, and so do I. Many years ago, I stood in the rain that usually accompanies street campaigning with an earlier petition for a Borders railway line. Many people signed, but all said the same thing: "Lassie, I'll

sign, but it will never happen.” In my members’ debate last year, we debated the case for a Borders railway. Last week in this chamber, we debated another glossy Executive brochure, “Rural Scotland: A New Approach”, which is all about a commitment to the rural economy. I said then, and I say now, that the Executive should prove that it is capable of more than gloss and call on the strategic rail authority to provide the necessary funding.

This is a question of vision and hard cash. One vision is a terminus at Galashiels, trains with Borders rail livery, cycleways parallel to the track, bridle paths, local industries flourishing alongside the line, villages in which the schools remain open because families live there and a community at last repaid long-overdue debts accrued in the time from the closure of the railway to the closure of Viasystems. That would be a tangible achievement that would last for centuries. It might not be the rail that Jack would build, but it would be the rail that this Parliament would build. Most important, it would be a lasting testament to the tenacity of the Borders people.

10:28

Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): It is clear to me, as a member for South of Scotland, that there are two great gaps in the transport infrastructure of that huge slice of Scotland: the first is the lack of a Borders rail link; the second is the lack of a lateral rail route across Dumfries and Galloway.

The closure of the Waverley line in 1969 was an economic and social disaster for all Scotland’s border counties. As a result, the Borders missed out on all the growth of commuter traffic and travelling that has transformed Scotland’s economy in the past 30 years. The Borders missed out on the housing and employment booms that occurred in Fife and the Lothians, because the region lacked access to the core of those booms, Edinburgh. People in the Borders have lost out on the variety and quality of employment that is available in Edinburgh and to people who have ready access to Edinburgh. To a large degree, the Borders region has also missed out on the opportunities for economic diversification as its traditional staple industries of agriculture and textiles have struggled.

The consequences for the Borders are easily stated, but no less significant for that. The Borders has a low-wage economy. People throughout the Borders who are reliant on public transport are reliant on an expensive and infrequent bus service. The motor car—which, in most of Scotland, is a means of liberating people and providing choice—is something on which people in the Borders are dependent, and even low-income

householders must have a car, sometimes two cars, to be able to function in the labour market and in other contexts.

Many areas of the Borders have experienced a decline in population, with all the implications that that has brought for Scottish Borders Council and the health services, the resources of which are essentially geared to local population levels. As the minister implied in her speech, if we are serious about social inclusion, we must consider how we can integrate the towns and villages of the Scottish Borders into the mainstream Scottish economy and provide those links to employment, education, entertainment and everything else that an accessible and reliable transport system means.

It is important that we treat transport in the Scottish Borders as a regional issue. After all, that has been the context in which the local council has operated through its representatives on SESTRANS. The council is saying that the issue should be treated not as a Borders problem but as a south-east Scotland problem, as the Parliament tries to balance the demand for housing land and quality workers in Edinburgh with a supply that exists in the Borders, but is not readily accessible. The vision that Scottish Borders Council has tried to put across in that argument has much to commend it.

I appreciate that the minister was necessarily constrained in what she could say the Executive could do in response, and about the time scale in which the Executive can act. It will not be easy to find the £75 million for a central Borders railway in the transport budget, much less the £200 million that the full line would cost. That is a genuine challenge for the minister, and I try to score no political points. If I were—remarkably—the Minister for Transport and the Environment, it would be no easier for me to find that money. I would also say, albeit with a degree of trepidation, that were Christine Grahame the Minister for Transport and the Environment, even she might struggle to find £200 million just like that.

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): Will Mr Tosh give way?

Mr Tosh: I anticipate the point that is coming, and I shall respond to it later.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Answer it.

Mr Tosh: I shall answer it later on.

There are pressures on the minister’s budget. The Parliament has just gone through a budget process in which we have seen how the momentum of existing commitments and programmes is carried forward. In that process, none of us suggested any amendments that suddenly lifted £100 million from one area and put

it in another. We all know that there are considerable competing claims on the transport budget, and many of us have spoken in favour of those competing claims. The problem is not an easy one to resolve. However, I shall make three suggestions of ways in which the Executive might realistically fund a Borders railway line.

The one area of the transport budget in which there is genuine discretion and no commitment to local authorities, motorway programmes or rail subsidies is the challenge fund. That fund is worth £90 million over three years. The whole of Scotland, outside the Borders, has a rail network and receives the benefit of the ScotRail subsidy. Is there perhaps a case for the £90 million in the transport challenge fund to be earmarked for the Scottish Borders for the years 2005 to 2008?

All over Scotland, I find huge good will towards the Borders and an awareness of the area's problems. I venture to suggest that the sense of justice which is strong in the Scottish character would lead people to accept that, for a time, there is a case for making the Borders a priority within existing budgets. That is not in any way to belittle the projects that are funded under the transport challenge fund at present.

Mr MacAskill: Does the member accept that the construction cost of one station on the Jubilee line—between £70 million and £100 million—would pay for the construction of the Borders rail line at least as far as Tweedbank?

Mr Tosh: I understand the SNP's agenda when it tries to play off socially excluded working-class communities in greater London or Manchester against comparable communities in Scotland. However, there is—sometimes—a core of sense in what Kenny MacAskill says.

Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): When?

Mr Tosh: I often struggle to find it, but it is there if we look for it.

The second and third points that I want to make relate to the resources of Westminster rather than those of this Parliament. The ScotRail franchise—and this point has often been skated over without our debating its substance—was set up with an annual subsidy of £300 million. In the course of its seven years, that annual subsidy is declining to £200 million. That is good—getting the same service for a declining subsidy is good. But who will benefit from the £100 million a year that is saved? That £100 million is part of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's surplus. I suggest that there is a gap in the McLeish settlement—a settlement that did not find a way to keep under the authority of this Executive the savings as the ScotRail subsidy declined in real terms. We could do an awful lot of work on Scotland's railway

infrastructure with that sort of money.

It is not unrealistic for us to say that that money should be made available here. Among all the rumours that we hear about big allocations of money for transport, the press frequently notes that the strategic rail authority is to receive substantial additional sums. However, that money will be under the control of the strategic rail authority, not the Scottish Executive. The Scottish Executive has a pro rata share of the freight facilities grant. Why should it not have a pro rata share of the infrastructure fund and the rail passenger funding schemes that are available through the strategic rail authority? That seems to me to be part of the logic of an evolving, devolved system of government. If big sums of money—really big sums of money—are to be made available, we have to be assured that we in Scotland will have a mechanism to access that money and that we will be able to inform the debate of criteria that may not apply in urban England but that do indeed apply in scattered and disaggregated rural areas of Scotland, where different economic and social conditions obtain.

My third and final point concerns the press announcement that came from "Government sources" this week. The announcement updated the rumours from earlier this year that Mr Prescott would have £80 billion: he will now have £140 billion over 10 years. Apparently there will be an announcement in July. If that extra money is coming, that is good news and I am pleased. We could do a lot with that money.

It can be difficult to interpret Westminster statements, because the same sum of money gets used over and over and over again, but this Parliament and this Executive is committed to transparency. When the announcement is made, let us find out from the Scottish Executive what additional funding we will get. What will be the pro rata consequences in Scotland of a big increase in transport expenditure for the UK? That additional sum of money is committed to no one else, so it will not be a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul. From that additional money, let us consider earmarking money for the funding of the Borders rail line during the three or four years that it will take to develop it in the earlier part of the new century.

10:39

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I am grateful to Alex Johnstone and his committee for allocating all of their parliamentary day to a debate that may, on the surface, appear to be just a local issue, but that, in truth, will resonate far beyond the Borders. I hope that today's debate will prove to be a defining moment in the economic and social life of the

Scottish Borders. I hope, too, that it will prove to be a significant moment in the life of the Scottish Parliament.

I pay tribute to those who have helped to bring us to this point, including Borders Transport Futures, the Campaign for Borders Rail, Scottish Borders Council and Scottish Borders Enterprise, our colleagues at Westminster and in all parties in the Scottish Parliament. We work together on an important project where, as Christine Grahame said, party differences ought not to matter too much. Above all, I pay tribute to the people of the Borders, who signed the petition, who have come here today and who gave memorable evidence to the Parliament's Public Petitions Committee when it visited Galashiels. Without all that work we would not be here today to make what I hope is history.

I do not want to dwell too long on the past, except to say that an amazing number of Borderers vividly remember and still feel the sadness and anger that accompanied the closure of the Waverley line, which foolishly and short-sightedly cut the Borders off from the rest of the country's network to the north and south, with immeasurable consequences for the economic life of the area. Christine Grahame has outlined the economic problems created, which we are all familiar with and that have come to a head in recent years. Sarah Boyack mentioned the help we got from the Government, from Gus Macdonald and Brian Wilson. Two good things came out of that: the new ways economic strategy and the feasibility study. The feasibility study helped to silence the cynics because it proved that a link to the central Borders was and is viable—it can be built and it can be viable.

The benefits for Borderers will be substantial, in terms of jobs and of social inclusion, helping us as a community to belong to the mainstream of Scottish life. They will include expanded tourism, increased educational opportunities and a truly strategic transport strategy. We need a hub where the transport links can be drawn together—at the moment the buses are all over the place. Above all, the rail link would transform the psychology of the Borderers. We would be able to see ourselves as a dynamic, forward-looking community, not languishing but moving forward, not passive but active, not waiting for something to turn up but with a new, positive focus—not drowning but waving.

Parliament can today throw the Borders a lifeline that will transform the prospects of one of the most beautiful, characterful areas of our country. It is an area with fine workers who have never let any employers down, with good schools, a strong sense of local community and tradition and a proud sense of self-worth. It has a quality of life

that is the envy of almost everyone who takes the trouble to get to know our towns, villages and valleys—I see a Borderer over there nodding.

Why should Parliament back the railway? There are many reasons but one is equity and social justice. The Borders have not done well from public investment. The Highlands and Islands have been more effective in attracting funds, with access to European grants, a strong brand image and a great deal of cultural pressure. In the Borders we have been less assertive but we are changing. We are establishing a brand. We have fine foods and hotels and quality in all sorts of things. We have good co-operation between agencies such as the council and the enterprise company. However, the fact that there are 57 railway stations in the Highlands and none in the Borders is unanswerable.

The second main reason I pick out is choice in transport, which the Minister for Transport and the Environment spoke about recently. In my constituency there is no choice in transport. We have no coastline, so we cannot complain about ferries. We have no air link, there are no dual carriageways—nothing. We have a rickety bus service run on rural roads, and there is really no choice but cars. That means social exclusion on a big scale. I ask the minister to give us mainstream access to help us to improve the transport system.

I wish to consider the project now with a wider focus. Let us not think that the line is just for the Borders. Let us get away from the idea that we are coming looking for vast sums of money for the Borders. It is not just expenditure, it is investment; and it is not just for the Borders, it is for Edinburgh. The new line attacks problems of pollution, congestion and pressure on housing. It helps solve pressures on the labour market. It provides Edinburgh residents with access to a treasure house of day trip opportunities, cultural activities, activity breaks and just plain days out for a holiday. It provides opportunities to develop Midlothian's south-east wedge and to establish a flourishing suburban rail link to the capital, with all the benefits that that would confer.

I say again—it is not just for the Borders; it offers Scotland a new line through to Carlisle for freight, and an alternative route for passenger traffic. No one ever says or thinks that the west Highland line is just for west Highlanders; it is for you and for me and for the whole of Scotland. It is a national treasure, as would be the restored Waverley line—a new line for a new nation.

The project should be seen as a flagship project for this new Parliament in a new millennium. It should be a symbol of our being able to do things differently now—a millennium project that means something and which really does something. Let us push aside contentious issues and wipe them

off the front pages with some good news of a Scottish Parliament at work. We should remember that five committees of this Parliament have listened positively to the petition. They have seen its relevance to broadly agreed policies and stances on transport, sustainability, rural development, social inclusion and enterprise and lifelong learning. All those policies are embodied in a single flagship project.

Today, at a stroke, we can change people's attitudes to the Scottish Parliament. Here we have an accessible and listening Parliament—although not as accessible to Borderers today as it would be on other weeks, but never mind—which can put good things into practice that Westminster simply could not or would not have done. We talk about Scottish solutions for Scottish problems. We have Scottish problems in the Borders. Let us start solving them here today.

I acknowledge that there are difficulties with funding, particularly for funding the whole line at once. Everybody accepts that, and Murray Tosh's contribution helped us focus on that. I am delighted that the Executive did not decide to amend the motion. We all have reservations about how fast we can proceed, but this Parliament will give the project whole-hearted backing today.

We in the Conservatives are eager that, working all together, we can bring the railway back to the Borders. I urge the Executive to take up the challenge and to show us an Executive that is listening; a partnership Government that is working; a Parliament that is shaping a positive future for our nation. Bring back the railway for the sake of the Borders, but bring it back also for the Parliament and for the Scottish people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The debate is now open. Speeches will be of four to five minutes, plus interventions.

10:47

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): A portion of my constituency could be considered to be in the Borders. My constituency generally borders on the Borders, so I am particularly happy to speak in support of the motion.

It cannot be denied that the Borders has been particularly poorly served against the standards of the rest of Scotland. As Christine Grahame said, the Borders has a population of more than 100,000, yet they have no railway station. That puts the Borders in a unique position with regard to its bargaining for funding, compared with other areas of Scotland. More than 70 per cent of the population of the Borders live more than 30 miles from any rail station. As a consequence, car ownership is the highest in mainland Scotland, despite the area being one of low wages and low

domestic product.

The first reason for which the rail link is important is getting people to work. I have been involved in a campaign in my constituency to introduce an early morning train from Lockerbie to Edinburgh. Incidentally, it looks like that might have been successful. That will allow people in Lockerbie to work in Edinburgh but live in beautiful Dumfriesshire. That must be good for the economy of the area, as well as being good for the people who live in Dumfriesshire. The same is true for the Borders, as a good train service would encourage people to travel to work by public transport, rather than taking their cars. As Ian Jenkins said, that would be good for Edinburgh, as it would reduce the capital's congestion problems, which exercise the minds of many MSPs as we travel around the city.

Reinstating the rail line would also be good for tourism. As we know, the Borders, which is within striking distance of Edinburgh and Glasgow, has splendid and varied scenery and a rich history, but tourists can access the area only by car. As some of the more traditional industries decline, it will become increasingly important for the area to realise its tourist potential.

The promotion of the south of Scotland generally as a tourist destination must be much improved. Recently, I attended the Scottish Tourist Board's fair in Glasgow, where I was depressingly struck by how poorly represented the south of Scotland was. While the area tourist boards were present, very few industries were represented, in comparison with the efforts put into the fair by the cities, the Highlands and Islands, the western isles, Orkney and so on. The south of Scotland remains neglected, and it is unfortunate that it is often seen as that bit of Scotland between the English border and the cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. We must do much more to promote the area, and reinstating the rail line is an important part of that work.

I will argue the case for the reinstatement of the entire line from Edinburgh to Carlisle, although I recognise that that would take a long time. I heard, and was encouraged by, the minister's comments that she recognised the potential of reinstating the entire line. I support the idea of "to Galashiels and beyond", although that sounds rather like a misquotation of Buzz Lightyear. That would link the Waverley line into the Dumfries and Galloway network by allowing people to change trains at Carlisle. The Dumfries and Galloway network reaches up into Upper Nithsdale and passes through Ayrshire into Kilmarnock, Troon, Prestwick, Ayr and Girvan. While people are able to travel by train throughout parts of the south of Scotland, reopening the Waverley line would give visitors a great opportunity to explore the Borders.

That would also allow residents in the south of the Borders to commute by train to work in Carlisle, although I do not think that that is as major an issue as commuting to Edinburgh.

Most of all, reopening the line is important for freight, particularly given the increase in timber traffic in the south of Scotland and the Borders. Recently, some serious—and fatal—road accidents have taken place in the Langholm and Sibbaldie areas in my constituency. In one case, a timber lorry was directly implicated in the deaths of two people and the state of the roads used by timber lorries seems to have contributed to another accident. We must learn the lessons of those accidents because more and more trees in the south of Scotland are reaching maturity and will be harvested. Therefore, it is essential that, as far as possible, freight is transferred from road to rail. Although some timber will always travel by road, it is important that we promote the use of rail.

As other members said, funding is the main issue. I believe that any and all possible methods of funding for the reinstatement of the Waverley line must be investigated. I hope that the SRA will have a significant involvement in funding, but, like Alex Johnstone and Ian Jenkins, I realise that probably we will have to seek other funding partners. Nevertheless, we have today an opportunity that is important to the Borders and to the south of Scotland and that we must seize.

10:52

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I have not deliberately moved away from my colleagues in some split over this issue. Apparently, the Parliament's equivalent to leaves on the line is dust in the consoles, which are not all working.

There is only one question to discuss today. It is a disappointment to Christine Grahame, to all the MSPs who represent South of Scotland and the Borders and to me that that question has not been answered yet today. That question is, "When will this railway line be built?" There is no other question. We know that the case for the railway line is unanswerable—it is highly unlikely that any member will rise to their feet in the chamber today to say that there should not be a Borders railway. From the strength of feeling within the Borders, from the 20,000 signatures on the petition, from the meeting held by the Public Petitions Committee on this issue, from the lobbying that we have received and from the long-term campaigns, we know that the question, "When will this railway line be built?" is the only one.

Mr Tosh put that question in the correct context of a list of transport priorities—both the priorities of

UK money, which comes from south of the border, and those of the Minister for Transport and the Environment, who is not here. It is her transport priorities that she has to answer for. People who listen to or read her speech will be tremendously disappointed, because almost her first comment was that she must avoid making rash promises. It is not difficult for Sarah Boyack to avoid making rash promises—it is her lifestyle. She avoids making any promises at all. Nowhere in her speech did she say where a Borders rail link lies in her priorities. There was the usual lengthy new Labour-speak about reports, consultants, issues and taking things slowly.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): Will the member give way?

Michael Russell: I will give way to the member in a second. He always gets excited when he is defending the partnership Executive.

In her speech the minister gave no indication of whether she wanted to see a Border rail link this year, next year, some time or never. That is the first disappointment.

Tavish Scott: Is a Borders rail link the SNP's No 1 transport spending priority? Has the member discussed that with his transport spokesman?

Michael Russell: That is a very interesting question. No 1, No 2 or No 3—it is a priority. It does not appear to be a priority of the Executive.

I believe that the time has come to build the Borders rail link. Tavish Scott's colleagues believe that, too. Mr Jenkins appeared to indicate—

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Michael Russell: Not just now. I know that the member is a regular rail traveller, but he goes north. We are talking about southerly routes.

At the end of his speech, Mr Jenkins indicated in his usual elegant and gentle way that the partnership might be at risk if this line was not built. However, he did not say whether that would happen this year, next year or the year after that. He is now tapping his nose as if he knows—somebody has told him when the partnership is coming to an end, thank goodness. We must know when this line will be built.

By saying that this is a long-term game, the minister added insult to injury. This is a very long-term game. I will not insult the Presiding Officer, but at the beginning of this debate he revealed to us that he was on the last train from the Borders, and he is no spring chicken. This has been a 30-year game. Even if the funding for a Borders rail link were found today, it would be four or five years before it was built.

We must get answers today. It is excellent that

this is the second debate on this issue to be held by this Parliament, but it is not, as Mr Jenkins said, an historic debate or an historic day. The historic day will be when the line is built, when the Borders is opened up once again to the rest of Scotland, and when the terrible mistake of 30 years ago to which Mr Jenkins referred is overcome. On that day the people of the Borders will be able to open their newspapers and no longer see a list of national transport priorities that includes tramlines for Manchester, investment in Nottingham, a Docklands light railway, double-decker trains and a Borders railway about which the Executive says, "We are committed to this, but we won't tell you when, we won't tell you how, and it won't happen." That is the problem with this debate.

10:57

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Mr Mike Russell is absolutely right to say that a Borders rail link is a very high priority for all of us and that it should be built as soon as possible. This Parliament expects action and the people demand nothing less.

Today's debate is both unique and significant. It is unique because this is the first time a public petition to this Parliament has resulted in a full parliamentary debate. It is significant because a reinstated Borders rail link is of crucial importance not just to individuals and communities in the Borders and to commuters from Edinburgh, but to the wider aim of achieving a viable and effective rail service in Scotland. It is relevant to people who live in Edinburgh and commute to the Borders for work and, more important, to people who live in the Borders and commute to Edinburgh. Virtually all those persons commute by bus or car, and many would opt for rail if that choice existed.

I congratulate warmly the members of the Campaign for Borders Rail on bringing this vital issue to the Parliament's attention. The fact that the campaign, which started less than 18 months ago, was able in less than three months to collect more than 17,000 signatures for its petition is testament to the strength of feeling that exists throughout the Borders concerning the reopening of a commercially viable rail line. I add our wholehearted support to that extremely worthwhile and important cause. I do so, in part, in the interests of lessening traffic congestion in and around Edinburgh.

Of much greater importance, however, is the role that a rail link would play in enhancing the industrial and employment prospects of people throughout the Borders. It would afford an important boost to the region's tourism industry and to its general well-being. Those advantages are made all the more apparent with the conclusions of the recently published Borders rail

report, which made it clear that a re-established line would be economically viable and bring substantial social, economic and environmental benefits. We should now take this matter forward and re-establish the rail line running from Edinburgh to Carlisle. Re-establishing such a link would have important benefits from Edinburgh to the Borders. It would make the area much more accessible for industry and development and help to create badly needed job opportunities.

The Borders has recently been badly hit by factory closures. It would benefit from a rail link, which would provide an alternative to the congested road system. New businesses have unfortunately perceived the Borders as somewhat remote from suppliers, markets and business contacts, but with a rail link they would be far more likely to invest speedily in the area. A recent study found that the Borders is at the bottom of the weekly earnings table in Scotland. A rail link would undoubtedly address that situation. Such a link would be environmentally friendly and improve access to the Borders for tourism. It would reduce social isolation in Borders communities and reduce the net loss of talented young people who are moving elsewhere for educational purposes.

Great North Eastern Railway Ltd produced a report this year which said that rail-linked areas enjoy better prospects socially, economically and industrially than areas that are not rail linked, as rail use by passengers and freight increases. A fully reopened route would provide direct and fast links not only to England, but to Europe and its markets. It would benefit Edinburgh, Midlothian and Scotland, as well as the Borders.

There is great potential in the Borders for all kinds of freight traffic: timber products, agricultural produce, aggregates and fuel and oils, to mention a few. Borders forests are set to produce 750,000 tonnes of timber a year for the next 20 years. That timber has to be moved from the forests to the consumer. At present, there is only one option: to send such produce along the region's congested roads. That must be changed. Beattock yard is an example of what can be done. Six days a week, a 20-wagon train leaves there for north Wales pulp mills. That is the equivalent of 120 lorry loads a week. That only scratches the surface of what could be moved from pick-up points in the Borders on the Waverley route.

The history of reopened and newly constructed lines has been one of success, an example of which is the reopened Bathgate line. The re-emergence of the Settle to Carlisle route as a major line for freight and passenger traffic is another example.

In 1869, folk from Hawick travelled to Edinburgh by train in two and a half hours. In the 21st century, Hawick folk can take two and a quarter hours to

travel to Edinburgh on public transport. We clearly have to give all the support we can to the resurrection of a viable Borders rail link with a much faster service. The technology exists. The track bed largely remains. The local and regional will is strong and the resources would be available if the political will existed. This could be a flagship project for Edinburgh and for Scotland, not only making the Borders a well-served area, but bringing investment and economic prosperity to individuals throughout the area. I hope that the Scottish Executive and ministers will see this as a strategically important economic, industrial and social issue in Scotland and will give the proposals for a Borders line all the necessary support to achieve the desired solution in the best interests of the Borders and Scotland.

Tavish Scott: We are curious about the time when Lord James was transport minister in the Conservative Administration. He says that reinstating the Borders railway as soon as possible is a priority. What measures did he take to do that?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We made many advances with regard to the road infrastructure in Scotland. Rail was not the responsibility of the Scottish Office, so it was not my personal responsibility, but I wish to make it clear that the evidence is plain and unmistakable: the rail link should be a high priority. If the Parliament endorses this motion, I hope that the Executive will respond. Incidentally, I do not see any minister of the Executive in the chamber. On an issue of this importance they should be summoned to the chamber immediately.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. This is about respect for the dignity of this Parliament and respect for its committee process. Can I have your guidance on the appropriateness of no minister from the Executive being present to hear the debate at this moment? It is not appropriate that that should be the case. Can you do anything about it?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is nothing in the standing orders that requires the presence of a minister. That is a matter for the judgment of the chamber.

11:04

Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): I would like to take the place of a minister, but I do not think that the Scottish Executive would be entirely happy at that prospect.

I will begin by paying tribute to everyone who has made this debate possible. I return the compliment to Christine Grahame, who first suggested that the Public Petitions Committee go

to the Borders to receive this petition and set the parliamentary ball rolling. We have secured a debate in Parliament in much quicker time than it has taken Glasgow Celtic to replace John Barnes as manager. We should be proud of that, although I hope that Celtic will get its act together sooner or later.

The meeting in March in Galashiels was the first occasion when the Public Petitions Committee ventured forth from Edinburgh; it was a quite extraordinary occasion. Top of our agenda that day was the 20,000 strong petition for the reinstatement of the Borders rail link. As Christine Grahame said, it attracted an astounding public attendance at the committee. At the time I described it as amazing—more than 200 people were packed into the Volunteer Hall in Galashiels. Without a word being uttered, the strength of feeling across political parties and across civic society in the Borders that, as a priority, this rail link has to be reinstated by those in power—whether in this Parliament or at Westminster—became obvious to everyone present.

We heard a lot of evidence that day from a wide range of witnesses. Many of them were members of the Campaign for Borders Rail. The people who gave evidence included older people, middle-aged people, young people and even a teenager. MSPs from all parties—not just members of the committee, but other MSPs from the Borders—were present. We even had MPs in the form of Archy Kirkwood and Michael Moore who—unlike some of their Westminster colleagues—have no problem giving evidence to a committee of this Parliament. All of them spoke with one voice: which stressed the urgency and necessity of reinstating this rail link.

What struck me was the common theme throughout all the speeches: the deeply felt sense of injustice and grievance that the Borders should be the only mainland region in the United Kingdom that is without a rail service. I was struck by one comparison the witnesses made: that between the Borders and the Highland region. The Highland region has a population of around 220,000 and is sometimes thought of as a neglected area. It has 57 railway stations. The Borders, which has more than half that population, does not have one railway station in its area. That is not fair, it is not right and it is unjust. As a member of the Public Petitions Committee who had the privilege of being in Galashiels that afternoon, I give my full and unqualified support to the campaign to make it a priority that the rail link be restored in the Borders.

Some people would say, "You are not from the Borders. You are an exiled Glaswegian who has chosen to spend most of your life in Scotland's other great city—Dundee. What has this got to do

with you or the constituents you represent?" It might seem obvious to say that it does not have a lot to do with me or my constituents directly. What seems obvious is not always right. It seems to me that this as much an issue for the rest of Scotland as it is for the Borders. We must ask ourselves what kind of Scotland we want to live in. Do we want a Scotland that is decent, inclusive and offers fairness and justice to every Scot, wherever they happen to live in Scotland, or do we want a Scotland where individual MSPs look after only the region they come from? What kind of MSPs do we want to be? Do we want to be 129 atomised individuals who clash against each other all the time and always put ourselves and our constituents first, or do we believe that sometimes we have to think of the whole of Scotland rather than a part of it? I think that Scotland is a better country than that; supporting the reinstatement of the link would be an important signal that Scotland is different from other countries and that it wants to be inclusive.

Ultimately, we return to the matter of money. The resources that are available to the Parliament are scarce. Murray Tosh is right to say that it will not be easy to find funding, but we have all seen leaked reports of the announcement that is due to be made next month about the £140 billion that will be released by the Westminster Government to overhaul the creaking transport system. According to the press this morning, Scotland's share of that sum will be £12 billion over the next 10 years.

Of course, not all the money will be spent on railways—some of it will be spent on roads—but the SRA is letting it be known that it regards the future railway investment as meaning big improvements to the links between Glasgow and Edinburgh to London on the east and west-coast main lines. As I have said before, Scotland is more than the Glasgow-Edinburgh axis. The other parts of Scotland, including the Borders, deserve their share of resources. The time has long passed when the Borders deserved this investment.

At time for reflection this morning, Captain Christopher Connelly of the Salvation Army reminded us about Neil Armstrong setting foot on the moon more than 30 years ago. It was about then that it became impossible to travel from the Borders to Edinburgh by rail. Sometime in the past 30 years, we got our priorities drastically wrong. It is time for us to put them right again by supporting the campaign and finding the money to make the Borders rail link happen immediately.

11:10

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): As I was born and brought up in Patna, I agree with John McAllion that Scotland is much more than the

Glasgow-Edinburgh axis.

I will concentrate on the benefits of the Borders rail link to the wider Scottish economy. The current pressure on the Edinburgh economy, which is likely to be exacerbated over the next two decades or so, has not been mentioned. The City of Edinburgh Council produced a report a couple of months ago that predicted that up to 25,000 new jobs will be created in Edinburgh over the next few years. We all know about the pressures on the property market in Edinburgh, as young people in particular find it extremely difficult to find accommodation that is within their reach. We also know about the pressures on the labour market in Edinburgh. Businesses often find it difficult to recruit people, particularly those with the skills they require.

We are in danger of recreating in Scotland the position of the south-east of England vis-à-vis the rest of the country—one small pocket becomes overheated while the rest of the country certainly does not overheat and, in some places, such as the Borders, is in a state of depression. The economic conditions in the Borders are the opposite of those prevailing in Edinburgh. The Borders has an average wage level that is 10 per cent below the Scottish average and a level of unemployment that is high and rising. It faces the prospect of major deindustrialisation and depopulation, particularly among the young people who are required to resuscitate the local economy.

I hope that the rail link will help to regenerate the economy of the Borders and take some of the pressure off Edinburgh. It would give people who are unemployed in the Borders greater access to the wider labour market in Edinburgh and the surrounding area. It would also allow companies that can no longer expand in the Edinburgh area because of lack of accommodation or appropriate labour to examine the Borders as a realistic alternative location for investment. It would allow the property market in the Borders to develop while removing some of the inflationary pressures in the property market in Edinburgh. On this occasion, what is good for the Borders is also good for Edinburgh and the wider Lothian and Scottish economy.

It is important to register that this is not a parochial issue about how we link up the Borders or tackle its economic problems; it is a national issue about how we maximise the resources and potential of the Scottish economy and the Scottish people. Neither is this only a transport or railway issue; it is a wider issue of economic and social development and ensuring access for people in the Borders to greater economic and social opportunities.

Mike Russell touched on the key question of when the link will happen. There are two points.

First, when it happens is unfortunately not the decision of this Parliament, although it should be. The minister referred to the McLeish settlement, part of which was that the minister would be able to issue instructions to the rail authority. That has now been reneged upon. The minister should reinstate the word and spirit of the McLeish convention so that this Parliament controls the decision making.

John McAllion has already covered my second point, which is about the money. There are two reports in the papers this morning, the first on the UK transport budget for the next 10 years. We are told that £140 billion will be made available. Scotland's share of that should be roughly £14 billion. Surely out of that £14 billion we can find the money for the Borders rail link.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member give way?

Alex Neil: I am winding up.

Sarah Boyack: Who are you winding up?

Alex Neil: I am obviously winding the minister up.

We are told that Scotland's share of the comprehensive spending review will be £12 billion over the next few years. The money is available—money should not be the argument.

Today's debate is a litmus test of the Parliament. Are we an assembly that is able to debate the issue, full of motherhood and apple pie, or are we a Parliament that can deliver for the people of Scotland?

11:16

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): That was a good fundamentalist speech from Alex Neil. It contrasted with Mike Russell's gradualist speech, which is presumably why he has gone. I thought Mike Russell had gone to sort out whether this is priority No 1, No 2 or No 3, but it is now obvious that he left because he knew what was coming next.

As Murray Tosh said, this is Scotland and we need to sort this out in the context of the Scottish budget. I thought that Murray, in an uncharacteristically calm performance, put his finger on many of the important factors about the overall budget.

Ian Jenkins's point about the Scottish Parliament getting on to the front foot and doing something positive and important, not only in a local or regional sense, but in a Scotland-wide sense, was important too and I hope that it will be considered.

I support the motion lodged by Alex Johnstone and the Rural Affairs Committee. It is important that the Parliament has the opportunity to debate

the Borders rail link. I note also that there is a pretty good turnout, which has not always been the case for committee debates. Usually, just committee members turn up. It is good to see colleagues from across the political spectrum here to make a contribution.

In an increasingly competitive world, transport and infrastructure links are important for the vibrancy and sustainability of many communities. That applies to the Borders as much as it applies to any other part of Scotland. I share the desire of the multitude of campaigners on this issue—national and local politicians and the people involved in all the campaigning efforts mentioned this morning—to see the Borders rail link reinstated.

My grandparents used to live in the Yarrow valley. They were constituents of the local MP who was, as my grandmother reminded me on the phone last night, a young David Steel. It was he who intervened 30 years ago to stop a local minister in Newcastle, who had said that he was going to block the line, being arrested. Direct action may not be the appropriate mechanism today, but in times past they have been considered.

Today's politicians must work with local agencies and all involved in the process to make progress towards reinstatement of the link. My colleagues in this Parliament, Ian Jenkins and Euan Robson, have augmented the work of Michael Moore and Archy Kirkwood.

John McAllion mentioned the progress of the Transport Bill at Westminster. Some important comments on the strategic rail authority and what could happen have been made there. When the bill went into committee on 21 March, Michael Moore proposed an amendment that would have added two purposes to the SRA: to identify unmet needs for railway services and to expand the railway network where appropriate. The amendment would have put the onus on the SRA to be involved in the process. That follows on from the Scott Wilson study.

During the Westminster debate, Michael Moore pointed out that the SRA's director of external relations visited the Borders on 20 March to discuss the findings of the feasibility study. Considerable progress has been made as a result of the efforts of the campaign. It is worth quoting Keith Hill, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. In reply to Michael Moore's amendment, he said:

"The SRA will have powers to assist reopenings and will consider proposals, taking into account a range of factors including the environment, accessibility and value for money against competing demands . . . Where schemes appear to the SRA to fit its strategies for securing the development of the railway network, it will need to consider

how the new scheme could be encouraged.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons, Standing Committee E, 28 March 2000; c 1193-94.*]

It would be helpful if the minister could give us some assurances that the Scottish Executive is applying pressure to ensure that the helpful answer given in Westminster and other such points are being pursued.

The SRA is one part of the equation, but many others must be involved in the financing of the plans. The Liberal Democrats do not have any ideological opposition. We want the line to be reinstated and to ensure that the necessary finance is available. As Murray Tosh said, there is considerable pressure on the Scottish budget; all options must be considered carefully. Midlothian Council might want to consider whether the £18 million that is currently earmarked for the A701 might be better spent on an integrated transport solution including the Waverley line.

Reinstating the Waverley line is a key component of local transport strategy for the Scottish Borders. If the project does not progress, the Borders will not be part of integrated transport options. The Executive and several publications support the contention that we must give people transport options. As colleagues have said, that choice is not available at present. In addition, the forthcoming Scottish transport bill may give local authorities a power to introduce city road pricing. If that happens in Edinburgh, Borders drivers will have no option, because they will be paying a charge to get into Edinburgh. It is important that options are available to people travelling from the Borders for work or leisure activities.

It is important that the Parliament and the Executive take a lead on the issue by supporting the Waverley line. We must give the funding bodies the encouragement to drive the need and begin progress on the reinstatement of the Borders railway without delay.

11:22

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I, too, welcome the debate. I thank all those honest, decent Borders folk who have campaigned tirelessly to re-establish the line and who have brought us to this point. Their case was taken up by the Labour Government in 1997, when Gus Macdonald commissioned the feasibility study. That study has moved the re-establishment of a Borders rail link from a nice possibility to a real agenda for change.

For 20 years I lived, studied and, very occasionally, worked in the Borders, in what is no doubt the most beautiful place in Scotland—Jedburgh. My mother still lives there. She does not drive, does not have a car and is wholly reliant on

public transport. It takes a four-hour journey for her to come to visit me in Lanarkshire—a journey that costs one fifth of her weekly wage. The case for a Borders rail link is one of which I am personally aware.

As a child, I remember walking with my grandparents along the old line, past Riverside park up to Bonjedward. We could walk for miles along what used to be the railway. My grandparents talked about the days when the railway was there. My mother remembers the Spittal trip and the train journey through the countryside to the seaside. I will never forget taking my eight-year-old godson up to Edinburgh for the day and his joy in riding on a train for the first time—although we only went as far as Haymarket. However, that is the only way for a Borders boy to go on a train. I do not need to be convinced by outsiders of the need for a rail link in the Borders.

I had to leave Jedburgh to go to university; I did not have the choice of commuting. Once someone has moved away, it is hard to find a job that enables them to come back. That is why so many of our young people are not able to return. Believe me, I tried.

I will not take any lectures from the Tories about the priority that they attach to a Borders rail link. During 18 years of Tory misrule, they did absolutely nothing—

Mr Tosh rose—

Karen Gillon: Sit down, Murray. Actions speak louder than words. What did the Tories do—

Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Karen Gillon: I will not take any lectures from you lot either.

The Tories did nothing to reinstate the Borders railway. The railway is not, and must not become, a political football.

Mr Tosh: Will the member give way?

Karen Gillon: No. Sit down.

The railway is far too important to be used as a political football, and it cannot become part of a false argument that pits Scotland against England. If extra money is to go to transport in the rest of the UK, we will get consequential cash in the same way as usual.

I am surprised that Kenny MacAskill sets so much store by press speculation. If everything in the press is true, as Kenny MacAskill made out, I assume that he is getting ready to challenge Alex Salmond for leadership of the nat pack.

I welcome the minister's honesty in saying that

she will not promise something that she cannot deliver. Borders people will respect that.

I point out to Alex Neil that the McLeish settlement is established in the UK Transport Bill and that we have statutory authority for Scottish services.

When extra cash becomes available, we will all vie for that cash for our constituencies. I will campaign for cash for the Larkhall rail link; Mike Russell tells my constituents that that is his priority. Lewis Macdonald and John McAllion will campaign for extra cash for the east coast main line; Kenny MacAskill tells their constituents that that is his priority. Ian Jenkins and Euan Robson—rightly—will campaign for the Borders rail link to be the No 1 priority; Christine Grahame says that that is her priority. Mike Russell says the same, and Kenny MacAskill says that it is his No 1 priority. There will be extra cash—we will all vie for it—but the cases will have to be put.

Let us be in no doubt that the case for the Borders rail link—

Mr Tosh: Will the member give way?

Karen Gillon: I must finish; I have only two minutes.

The Borders rail link is a priority for the Labour party. If it had not been, we would never have undertaken the feasibility study or put measures in place to work out whether the link could be feasible. The real debate is not about where the Borders rail link should end, but about the very fact that it begins. My personal preference is that if the line is to stop somewhere in the Borders, it should stop at St Boswells. That would connect the bottom part of the Borders to the rail link and mean that shuttle bus services could run from Kelso, Hawick, and even from Jedburgh, up to St Boswells to make the important journey north to Edinburgh.

Ideally, in future, the link should be extended to Carlisle, if that is feasible and economically viable. The important point is for everyone to continue to campaign, and work together—as we have done over the years—to make the rail link happen. If the rail link does not start, it will never finish. For the Borders people, the railway is far too important to be pitted as one person's priority against another's.

I welcome the minister's comments that she will continue to look at the issue, and I know that Ian Jenkins and Euan Robson will not let it go. Together, we can make the Borders rail link a reality, not just a pipe dream.

11:28

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): There is a

good teaching maxim that we could use—on this issue and others—vis-à-vis the Executive: "Tell them. Tell them again. Tell them you've told them."

The reopening of the Carlisle connection through the Borders is without doubt the most telling and important contribution the Executive could make to the rejuvenation of the rural economy of southern Scotland.

First, what is the alternative? Improvement in transport and infrastructure is vital if tourism, agriculture and manufacturing are to flourish in the Borders, but would major road-building projects be the answer? The terrain is such that such projects would be hugely expensive and unsightly and would destroy the feel of the landscape. In the long term, a new road would do no more than provide an alternative to the east and west coast routes that would, inevitably, fill with through traffic and, as a consequence, have negative impacts on the Borders. We do not need to encourage the idea of a third fast road route south.

There is a bigger picture to consider. We have signed the Rio and Kyoto international agreements, which bind us to preserving our biodiversity and reducing CO₂ emissions. I repeat again and again that the Executive should be choosing to reduce road transport. Driving a motorway through the Borders would effectively undermine and attack both agreements.

We must build this railway as soon as possible. I have selected six sound arguments for reopening the rail link. In light of my opening remarks, I do not apologise for repeating points that have already been made.

First, on efficiency, mile for mile, width for width, rail can shift two to six times as many passengers per hour as road car use options. Mile for mile, it is cheaper to build and maintain and is much the best option.

Secondly, although pollution obviously depends on use, it can be reduced by a factor of 12 in the case of passengers. I am not sure about the present figures for freight.

Thirdly, rail is far safer than road. It is sad to reflect that far more people were killed on Britain's roads in the two weeks following the Paddington rail disaster; however, that fact did not hit the headlines in the same way.

Fourthly, if we do not make an effort to persuade tourists on to trains in Scotland, our national parks and scenic areas such as the Borders will become swamped with road traffic, which will reduce enjoyment of the experience and make life impossible for people attempting to go about their daily business. Tourism is projected to double in the next 10 years. As we cannot absorb such an increase on our roads, rail transport in Scotland

must be seen as a major new player in the development of tourism, which could also deliver a significant boost to the Borders economy.

Fifthly, there have been enough detailed comments about the advantages that the rail link will bring to logging and manufacturing industries.

Finally, on house prices and commuting, there is much pressure on green-belt land around Edinburgh, some of it from people who wish to live in a rural atmosphere and commute into town. That produces far greater pressure to build more roads. I do not have time to enter into the case for compact cities, but if we wish to retain green belts and protected interior green space in our cities, it is important to recognise that the only alternative to compact cities is spur or wheel-spoke development.

As many European cities have demonstrated, rail is the only way to deliver—sustainably, environmentally and efficiently—the amenity of small-town or village life coupled with city working. Although I am no great advocate of the model, the spur principle would deliver it far more sustainably than uncontrolled city sprawl. Rail is the only solution to the transport problems posed by such development.

For the Borders, a rail link is not just necessary and vital; it is the only and obvious answer to the region's social, employment and transport problems. I support the motion and have no reservations that the concept must be "Carlisle or bust."

11:33

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): Sir David Steel began this debate by declaring that he was one of the passengers on the last train from Waverley station to the Borders. So was I, although I do not think that members in the chamber will believe that I was in my pram in the goods wagon. It was 1969. In the same year that man walked on the moon, we closed a vital transport artery in Scotland.

I will never forget that terrible day. All on board that train who were interested in rail—and who remain interested in rail and loyal to that cause 30 years on—vowed that they would seize any opportunity to try to reopen the line. Feelings were running so high in the Borders—and in Edinburgh—that there was a bomb threat to that train. Such threats were unusual in 1969. I remember a policeman on the train coming out with the immortal line that is guaranteed to panic the public, "Don't panic." Being staunch Scots, we all did the natural thing and panicked. Eventually, after being searched, the train pulled out of Waverley and made that heartbreaking journey into the gold and green borderland for what was

thought to be the last time.

Karen Gillon referred to Gus Macdonald and said that the reopening of the Waverley line was a priority for the Labour party; others have paid tribute to Gus Macdonald's supposed intervention. Anyone's intervention is welcome, but I must remind members that it was a nationalist—me—who helped kick-start that survey by involving Richard Branson. I challenged him at a public function at which he had been sitting next to Gus Macdonald. Mr Branson stated that he had not heard of the Waverley line, although he had been talking to Gus Macdonald for two hours. At that moment, Mr Branson said to Gus Macdonald and other members of the Government that they should all do something about it. The feasibility study is a result of that discussion.

Many have remained more loyal than I am to the cause of the Waverley line. The great Borders campaigners have kept going. Today, the minister talked of time capsules. She believes that reopening the Waverley line is a good idea. We all know that it is a good idea. We do not know what she is going to do about it. We listened with hope to her early remarks, but she calmed us down by pointing out that the Victorians had taken 17 years to link up part of the Waverley line. Is she proposing that we—living in the 21st century—should resort to crinoline thinking and crinoline time scales? What does she mean by that comparison? That we should wait for the next millennium before getting that line?

The minister must give us a date and impress upon her colleague Mr Prescott that he must open his box and give us the money. The money is peanuts: £74 million for half the job or £200 million for the full job. That is peanuts compared with the £1,200 million that has been spent on the extension of the Jubilee line, which will enable the public to go to the millennium dome and observe with great pleasure the waste of even larger sums of public money. More than a thousand million has been found for one corner of London, but we are unable to find a few tens of millions for a vital artery in a part of Scotland that has suffered an economic Flodden in loss of jobs and which should, geographically, be one of the most economically viable areas in Scotland.

I call on the minister to give us the timing for the reopening of the Waverley line and to tell us when she will get her friend, John Prescott, to open his box and give us the money that we deserve.

11:38

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to debate the link between railways and rural development and to congratulate those here and elsewhere who have

worked hard to put forward the case for a rail link to the Borders.

As John McAllion said, the case for the rail link was brought before Parliament in the form of a petition. I want to reflect on the objectives of that petition in the context of the objectives of the Rural Affairs Committee to promote the social and economic development of rural Scotland. The petitioners said that a rail link would make the area more accessible for industry and development, create desperately needed jobs and opportunities, provide an alternative to the road system, promote a more sustainable transport system, reduce social isolation and improve access for tourism. Those are all objectives that will be widely recognised and supported the length and breadth of rural Scotland.

Improved access for industry and development is critical to maintaining populations and sustaining skills in the north and south of Scotland. This week, the Rural Affairs Committee heard from Locate in Scotland about its efforts to attract inward investment and to create jobs. The representatives of Locate in Scotland faced hard questions about their traditional focus on the usual suspects—locations close to Glasgow and Edinburgh. However, they made it clear that they recognised the need for change—a rural investment team has been set up in the past year—and the importance of transport and communications when investment decisions are made.

Railways are particularly important in meeting the other objectives of the petitioners—providing an alternative to road transport and promoting a more sustainable transport system. As Robin Harper said, those are not just local issues. The UK has clear commitments to reducing CO₂ emissions and to slowing the global warming that threatens to wipe out much of the Scottish rural economy over the next century. There is a good case to be made for continuing to find ways—as the Executive has done—of reducing road transport costs for rural areas in which there is no alternative to road transport. There is also no way of avoiding our wider international obligations, and increased rail transport, where that is possible, offers one way in which to square that circle.

I hope that existing routes in the north and north-east of Scotland will be improved, and that routes will be extended when there is an economic case to be made for that. Reducing social isolation and promoting tourism are also objectives that railways can help to meet, not only in the Borders but throughout Scotland. The point has been made a couple of times that the Borders is the only area that lacks rail transport. It is certainly one of the areas that lacks rail transport, but, without presuming to speak for the constituency members

for Deeside, Buchan, Ullapool and Loch Ness-side, I suggest that there are other areas in which economic development could be supported by further railway development. The proposal for a Borders rail link is to be welcomed not as a uniquely deserving case, but as a case for the role that railways can play in promoting development in rural Scotland.

I welcome the minister's comments, and hope that she will take the proposal forward as part of a basket of measures for discussion with national and local bodies, recognising that both national and local investment have a role to play and that railway investment throughout Scotland can help to achieve economic development, sustainable transport and social inclusion.

11:42

Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): I had the unusual pleasure of coming to Parliament today by train. That is not something that I can do from Kelso, where I live, but I long for the day when I shall be able to do so. This important debate marks a further stage in the re-establishment of the railway in and through the Scottish Borders, which was cruelly and unjustifiably removed from our midst over the years leading up to 1969.

I echo Ian Jenkins's thanks to all those who have brought the campaign so far, many of whom are in the public gallery today, and to the many members who have attended. It is important that as many people as possible should hear the case.

In the Borders, we work in partnership. It is a natural instinct for us to work closely together, and one that has been reinforced by the economic troubles that we have endured over recent months. One of the responses of the Borders working party to our economic ills was to say, in the new ways economic strategy, that the Borders should become "a connected place". That is a multifaceted concept, but the restoration of a railway line is an objective that fits perfectly with that and thus would fulfil an existing Government policy. The Scott Wilson feasibility study was a direct consequence of the working party's efforts.

The restoration of a rail link would bring many economic benefits, several of which have been mentioned today. It would bring jobs—although we should not over-emphasise the number of jobs—and development along the corridor of the line. It may well attract commuters to live among us and work in Edinburgh or further afield, whose disposable income would boost the local economy. The railway would also bring freight opportunities, and our people would have greater access to employment, education, leisure and cultural activities in other parts of Scotland. So

many things would be far better if we had the railway line.

As Karen Gillon eloquently said, our young people—who are perhaps one of our biggest exports—would be more likely to remain with us. Incidentally, I do not think that Karen's mother will let her have investment in the Larkhall railway line before there is investment in the Borders railway, but we will see.

In the Borders, we do not consider the railway as being of benefit only to the Borders. The line would relieve Edinburgh of traffic congestion. That is a vital point and it should be stressed; I was grateful that Alex Neil eloquently did so, and that Robin Harper mentioned the effects on Midlothian as well.

The minister recently funded increased capacity on the railway line from Fife to the capital; she was right to do so, but she should remember that in the Borders we do not have the option of using a railway, except for a few of my constituents who live within reach of Berwick-upon-Tweed in north Northumberland. However, as we have said in Parliament before, a blind person who lives in that part of the Borders cannot use his or her concessionary travel ticket from Berwick-upon-Tweed.

I have told the Parliament on a number of occasions how difficult—or impossible—it is to commute from Hawick or Duns, for example. It takes more than two hours and costs more than £6 to travel from Jedburgh to Edinburgh by bus. Think of all the people who have to visit relatives or friends in hospital, and think of the patients. When we consider the cost of rebuilding our railway line, we should contrast it with the cost of perhaps building another Forth crossing.

We should bear in mind the fact that this great project to restore our railway line could win for this Parliament the gratitude of the people of the south of Scotland. As many members have said, it should be seen as a national project: national because it could create a third rail route into and out of Scotland, and national because it would join the people of the south more closely with the rest of the nation. It is for that latter reason that so many people from outside the Borders have joined the Campaign for Borders Rail. I certainly want a through route to Carlisle, and the minister did not rule that out. However, I am not interested in saying where the line should stop; the key thing is to get the line started.

I thank John McAllion for his help, for his chairing of the Public Petitions Committee in Galashiels, and for his remarks during the debate. It is good to have his support.

The feasibility study has shown us the way. The local authorities have set up an inclusive working

group in which powers from a parliamentary order could be invested; the business case will be made and the environmental impact assessment and other preparatory work will be done; but we need the help of the Scottish Executive to fund the effort. I trust that the minister will look favourably on the application for finance from the public transport fund. As long as the Executive is seen to be a willing participant, others who have been reluctant in the past will stay with the project. That is an essential ingredient for success.

Getting parliamentary orders is not necessarily easy. There might be objectors, and they will have the right to be heard in a public inquiry. While that is happening, we can look to a variety of funding arrangements. At this stage, nothing should be ruled in or out. Simplistic solutions are unwise.

The minister said that she wanted the railway network to grow. She said that we had to demonstrate that the project offered value for money, that we had to consider our priorities in the context of an integrated transport system, and that we had to look towards reduced congestion, improved access, increased inclusion, and social, economic and environmental gains. We in the Borders fit the minister's requirements, her paradigm. She was talking about the hopes of my relatives, neighbours, friends and constituents—Borders people. I urge her to back us.

11:48

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I will start by highlighting the process from which many other campaigners across Scotland could learn, I believe. I am thinking particularly of the people in Dumfries and Galloway who are campaigning for the reinstatement of the Paddy line from Dumfries to Stranraer, who could learn a great deal from the way in which campaigners for the Borders rail link have used the Public Petitions Committee of this Parliament and have brought together parliamentarians of all parties.

This has been a genuinely cross-party effort, so it was rather disappointing that Karen Gillon sought to claim credit for Labour for the initiative. It has been good to see MPs and MSPs working together, and it is important that that should happen. Archy Kirkwood and Michael Moore are to be congratulated on working with the committees of this Parliament. They are also to be congratulated on their continuing work with the A7 action group.

Nothing in the feasibility study or indeed in today's debate suggests anything other than that the reintroduction of the line would be of widespread benefit, not just for the Borders but for Scotland. However, as others have said, the recreation of the line would not in itself solve the

transport problems of rural Scotland. The economy of a large chunk of rural Scotland—as Mr Morgan said, the gap on the map, Dumfries and Galloway—will not be regenerated until its serious transport infrastructure problems are addressed.

Elaine Murray highlighted the important issue of timber freight. Villages and towns throughout the south of Scotland are subjected to lorry after lorry carrying timber. A rail link is the most sensible way to transport timber from, for example, Kielder, the largest man-made forest in Europe, to Carlisle and the markets in the south and elsewhere. As Elaine also said, the accident on the Auchenvivock section of the A7—an accident that everyone knew was waiting to happen—when timber came off a lorry and crushed fatally the two occupants of a motor vehicle, demonstrates the need to get the timber off the road and on to rail. The southern section of the Borders rail link would do that.

Others have talked about a multitude of priorities. The priority that the Minister for Transport and the Environment gives to upgrading the southern section of the A7 should not be diminished. Members from the south of Scotland from all parties want to see that section of the A7 upgraded. I hope that she will reconsider Elaine Murray's invitation to come to the Langholm area and see the road for herself.

I agreed whole-heartedly with Ian Jenkins when he said that people will judge this Parliament on the basis of concrete achievements. There could be no more concrete achievement than the rail link. I hope that in her summing up the minister will be more enthusiastic about it than she was when I proposed the reopening of Beattock station for passenger travel.

The debate on the Borders rail link has gathered a momentum that, as Christine Grahame said, many people a few years ago believed would be unlikely, and which I hope will continue. Today is an important point, but only a point in a journey—a journey that I hope will take us by train from Edinburgh to Carlisle.

11:52

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): We have had fine words and eloquent speeches—explanations and exhortations as to why the railway to and through the Borders is needed. Let us be clear: we are talking not about building a new railway but about restoring a previous network that, as a result of underfunding and short-termism, was wrongly closed. We are not coming cap in hand to ask for special treatment but seeking to restore to a constituent part of our nation what was theirs and is theirs by right.

There are two clear reasons why the Borders rail

link must be reopened. As others have said, it is a prerequisite for social and economic progress in that distinctive area. If jobs cannot be taken to the people, the least that can be done is to take people to the jobs. Initially, the work opportunities available in Edinburgh could be taken up by people from the Borders. In the longer term, it would allow the economic boom in Edinburgh to resonate outwards and southwards.

In the 21st century, we pride ourselves on looking forward, but let us learn from history. In the 19th and early part of the 20th century, opening up the rail network allowed the economic expansion of the industrial revolution. Rail lines opened up investment and towns and communities were born. It was not the cavalry but the iron horse that opened up the west, in the USA.

The corollary to social and economic expansion is social and economic decline. That is what has been happening, in substantial part as a result of poor transport infrastructure. We owe it to the Borders to restore the rail link in order to revitalise its economy and to bring it into the social and economic hub of a vibrant Scotland in the 21st century.

The Borders rail link is a strategic part of Scotland's economic future. It is not simply a Borders issue, but an all-Scotland issue. As the Borders is geographically isolated within Scotland, Scotland is geographically isolated from its economic markets. As a nation, we are located on the periphery of the economic trading block in which we operate—location has advantages in some fields, but disadvantages in others.

We need to trade to survive, for no one owes us a living. We require access to our markets. In a global economy, transportation time is vital. We require to ensure that we have the capacity to transport all our goods, and on time. Business demands it and our customers expect it.

We look forward to improvements on the east coast and west coast main lines. We envisage a time when the railway to London and points in between competes with airlines. I can see advantages in being able to walk to Central or Waverley stations, and pick up a train, on the hour, which will get me to London in three hours or thereabouts.

However, there is a downside. The more passenger trains that move, the more difficult it is to move our freight. The strategic economic advantage and the reason, touched on by Elaine Murray, why the line to Carlisle must be restored, is to allow an alternative line to ease capacity problems, if not in the short term, most certainly in the long term. The restoration of the rail line is necessary for all the Borders and for all Scotland.

What then is to be done? We could end this

debate basking in the glow of the hot air created by the rhetoric, but that rhetoric will not lay one sleeper nor advance the track by one mile. We need to ensure that we lay the solid foundations on which the line can be restored, and that we fuel the engine that will run upon it.

In Scotland, the tragedy is that our Government has washed its hands of responsibility for rail. Power has not been devolved to this elected Parliament but given away to an unelected quango, outwith our land. That organisation will be dealt with in other debates, but at present, that is the body which holds the purse strings and which has the power to restore the railway or not.

The money involved is small beer compared with what has been spent elsewhere. For example, £2.5 billion has been spent on the Jubilee line. As I mentioned in the intervention that Murray Tosh kindly took, one station costs between £70 million and £100 million. The Channel tunnel link cost £1.8 billion. Yesterday, Prescott pledged £140 billion over 10 years. I read that the programme will include

“a £500m extension for Manchester’s tramlines, a new £180m system in Nottingham and extensions to the Docklands Light Railway in London and the similar Tyne and Wear rail network.”

Before the cacophony of voices rises in protest at yet another spending pledge, answer me this: how come John Prescott can think so big, yet the minister aspires so small?

Lewis Macdonald: Will Mr MacAskill give way?

Mr MacAskill: I am winding up.

Let the resolution of this Parliament be that we welcome progress south of the border towards an enhanced rail network, but we insist upon similar progress and similar aspirations in our land. If the strategic rail authority is supposed to represent this United Kingdom, it has a duty to be equitable in the dispensation of its largesse.

In summary, we are saying that it is time to stop the talking and start the constructing. We are not satisfied with a dream, but wish to make the dream a reality. Let us tell the strategic rail authority that the settled will of this Parliament and of the Scottish people is that the authority restore the Borders rail link as a matter of priority.

11:58

Sarah Boyack: I am delighted to wind up today’s debate and to be positive at the end: members have been unanimous about the need for the Borders railway line.

Several members have asked when the line will be completed. The critical issue is that the work has started; the clock is already ticking. We have

already had the feasibility study, which was commissioned by the Labour Government in 1997, and which was delivered and is now available in the Scottish Parliament information centre. I am sure that every member in the chamber has taken the time to look at its conclusions.

We already potentially have the support through the public transport fund; Scottish Borders Council has already begun the process of working up its bid for the project. To suggest that nothing has happened, and that we are at the vision stage—and that we are not talking about realities—is not true: the work has started and the commitment has been made.

The Scottish Executive has spent money already on getting the Scottish Borders rail link started. We must ensure that that work continues and that we give the support that Euan Robson asked for, encouraging the parties that are pursuing the project, such as Scottish Borders Council, Midlothian Council and Scottish Borders Enterprise, and telling them that we want to start the work on the line.

However, it is not real politics to suggest that one can deliver overnight the sort of investment required to build the line by simply demanding it, nor is that how to build a railway line.

Mr Tosh *rose*—

Michael Russell *rose*—

Sarah Boyack: I will not give way, as I have only a short time.

The first steps are being taken and money has been spent already. Important work is being done, which was recognised by all members in the chamber.

I want to correct a number of the points made in the debate. Let me be absolutely clear—we have powers over services in Scotland, in relation to the ScotRail franchise. Nothing in the UK Transport Bill waters down those powers and we will use them to the full. Several nationalist comments were made about press speculation on John Prescott’s transport investment proposals. We have already received money as a consequence of the budget, and we are spending that money in Scotland. The priority is for that money to go into rural transport and safety issues. The Nottingham link, to which Mr MacAskill referred, has funding already. When he examines packages of expenditure, he should be careful to ensure that he does not simply believe the press speculation.

This summer, there will be a comprehensive spending review, which will give both the Scottish Executive and the UK Government the opportunity to decide our spending priorities. Rail and transport investment must be part of those priorities—that will be my job as Minister for

Transport and the Environment.

Mr Tosh: Will the minister give way?

Sarah Boyack: No.

The SRA is already investing in Scotland, and the idea that it is not aware of our priorities is absolutely ridiculous. We have already received money for the Edinburgh crossrail scheme. That money is to be spent on the ground, to open up the scheme. The SRA has met Scottish Borders Council and the other parties involved in the project to open up the Borders railway line, and is due to meet them again on 12 June. The SRA is not a remote body—it is engaging with our priorities in Scotland, and we are clear that one of our key priorities is the Borders railway line.

Several comments were made about the need to promote links across Scotland. I agree that we need an integrated approach and more investment in our rural infrastructure. The Executive is addressing those issues through our rural transport fund and our public transport fund. New railway stations are opening up across Scotland and more money is going into our railway network to provide extra capacity for services in Fife, for example, and to fund new freight facilities grants. Only this week, I announced another £1 million for those grants.

Although we are making that investment, the Borders railway line is on a different level. All members accepted that point. The Borders railway line will be delivered not by a magic wand but by a package of funding. We have an opportunity to deliver that funding, and it is a great pity that members have talked down the fact that we are getting going on the line.

Michael Russell: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No.

The work is happening already, and solid foundations are being built. I say to Mr MacAskill that before one can build a railway line, one must follow a series of procedures, such as planning procedures, and one must abide by important democratic principles. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): Order.

Sarah Boyack: The point is that Scottish Borders Council has started doing that work—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Sarah Boyack: Can I be clearer? I am using the present tense, because this is not about the future. That is the important message that we must send to people in the Borders, not that the Borders railway line is on a wish list or that it will not be built for a long time. The Scottish Executive is

working on the project with the rail industry, Scottish Borders Council, Midlothian Council and Scottish Borders Enterprise. I am fully behind the enthusiasm that exists for the building of the railway line. We are working together, and it is a great pity that people talk down that fact. Rather, we must talk it up, while remaining realistic.

Mr MacAskill: When?

Sarah Boyack: I have answered the point about time—it is now, as the work is on-going. That is the message from the debate which must be taken to people in the Borders, and no one in the chamber has disagreed with that message.

It is good that there is unanimity on that point and that all members accept that there is a need for the economic investment in the Borders that the railway line will bring, which will enable people in the Borders to attract new investment. We are fully behind that opportunity, and I am happy to support the motion that was moved on behalf of the Rural Affairs Committee.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Alasdair Morgan to wind up for the Rural Affairs Committee.

12:04

Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP): When I was preparing for the debate last night, I found on my bookshelf a document—which I am not sure all members will have seen—entitled “The Reshaping of British Railways” and published in 1963 for the princely sum of £1/-/-. It is better known as the Beeching report. In 1963, when the railways were hugely uneconomic and we had a legacy of lines in the wrong place, some radical surgery to our rail network was needed. That was supposed to be balanced by growth elsewhere. Dr Beeching stated:

“The building of a Channel Tunnel will also have a favourable effect on the railways”.

That was in 1963, so he had to wait a wee while for it. I hope that we do not have to wait quite as long for a Borders rail link.

In the end, the cuts went much too far. They went even further than Dr Beeching had proposed. Lines that were not on his list, such as the Perth-Edinburgh direct line and the Dunfermline-Stirling line, via Alloa, were closed. One of the last closures was the Borders line.

We are now in a very different era. Rail travel is booming and, if the 7.45 this morning from Edinburgh is anything to go by, we need a few extra trains. Former lines and former stations have been reopened. The Edinburgh-Bathgate line, which is such a success story, was originally such a basket case that it was closed even before Dr

Beeching produced his report.

I now refer to the specifics of the Borders railway. The case for the northern section, wherever its terminus is, is very strong and similar to that for the Bathgate line, which was reopened some years ago. Alex Neil and others pointed out that it would benefit not only the Borders, but Edinburgh and the Lothians. We seek an early commitment to that line—not just to employing some consultants, but to employing some navvies, or their modern equivalent. In her closing speech, the minister said that work had started. We want a commitment that it will finish.

The southern section is said to be more problematic. It is dependent on timber traffic out of Kielder along the old Borders county line to Riccarton. We are told that there are problems with the currency—we know all about those from several other debates. There are problems with dumping of timber by the Baltic states. However, the trees will not stop growing. They reach maturity at a certain stage and they need to be felled and taken out. All of us who represent constituencies with a fair amount of afforestation hear constituents express concern about the total inadequacy of the current road network. We need rail to take the timber out of our major forests, not just in the south of Scotland but elsewhere.

The case for the central section, which would complete the through-route, is said to be even less strong. It is probably true to say that less freight and passenger traffic would be generated by the central Borders section than by the other sections. However, there is another argument for building it, to which Kenny MacAskill alluded. It concerns the strategic route from Scotland to England. We have two main passenger routes, on the east coast and the west coast, but already increased passenger traffic means that there is less capacity for freight on those routes. Virgin's proposals for tilting trains on the west coast and the proposals of whoever wins the new franchise for the east coast line—whether it be Great North Eastern Railway or Virgin—for faster passenger trains will reduce still further capacity for the slower freight trains. The Nith valley line, which is the only other option in the west, is already full to capacity, mostly with coal traffic.

If we are to fulfil our ambition of moving freight to rail, we will need another route to take that. We have only two choices—we can either build another high-speed passenger link, or we can build another line that is capable of taking some of the freight. A Borders link would be an obvious candidate for that. Railways are not built quickly—we have been told about the difficulty of getting planning permission and so on—so if we are to fill the gap for freight traffic, we need to make a start on it now.

I do not want to add to the minister's woes, but, like David Mundell, I want to indulge in a bit of me-tooism. There are 90 miles between Millerhill and Longtown. That compares very significantly with the 75 miles from Stranraer to Dumfries, all of which is in my constituency. The south-west of Scotland, which has a higher unemployment rate than the Borders, is just as railless.

In conclusion, whether the Borders rail link figures in the priorities not just of the Executive but of the strategic rail authority will be a crucial test of whether that authority is a cross-border body that works.

Business Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S1M-923, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out the business programme. I call Iain Smith to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees

Wednesday 7 June 2000

2.30 pm Time for Reflection
 followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 followed by Stage 3 Debate on the Standards in Scotland's Schools Bill
 5.00 pm Decision Time
 followed by Members' Business – Debate on the subject of S1M-787 Ms Margo MacDonald: Standard Life Mutuality

Thursday 8 June 2000

9.30 am Ministerial Statement
 followed by Committee Business – Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee Debate on Local Economic Development Services in Scotland
 12.00 pm Ministerial Statement
 followed by Business Motion
 2.30 pm Question Time
 3.10 pm First Minister's Question Time
 3.30 pm Debate on Learning Disability Review
 5.00 pm Decision Time
 followed by Members' Business – Debate on the subject of S1M-908 Elaine Thomson: Women's Pay – 30 Years on from the Equal Pay Act

Wednesday 14 June 2000

2.30 pm Time for Reflection
 followed by Ministerial Statement
 followed by Stage 1 Debate on the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Bill
 5.00 pm Decision Time
 followed by Members' Business

Thursday 15 June 2000

9.30 am Non-Executive Business – Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party
 12.15 pm Ministerial Statement
 followed by Business Motion
 2.30 pm Question Time
 3.10 pm Open Question Time

3.30 pm Debate on Early Education and Childcare
 followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
 followed by Members' Business—[*Iain Smith.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As no member has indicated that they wish to speak against the motion, the question is, that motion S1M-923 be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Bell Baxter High School

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S1M-822, in the name of Mr Keith Harding, on Bell Baxter High School in Cupar. The debate will be concluded at the end of 30 minutes without any questions being put. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons as soon as possible.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that Bell Baxter High School in Cupar, Fife has operated on a split-site for the past 40 years, that pupils must walk along busy roads between both sites to attend classes with a loss of teaching time, and that Fife Council's capital programme for the school will take four years to implement and will nevertheless omit the refurbishment of the swimming pool and gymnasium and the provision of community facilities, and believes that the Scottish Executive should review the situation as a matter of urgency in order to determine whether it is able to assist Fife Council to resolve this problem at the earliest opportunity.

12:10

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am grateful to be able to debate this issue, which has been a cause of great concern in North-East Fife constituency for a considerable number of years. In March this year, along with all the other MSPs representing the area, I received an invitation from the Bell Baxter school board to visit its high school in Cupar and spend a day in the life of a school pupil. With Tricia Marwick, I visited the school on 20 March; we were concerned at what we found and experienced.

Since the 1940s, the school has operated on sites that are approximately half a mile apart. In 1966, when the then rector was appointed, he was promised a new school. In the 1980s, Fife Regional Council, as it then was, proposed that Bell Baxter should become a one-site school. Plans were drawn up and development started. The completion date was scheduled for 1991 but, with various delays, that slipped to 1995. The school moved down the priority ladder yet again, and the school board submitted a petition two years ago to Brian Wilson, the Scottish Office minister with responsibility for education, and to Fife Council. The board was promised that all phases of the programme would continue and be completed by this year. Recently, Fife Council announced capital funding of £3 million to complete the refurbishment of the school's south wing at Carslogie Road within the next five years. While that is welcome news, it will not complete the school. Additional funds of approximately £1 million are required to complete the project.

When I arrived at the school, I was impressed by the building and began to wonder why I had been asked to visit. The Carslogie Road school was built in 1962, yet it appears modern and well maintained. I understand that sufficient space is available for the refurbishment to incorporate teaching accommodation as well as a craft, design and technology block, studies that are currently undertaken on the old school site at Westport. That programme is the one that was recently approved for completion in five years.

We were then asked to walk to the Westport site, as all first and second-year pupils do daily. The almost half-mile journey is down a busy major road in Cupar, which must have safety implications. We were lucky, because that day was dry, sunny and quite cold. When we arrived at the Westport site, it was like stepping back in time. The buildings are, to say the least, dilapidated. I am surprised that, as far as I am aware, there have been no health and safety issues. Many of the structures are crumbling. Windows are boarded up because of vandalism, and facilities are far inferior to anything that I have ever seen, even when I was at school in the 1950s. I am sure that Iain Smith, the constituency member and a former pupil at the school, will be able to describe the situation far better than I can.

The reason I have sought this debate is not to cast blame on anyone for the long delays in consolidating the school on one site, but because of genuine concern at what I found. I acknowledge that funds are limited and that difficult choices must be made. However, I would like the issue to be resolved at the earliest possible date. We should not condemn another school generation to a totally unacceptable situation in this day and age.

I ask the minister, or members of his staff, to visit the school and to consider ways of assisting Fife Council to resolve the problem. I understand that, as development has already commenced, a private partnership initiative is not an option, but I respectfully ask him to consider a spend-to-save scheme.

Material savings are to be made in amalgamating the school on one site. At present, around 800 children travel between buildings for physical education, technical education and home economics. As I said, that is along a busy road with narrow pavements. Management at all levels is hampered and management teams are almost permanently split. The number of behavioural management issues is increasing because of the impact of travel on late-coming for lessons and the increased opportunities for misconduct. An additional 7.4 full-time equivalent teachers have to be employed to facilitate travel. Additional allowances are required for clerical, technical and

janitorial services and road-crossing patrols. The teaching staff have to travel to teach in consecutive periods; cover teachers are used while they travel. That has an obvious impact on teaching time and quality. It also creates stress.

The cost of maintaining Westport to minimal standards must be exorbitant. The value of the site, which is well situated in Cupar, must also be taken into consideration. At present, there are two canteen facilities, two cleaning contracts and two administrative offices. I am concerned that an accident is waiting to happen—either a failure in the structure of the old buildings or a road accident. I know that road safety for schoolchildren is a concern that the Executive is vigorously addressing.

The current situation undermines the desired ethos of the school as an integrated community. All that I seek today is for Peter Peacock to examine the matter and to undertake a cost-benefit analysis so that action can be taken much more quickly to meet the needs and aspirations of pupils, parents and teachers. We said that this Parliament would make a difference—that we would address Scottish problems with Scottish solutions. Let us now give some hope to the parents of north-east Fife.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Several members have asked to speak in this debate. To accommodate all the members who wish to take part, I ask for speeches to be kept to three minutes.

12:16

Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD): I thank Keith Harding for initiating this debate and Peter Peacock for allowing me, as the local member, to participate. The biggest thanks should go to the Bell Baxter school board, which has kept this matter at the top of the political agenda within north-east Fife. It has worked tirelessly in the campaign to ensure the completion of the Bell Baxter project. I express my thanks to it for its work on that.

As Keith Harding mentioned, Bell Baxter is my old school, so it gives me particular pleasure to speak about it, although it is with displeasure that I have to speak on it because it has not yet been completed. I went there in 1972—I know that I do not look old enough to have gone to secondary school then, but I did. In those days, the school suffered from many of the inadequacies that it suffers now. Its small, cramped classrooms, many of which are in poor condition, are unsuited to modern teaching methods. There is a village of huts, many of which are now almost literally falling apart; they are being tied together, not so much by Sellotape as by carpets, which are holding the

floors together. The situation is very unsatisfactory and it needs to be addressed.

I should also add—in case members are not aware of this—that I am not the first Scottish minister who is a former pupil of Bell Baxter, because a certain Allan Stewart was a pupil of Bell Baxter as well. In those days he was a Liberal—he went slightly off the rails after he left the area.

It is important to consider the history of this project. When I became a Fife regional councillor back in 1982, the project was in the capital programme, but it did not get the priority that it deserved. Fife Regional Council put other projects ahead of it, although the work started with, as Keith Harding said, a target date of finishing in 1991. However, cuts in the capital programme that Fife Regional Council suffered throughout the 1980s and 1990s meant that the completion date slipped year on year, so that it was not possible to complete the project in 1991. Indeed, the project was cut up into more and more phases, between which there were bigger and bigger gaps. It seems impossible to find out when the end of the project will be.

However, I am pleased to say—I am not sure whether Keith Harding is aware of this—that Fife Council's most recent capital programme indicates some progress. The council has moved forward the start of the next stage, which is the refurbishment of the south wing. It appears that that will now start next year, rather than in three years' time, as was previously thought. That stage is crucial as, once the south wing is refurbished, it should be possible to begin to put the school on to one site. As Keith Harding rightly says, the project will not then be completed, as there are other phases to follow, but completion of that stage will allow the management to examine seriously the possibility of having the school on one site for the first time. That progress is to be welcomed, although I would have preferred a start on the building this year.

I have been critical of Fife Council for not giving the project the priority it deserves. However, we have to take into account the cuts to capital expenditure that were imposed on Fife Regional Council and Fife Council by the Conservative Government, which have led to this project slipping back. We need to address that issue. The Executive has begun to do so by investing more money into education, which has to be welcomed.

12:20

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I congratulate Keith Harding on his motion, which has given us this opportunity to have a short debate about the problems of Bell Baxter. Like Iain Smith and Keith Harding, I pay tribute not just to

the school board, but to the staff and, in particular, the rector of Bell Baxter, who are working in intolerable conditions. The school has a good record of achievement and it is important that we give it the support that it needs.

As Keith Harding mentioned, he and I visited the school. Frankly, I was appalled by what I saw: a two-site school that is joined by a very busy road. When my children were at school in Fife, they had to have permission from me as a parent to step outside the school or to go on a school trip. I am seriously concerned about young schoolchildren walking up and down a busy road many times a day. There is an accident waiting to happen. If I were the parent of a child at the school, I would be very concerned about the regime, which has existed for a long time. The road is extremely busy, the pavement is extremely narrow and the children have to walk half a mile between the sites.

I will talk about the physical conditions of the school. The physics laboratory is like a school museum. When I was at school, a bit before Iain Smith, the conditions in my school were far superior to those that I saw at Bell Baxter. There is what is known as hut alley—where children are taught in 40 huts, which are falling apart—and there is a dining hall in which I would not allow my children to eat. The health and safety issue has to be addressed urgently.

Iain Smith is quite right that Fife County Council, Fife Regional Council and Fife Council have given no priority to Bell Baxter. Nobody denies that improvements have been made, but it is unacceptable in this day and age that school pupils should have to go to two sites. I know that the problems of Bell Baxter are replicated throughout Scotland. The Executive will have to address urgently the recent report that showed that repairing Scotland's schools would cost £1.3 billion—it is estimated that it will cost £70 million to repair schools in Fife alone.

I leave members with this thought. Every week, the schoolchildren at Bell Baxter spend an hour travelling back and forward. That is a week a year during which those children are denied an education because of the circumstances in which they find themselves. That is not acceptable. Something has to be done—and soon.

12:24

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): It seems to be confession time about when we went to school. I, too, went to school in Fife, after Iain Smith and certainly after Tricia Marwick. *[Laughter.]*

We should congratulate Keith Harding on bringing this issue to the attention of the

Parliament, although I have some doubt about whether this is the best venue for the debate—perhaps it is a debate more fit for the council chamber in Glenrothes. Nevertheless, the issues outlined by Keith Harding, and amplified by Iain Smith and Tricia Marwick, are worthy of comment.

It is unfortunate that people at one of our schools in Fife are still being accommodated on a twin site. However, that is not an unusual occurrence in the history of Fife's schools. When I was at school in the late 1970s, a number of high schools operated on twin sites. We should not lose sight of the fact that Fife Regional Council and Fife Council have invested heavily in the schools programme in the region to build the new Lochgelly High School to replace Ballingry and Auchterderran junior high schools, and to site Kirkcaldy High School and Beath High School on single sites. As Keith Harding has conceded, eventually Bell Baxter will also be accommodated on a single site.

It is certainly not the case that Fife Council has not invested in schools in Cupar. My understanding is that more than £10 million has been spent in the past decade on Bell Baxter High School. This year, in a £1.5 million expansion of nursery provision due to come to fruition in August, the primary school at Cupar will be sited on one site.

There are massive demands on the council's capital programme in Fife, not just in education. It should be acknowledged that one of the drains on the new Fife Council's capital programme was the deteriorating condition of the estate inherited from preceding authorities and, in particular, the amount of money that had to be spent to bring the county buildings in north-east Fife district up to an acceptable standard.

Education priorities exist all over Fife. In my constituency, Dunfermline West, we are in the deplorable situation of having two inadequately housed special schools, one of which, I would argue, is in a far worse fabric state than any other school in Fife. The Queen Anne High School campus, where staff and pupils have been waiting for more than 20 years for a new building, contains a substantial amount of huddled accommodation, although not quite as much as at Bell Baxter, and is in a deplorable state.

Problems exist at Bell Baxter and it is right that they should be highlighted, but problems exist at other schools in Fife as well. It is important to acknowledge the efforts that Fife Council is making to address the problems. Those efforts will lead, I hope, to improvements in the future.

12:27

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): I congratulate Keith Harding on bringing forward this motion, which gives us the chance to debate the issue. I will keep my remarks on Bell Baxter fairly short. I want to give an insight into my experience of Portobello High School—some people may doubt that I went to school, but there we are.

The situation was very similar—Portobello High School also had an annexe. The school was a modern building designed for some 1,200 pupils, but there were 2,500 there at the time, which was enough to keep it in “The Guinness Book of Records” for a number of years while I was a pupil. Because of the school’s size, the old building had to be reopened as an annexe and the whole of the first year and some of the second year studied there.

My experience is pertinent. There were accidents on the journey between the two schools. The dual site was also a source of indiscipline, which has not been touched on—perhaps indiscipline was particular to my school, but I doubt it. The journey time between one school and another was an opportunity for skiving and all sorts of larking about. Of course, it is the larking about that often leads to safety problems. There is real concern about the dual-site status of Bell Baxter, which we must address.

Lessons can be learned from Portobello. That annexe is no longer used by schools but has been converted into highly desirable flats. I hope that the site at Bell Baxter can be developed to release funds that would allow the school to be restored to a single site. If we could do that, the savings would be considerable and the sense of community of the school would improve.

I commend Keith Harding for securing the debate and look forward to hearing what the minister has to say and what help he can give.

12:29

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):

I, too, would like to congratulate Keith Harding on securing today’s debate. I would also like to thank the campaign sub-committee at Bell Baxter—Gina Logan, Veronica Kirk and others—for their efforts and commitment to the school. They managed to get many MSPs along on different days for detailed and lengthy visits—I visited on 17 March.

I am not sure that there is much advantage in taking Scott Barrie’s approach of raking over the past and giving us a history lesson—I am sorry that he is not in the chamber just now. The crucial

message that we must send out is that the situation at Bell Baxter is unacceptable. That is the view of every political party in the Parliament and something must be done about it. In nearly 30 years in active politics I have never seen a situation like that behind the decrepit building on Westport. It conceals a scandalous situation of 50 huts with rotting structures, which are too cold in winter and too hot in summer. They are unhealthy for pupils and teachers and are unacceptable in terms of educational provision. We must do something about that now.

As Keith Harding and others have said, the problem is that the finishing date has kept on slipping, from 1991 to 1995 to 2000. On 27 April, Fife Council made an announcement on the ending of the split site—although not on the building work that is required—which has been forecast for 2003. That date must not slip any further.

This is not just about safety issues, although, as Tricia Marwick said, those are crucial. I walked the route to the school and back on a fairly dry day. However, I was told that on rainy days kids arrive at one or other site totally drenched. Furthermore, that journey eats into the lesson time and school periods are therefore shorter than they should be.

Bell Baxter is not alone. Sam Galbraith has rightly said that there has been

“an historic underinvestment in Scotland’s school buildings”.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland estimate that it would take £1.3 billion to bring all primary and secondary schools up to scratch.

When a parliamentary question was asked about school building maintenance in Scotland, we were given that famous civil service answer:

“Detailed information of the kind requested is not held centrally.”

Furthermore, we were told that

“assessments of school building maintenance and other needs . . . may not be . . . consistent across authorities.”—*[Official Report, Written Answers, 12 May 2000; Vol 6, p 141.]*

I know that the education department is trying to remedy that situation, but how can the Parliament decide on priorities unless we know accurately what the situation is? The Scottish Executive must begin to collect and hold the necessary information centrally as well as ensure that there are consistent assessments of need across authorities. That is a priority.

We keep hearing how much extra money the chancellor is going to spend. I hope that when it comes to spending, our share of the money will be

a priority. I hope that we can encourage more public-private partnership schemes. I give credit to Glasgow City Council for what it is doing. Public-private partnerships are not ideal—I have some reservations—but it is the only game in town. In the interest of our pupils and teachers, such schemes must be extended so that we have a dramatic improvement in the condition of school buildings in Scotland within a reasonably short time, before the next Scottish Parliament elections.

12:33

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): My first full-time teaching job was in 1964, in Buckhaven in Fife, with the great R F MacKenzie at Braehead Junior Secondary School. At that time, Fife was investing heavily in a split system of junior secondaries and high schools. In fact, I think that Fife was the lead local authority in Scotland in terms of the proportion of budget spent on education.

I want to make the case for teachers who teach on split sites. I spent two years of my teaching career in a split-site school, where—two or three times a day—I had to make a half-mile journey between the two sites, so I have bitter personal experience of the pressures that that puts on teachers. In that situation, teachers are always late for their lessons—no professional teacher likes to be late for his or her lessons. There is a continual nagging pressure, month after month and year after year, that wears teachers down. The experience is entirely negative; I ended up, at the end of those two years, feeling more sick and ill, with an ulcer, than I had ever felt in my teaching career.

I beg the Executive to solve the problem at Bell Baxter, and at any other split-site school in the country, as soon as possible.

12:35

The Deputy Minister for Children and Education (Peter Peacock): First, let me say that I can well appreciate the concerns of any community about the continued split-site operation of any school in Scotland. In almost any circumstances imaginable, it would be preferable for a school to be on a single site. That requires no further explanation—it is the view that everybody would hold.

However, for a whole variety of historic reasons—depending on land availability or the growth of any particular community at any particular time—it has been necessary, on occasion, for split-site arrangements to be developed. I am confident that local authorities, which are responsible for such matters, try to

avoid those arrangements wherever possible and to rectify the situation where that is achievable. Fife Council has done that on a number of occasions; Scott Barrie drew attention to that. There are other situations across Scotland that are not dissimilar and that could also be rectified over time.

A number of members have referred to the fact that split sites, by their nature, can have an impact on the school's timetabling and general management and on the occupation of pupils' time. Both teachers and pupils can find it inconvenient when pupils have to move from one site to another, sometimes in inclement weather, which adds a particular difficulty to the situation.

I am sure that all those who are involved in the management of Bell Baxter merit commendation for managing successfully, despite the school's split-site nature, and for having done so over many years. The school's attainment levels are high, despite the split-site operation and the nature of the buildings, and the extensive building work that has gone on over the past 10 years has not interrupted or had an adverse effect on the school's quality of education.

As Scott Barrie and, I think, Iain Smith mentioned, something over £9 million has been spent on the school over the past five years. In a moment or two, I will come on to say what is planned to be done.

In the present circumstances at Bell Baxter, pupil safety, which was referred to by a number of members—Tricia Marwick, Brian Monteith and others—is, of course, paramount. From what I have been told, I am confident that that matter has received, and continues to receive, priority attention from staff and pupils alike. Crossing arrangements are made in the course of every day; it is recognised that there are circumstances in which the pupils require to be protected.

I must confess that I feel some surprise at the fact that Mr Harding has raised this matter for debate in the Parliament. Mr Harding has been a councillor of very long standing—he and I have debated council matters in another forum over the years. I believe that he may still be a councillor in Stirling, so he—of all members in the chamber—will know better than most that detailed decisions about school buildings are for local councils, not for the Executive or the Parliament.

I am a strong supporter of local democracy and I want to see such decisions being taken at the level that is closest to the citizen—the local council. The detailed debate on this matter ought to be taking place in Fife, with locally elected politicians expressing their priorities where they can be held to account for their decisions by people in the local community. The Parliament

was not created to centralise decisions in Edinburgh; it was created as part of a process of decentralising power in our society.

We must be careful not to use the Parliament to debate matters that are properly the province of another tier of democratically elected politicians and for which they are accountable to local communities. It would be all too easy to turn this Parliament into a big council for Scotland that interferes in or takes decisions that are best taken locally and are sensitive to local circumstances.

Tricia Marwick: Although I acknowledge the minister's points about the need to make decisions at the lowest level—that is, at Fife Council—the real issue is resources. We need £1.3 billion to tackle repairs to Scotland's schools, with £70 million needed in Fife alone. Will the minister give a commitment not just to Fife Council but to every council in Scotland that the money will be available to tackle that problem? Perhaps we can then debate the issue locally.

Peter Peacock: I will address the issue of resources later and pick up the points that Tricia Marwick makes. However, in the case of Bell Baxter, the Executive does not intend to intervene on a matter that we believe should be handled in Fife. It is Fife Council's responsibility to deal with the building issues at Bell Baxter school. I know that the need to bring the school on to one site was identified at least 20 years ago and I understand people's frustrations at the lack of progress. However, councils determine their own capital expenditure priorities; the Government does not intervene on such decisions and does not intend to do so in this case. Councils receive a single annual allocation of capital consent, which is not specific to individual capital programmes or particular projects, and decide whether to spend the money on roads, offices, leisure centres, schools, nursery provision or whatever.

Our role is to ensure that, overall, councils have a reasonable level of resources to tackle the priorities that they want to address. We are increasing those resources. In Fife alone, with our support, approvals for the public-private partnership scheme will release about £32 million in new investment. Not only will projects directly benefit from that money, but section 94 consent will also become available to tackle them. We are putting £115 million extra into the new deal for schools in Scotland and Scottish local authorities are spending £150 million a year on improving the fabric of Scottish schools. Such measures are why we have seen progress over the years.

Furthermore, in response to Keith Harding, our national priorities programme—which we have just published and are consulting on—makes it clear that we want to lift the issue of school capital expenditure and school refurbishment expenditure

higher up the political agenda. It was the Executive that first identified that more than £1 billion would be required; we did so not to hide from the problem, but to begin to address it.

Although we have agreed with COSLA that school buildings are a key priority within the overall framework of capital allocations arrangements, it is for local authorities to translate that into reality at a local level. As I have indicated, it will take many years to clear the backlog of work required in Scottish schools. However, we are determined to achieve that aim and to raise the standard of our schools.

I am also surprised that Keith Harding raised this issue because it draws attention to the Conservatives' record on reducing capital allocations to councils when they were in government. It is at least arguable that Bell Baxter would now have been on a single site had it not been for the actions of the Government that he supported in the 1980s and 1990s. However, he and all members in the chamber will no doubt welcome the fact that Fife Council has reinstated into its capital programme the project to initiate work on the new south wing at Bell Baxter, with expenditure starting this year and continuing into the next. That project will help the school towards single-site status. Clearly, the details of the start and completion dates are a matter for Fife Council and any major building work at the school has to take account of the need to minimise disruption of daily teaching and learning.

Mr Monteith: Will the minister give way?

Peter Peacock: I am sorry, I must wind up.

I am sure that Fife Council's most recent commitment will be welcomed by everyone associated with the school, who will be hoping that the council can schedule the work for completion as soon as possible. Clearly, the council's first priority is to address the single-site issue before considering other matters such as the pool and gymnasium. I am sure that all members will welcome what Fife Council has done and will wish it well in the task of completing this project.

12:44

Meeting suspended until 14:30.

14:30

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Local Authority Boundaries

1. Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to reorganise local authority boundaries. (S10-1821)

The Deputy Minister for Local Government (Mr Frank McAveety): Presiding Officer, I take this opportunity to thank you and the Deputy First Minister for your choice of ties this afternoon, which display the Glasgow city tartan.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): That is definitely out of order.

Mr McAveety: Under the existing legislative provisions, the next statutory review of local authority boundaries is not scheduled to take place until 2004 at the earliest. However, we receive representations from communities to identify how communities can be looked after through the existing local authority provision in Scotland.

Cathie Craigie: I thank the minister for his reply. Is he aware of the campaign that is being organised in the Cumbernauld area of my constituency? The campaigners, some of whom are in the public gallery today, are calling for their area to be used as an experimental unitary authority, with new structures for strategic planning, major transport and crime investigations, and education which could be dealt with through the Scottish Parliament. Will the minister consider the request that is being made by my constituents?

Mr McAveety: We are awaiting the report by Richard Kerley into local government, which will have implications for local authority boundaries. Most local authorities want a period of stability, following the turbulent period of reorganisation a few years back, and we are trying to reflect that in the present structures. One of the commitments that most councils should be engaging in centrally is having a good decentralised structure, to ensure that the needs of communities in diverse areas are represented in the decision-making process. I welcome contributions on that, and I hope that Cathy Craigie can be at the forefront of that.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I endorse the sentiments of Cathy Craigie's question. Does the minister recognise the real

strength of feeling in the Cumbernauld area, as endorsed by the leaflet that has been distributed today? Does he recognise that, for people in that area, local government is neither local nor good government? Without restructuring the whole of local government, we must pilot new ways of devolving it—as happens in every other European country—so that it is closer to the people, not remote as it is in North Lanarkshire.

Mr McAveety: I do not necessarily share Mr Wilson's perspective on local authorities. I have visited more than 30 local authorities throughout Scotland, and know that they want a period of stability. They want to represent the wider communities that exist in their areas, and will be able to do so to the ministerial team as part of the discussions that will take place post-Kerley.

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Local Government Committee has been in correspondence with councillors from Cumbernauld. We felt that, when we discuss the role of the boundary commission later this year, this issue should be acknowledged. Does the minister agree that that is the appropriate way in which to proceed?

Mr McAveety: As I said, we await the Kerley report. In due course, the Executive and the Parliament will consider its recommendations fully. If there are any implications for the work of the local government boundary commission, we will take them into account. Because of a number of concerns that have been raised with us during visits to local authorities over the way in which the commission has handled submissions to it in the past, we are in the process of examining the commission's work.

Education

2. Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to recognise and address the increase in recent years in the percentage of teenage girls leaving school with no qualifications. (S10-1858)

The Minister for Children and Education (Mr Sam Galbraith): We have commissioned a research project that aims to identify factors that influence the relative attainment of boys and girls and to provide advice on how good performance by both genders can be achieved. That will report at the end of the year.

Trish Godman: I thank the minister for those encouraging comments. However, I remain concerned over the lack of job opportunities for teenage girls. What is the Executive doing to widen the consultation with, for example, education authorities, career services and employers' organisations to encourage young girls, while they are still at school, to get the

qualifications that will allow them to take up opportunities in the workplace? What is the Executive doing to tackle the stereotyping of jobs for girls?

Mr Galbraith: Like Mrs Godman, I am concerned about the stereotyping that goes on, especially in later years at school, when boys tend to go for science and maths and girls tend to go for languages and other subjects. That has a knock-on effect on their job prospects. The freedom of choice that people have at school should be a true freedom of choice and not one that is based on stereotyping. I hope that the study that we are undertaking will tell us not only why stereotyping develops but how we can deal with it.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister think that the worrying rise in the number of under-age pregnancies is a factor in the lack of achievement to which Mrs Godman's question refers? Is he concerned about the rise in that number, and is he concerned about the way in which sex education is delivered in schools?

Mr Galbraith: I am somewhat surprised that Mr Gallie should ask whether anyone is concerned about teenage pregnancies—the numbers of which, incidentally, are not rising, but static. I am sure that everyone in this Parliament, without exception, is concerned about unplanned teenage pregnancies. I am surprised that Mr Gallie should suggest otherwise.

Genetically Modified Organisms

3. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive when it was first informed that seed contaminated with GM seed had been sold to Scottish farmers. (S10-1823)

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Ross Finnie): The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food informed the Scottish Executive in a letter dated 15 May that seed contaminated with GM seed had been sown throughout the UK. The sequence of events from the Scottish Executive's perspective was that on 5 May an official in my department was made aware, in the margins of a meeting in London, of an unspecified contamination case. Our further inquiries about the precise nature of the problem elicited the letter of 15 May.

Alasdair Morgan: That answer makes the position worse than we thought rather than better. Does the minister know how many acres in Scotland were planted with those seeds after MAFF knew about the matter on 17 April? What is the sense of individual farmers' being asked to sue a multinational such as Advanta? Is it not incumbent on the Administration to compensate farmers for their losses after 17 April, when MAFF knew? Should MAFF not foot that bill, and then

seek to recover the costs from Advanta?

Ross Finnie: I regret that I still do not have the full details of the number of acres that were sown with contaminated crop. Through work within our department, through co-operation with the National Farmers Union of Scotland, and following a meeting with Advanta in London this morning at which the Scottish Executive was represented by a senior official, I am pleased to say that we are now getting co-operation in going through the network of distributors to establish which farms are affected and, in particular, which ones have been distributed contaminated seed as opposed to the ones that have simply purchased it.

There are two issues in relation to compensation. I hope that Alasdair Morgan will accept that even although other parties might interfere in a fault, in law that fault still rests with the principal and in this case the principal is, without doubt, Advanta. I met with the National Farmers Union of Scotland on Monday. It made it very clear that it is not prepared to hang about on this but it is nevertheless happy for us to ensure that the responsibility that Advanta has is made very clear to Advanta.

At the meeting this morning with Advanta that I mentioned we made it very clear that it should recognise the damage it is doing to its reputation and that it should take action. I hope that we will have a few days in which to press that claim before looking at the wider picture.

Alasdair Morgan: What was Advanta's response? Did it acknowledge its responsibility and will it pay compensation to the farmers who should be ploughing the crops up?

Ross Finnie: I do not wish not to respond to that question. I hope all members will realise that I say very sincerely that the purpose of our attending that meeting was to make Advanta absolutely aware of its responsibility and the need for an early settlement. I do not wish to go beyond that, except to say that the official present at the meeting, with whom I spoke just before entering this chamber, regarded the meeting as constructive. It is important to conduct such a very important discussion for Scottish farmers, at least for the next few days, in some degree of—

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): In view of the fact that the French and Swedish Governments have already asked their farmers to plough such crops in, will the Executive guarantee interim compensation, to allow farmers immediately to plough up the GM-contaminated crops without fear of financial loss, before they flower and further pollute the countryside? Will it make such financial assistance and guidance available in advance of the imminent flowering of the GM-contaminated, spring-sown oil-seed rape

plants, and will such guidance advise farmers how to prevent the spread of contamination from wind-blown GM pollen and subsequently from fresh GM seed drop? What representations will it make to ensure that the compensation claims raised with Advanta are processed soon?

Ross Finnie: If Mr Harper had been listening to my answer to Mr Morgan, he would have known that I was pressing Advanta to settle quickly.

On the danger of the crops currently growing, Mr Harper is right: we have a very short window of opportunity. About 15 June is the date we have to meet, given the seed-sowing pattern.

On interim compensation, I can only emphasise that we have an agreement with the NFUS that we establish absolutely that Advanta is primarily responsible. I will not make any statement that gives any impression to Advanta that I am about to step into its shoes. That is not sensible in terms of achieving an answer to the final part of Mr Harper's question, ensuring that Advanta should settle quickly. If I were to think I would step into Advanta's shoes, that would be a recipe for prolonging the process unnecessarily and against farmers' interests.

On guidance and advice, that was the substance of the meeting that was held with the NFUS on Monday: that we establish the farmers' rights under the arable payments scheme, which we are pursuing diligently with the European Commission, and that we must understand and explain what we are doing and particularly what happens if some crops germinate.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): In the light of the obvious breakdown in communications between MAFF and the Scottish Executive, what measures are being put in place to ensure that a similar debacle does not happen again?

Ross Finnie: I am pleased to say that I have received a full personal apology from Mr Nicholas Brown, the minister in charge. We both recognise that this matter goes quite deep in terms of the organisations that were first handling it. We have agreed to have an early meeting, with our officials, to explore carefully exactly how this matter was mishandled and how there came to be such a gap. We are both quite clear at our own levels that this simply cannot happen again. Those are the reasonable steps that I can take at this time.

Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): Might it be helpful if the National Farmers Union took a test case to determine liability in this matter?

Ross Finnie: What I was attempting to do in the discussions that we held with Advanta today, and in the discussions that I would want to prosecute with Advanta, is to persuade Advanta that it ought

to settle without anyone having recourse to go to court. I cannot speculate that it would necessarily do that, but that persuasion is my preferred position, rather than getting into protracted litigation, which could take a very long time and which would involve such questions of test cases. I am reluctant to go much further. We have had an opening with Advanta. We intend to prosecute that with all the vigour we have.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Can the minister give any more information about the ongoing discussions at the European level? Can he tell us what the prevailing advice to farmers is about replanting on land that would involve digging up the contaminated seeds?

Ross Finnie: On the first point, in relation to the European Union, following discussions with the National Farmers Union of Scotland, during which the clear practical problems about re-sowing in the Scottish growing season and about the type of land that is being used for the crop in question, were mentioned, the options open to Scottish farmers are not great. I think that it was technically possible for them to have sown turnip rape, but there are even problems with that. If any other stray pieces were to emerge from the existing crop, they might end up with a fresh crop with the same contamination problem as before.

The NFUS is withholding advice at the moment, and, in particular, is waiting to see whether we can secure a further derogation from Europe to allow farmers to dig up the crop—which would be my preferred position—but not in any way to suffer any loss of arable area payment compensation. Direct conversations between the Scottish Executive and Europe were held yesterday. We have had a very favourable response.

Following my discussion with Nick Brown this morning, we are making a formal application this afternoon to Franz Fischler to try to secure a separate text, which will avoid any doubt that farmers would be able to plough the crop in and still receive arable area payment compensation. I have not seen that text. I hope that we will get it some time next week. We will be having a meeting with the NFUS tomorrow to explain the progress being made, which could greatly assist farmers in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: Members will recognise that I have allowed this question to run on a long time because of its importance, but we must now try to speed up.

National Health Service

4. Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how interpretation and translation services required by refugees using NHS services are funded. (£10-

1808)

The Deputy Minister for Community Care (Iain Gray): It is for the health service locally to ensure that interpretation and translation services are provided where necessary.

Shona Robison: The minister may or may not be aware that there are severe problems with the funding of interpreting and translation services in the health service. In one health centre in Glasgow, 27 languages are now registered, which costs the service over £30,000 in one month, in payments for private interpreting and translation services. In the light of those figures, will the minister agree to take up with the Home Office the issue of the lack of resources that Greater Glasgow Health Board has for interpreting and translation services?

Iain Gray: I understand that Glasgow City Council agreed last week to fund interpreting and translation services for asylum seekers when accessing health care. That funding will come from the resources provided to the council by the National Asylum Support Service.

Highlands and Islands Transport Authority

5. Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will support proposals for a Highlands and Islands transport authority to have the ability to purchase petrol and diesel for resale to motor vehicle users in the area. (S10-1863)

The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack): Recently, we have invited tenders for a study of the case for establishing a Highland and Islands transport authority. It is premature to speculate on the outcome of that study, but we will consider carefully how any such authority can best help to address the problems of high fuel costs in the area.

Fergus Ewing: Is the minister aware of the anger in the north of Scotland, where fuel tax and fuel costs are the highest in the world? Is that the real tartan tax in Scotland—a tartan that was spun by the Tories and woven by new Labour? Is it not the case that the last thing that we need in the north of Scotland is another false promise—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Fergus Ewing: It is okay. They will behave themselves in a minute.

The last thing that we need in the north of Scotland is another false promise of action tomorrow. We need a reduction in fuel tax today.

Sarah Boyack: I would treat that question with a little more respect if the SNP's budget proposals

for the Scottish Parliament election campaign had indicated how the party would fill the gap created by not taking fuel tax into account.

The Executive is working with the Scotland Office and the Treasury to examine ways of mediating in the problem of high fuel costs in the rural areas of Scotland. That is why we have identified money, which is being taken up, to ensure that rural fuel stations can be converted. The costs of such conversion could be passed on to and met by the Scottish Executive, which is why Brian Wilson in the Scotland Office has been able to work with fuel companies to consider ways of reducing costs.

There is a range of ways in which we can tackle this issue, and we are keen to consider them. I know that the transport conveners of each authority in the Highlands and Islands want to work with us and that is precisely what we want to do.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Last week, Kenny MacAskill, the SNP transport spokesperson, said on BBC Radio nan Gaidheal that he did not believe that the Highlands and Islands merited special treatment by having a Highlands and Islands transport authority. [MEMBERS: "Oh."] Does the minister agree that all local authorities in the Highlands and Islands support the establishment of that authority, that there are particular transport difficulties in the Highlands and Islands and that it is irresponsible of the SNP transport spokesperson to deny us the means of devolving decision making to the Highlands and Islands—

The Presiding Officer: Order. Questions must be related to ministerial responsibilities, and the Minister for Transport and the Environment is not responsible for Opposition parties' manifestos.

I will move on to question 7.

Housing (Glasgow)

7. Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive why capital investment in Glasgow's council housing fell in real terms from £100 million in 1995-96 to £52 million in 1999-2000. (S10-1838)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander): The main reason for the fall in investment was the requirement that the receipts be used to meet the outstanding debt burden. A reduction in the borrowing consent also reflected the transfer of debt on demolished housing into the general services account. That emphasises the need to provide tenants in Glasgow with the opportunity to choose the transfer of council housing, which could generate £1,600 million for housing in that city.

Mr Gibson: I thank the minister for her rather interesting reply.

Does the minister agree that Glasgow council tenants have been forced on to a starvation diet in terms of capital housing investment? Does she accept that that is part of a deliberate strategy, imposed by new Labour, to force those tenants into accepting that there is no alternative to housing stock transfer?

Furthermore, does the minister agree that the loss of almost £170 million in capital investment over four years has led to a massive deterioration in Glasgow's housing stock, denying many tenants investment in their homes and substituting immediate action for promises of jam tomorrow?

Ms Alexander: Since Labour came to power, which is the only part of the period mentioned by Kenny Gibson for which we can take responsibility, the resources available for direct expenditure on Glasgow housing stock have remained stable. Those resources have been supplemented by the new housing partnership programme, which was funded in Scotland in large part through our access to receipts raised in the rest of the UK in the first instance. I recall that the SNP made no commitment whatsoever to increasing local authority funding nor, indeed, did it make any commitment to an equivalent of the new housing partnership programme.

The more fundamental point is that the citizens of Glasgow should be given the opportunity to choose community ownership, which is an attractive option for their city. I am sure that they will take that opportunity.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Will the minister change her researcher, so that she can get her facts about the SNP straight?

The minister will be aware that the Scottish Executive wrote to Fife Council suggesting that it should not invest in housing now in order to provide an incentive for tenants to vote yes in its ballot on partial stock transfer. Can the minister tell us whether the same advice has been given to Glasgow City Council? Is Glasgow being starved of cash to provide tenants with an incentive to vote yes in the minister's ballot?

Ms Alexander: It is rather odd to suggest that Labour has spent three years starving Glasgow of resources when, over the past two years, an additional £12 million has been spent on new housing partnerships in this city. I recall that a mere two weeks ago, in this very chamber, I made it clear that we were allocating an additional £12 million for immediate use as spending on housing in the city, which hardly amounts to starvation prior to a decision on stock transfer. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. There is too

much noise.

Depression

9. Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps are being taken to address depression specifically among women aged 15 to 24. (S10-1835)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): The 1997 framework for mental health services in Scotland provides comprehensive guidance on services for the prevention and treatment of depression and mental illness. Health boards are expected to work with their partners in local government and the voluntary sector to ensure that the needs of specific groups and communities are met.

Irene Oldfather: Does the minister agree that, given that young women are three times more likely than young men to suffer from depression, we must identify the social and biological factors that contribute to that very high incidence and take further measures to reduce it?

Susan Deacon: I agree absolutely that we must continue to strive to find reasons for this and comparable problems affecting other groups—the high rate of suicide among young men, for example, has been debated in the chamber. The answers to these questions are complex, but I believe that, with the range of measures that we are taking to plan mental health services effectively, we are starting to examine the issues fully and responsibly. I hope that we can make progress on providing the support and help that different groups need.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): Often the organisations that make the best contribution to dealing with stress are local voluntary organisations, many of which are on the verge of extinction because of lack of funds. I visited a group this morning, as part of volunteers week. Will the minister try to ensure that there is adequate funding for voluntary organisations, so that they can develop their full potential in advising, befriending and counselling people with stress?

Susan Deacon: I agree absolutely that the role that the voluntary sector plays in this area and in supporting people with different health and social needs is paramount. We seek to build on that work, not just through the level of funding that we offer to specific groups, but by ensuring that the funding of those groups is sustained. One of the keys to providing effective services, particularly in relation to mental health, is to ensure that agencies work together effectively. All the audit reports and evidence on service provision in this area identify that as a key to effective service delivery. It is important that we support the

voluntary sector, but it is equally important that we ensure that statutory bodies such as the national health service and local government work effectively with it.

Radioactive Waste

10. Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what representations it has made to the UK Government or public bodies about the proposals by Babcock Ltd to store radioactive waste from HMS Renown at Rosyth. (S10-1853)

The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack): I understand that Babcock Rosyth Defence Ltd has yet to bring forward detailed proposals regarding its pilot project to store on land the components of the reactor compartment from HMS Renown.

We have been involved by the Ministry of Defence in the preliminary consultation on this proposal and have stressed the need to involve the local community. We note that the proposal would not result in any increase in radioactive material stored at Rosyth. Independent regulators will be involved as the project progresses.

Bruce Crawford: I hope that the minister will agree that it is hardly surprising that the people of Fife are a bit concerned about the continuing storage of intermediate nuclear waste at Rosyth, and that that concern reached new levels as a result of Babcock's proposals. Will the minister make it clear to those who will be responsible for carrying out the environmental assessment that it would be unacceptable for radioactive components to be removed from submarines until the UK finally has its own fully operational long-term storage site for intermediate waste? Will she also recognise that we cannot allow there to be the perception in Fife that Devonport got the jobs and Rosyth gets the waste?

Sarah Boyack: It is important that we understand that this is a pilot project to deal with one submarine's nuclear waste. We are all aware that, in the long run, we as a society have to deal with that nuclear waste. It is important to get across the point that there will be strong local consultation. Any moves to discuss this further would require an environmental impact assessment, which would be consulted on at a local level. Representations have already been made to local councillors and to MSPs. It is important that people do not hype up this issue, that they treat it seriously and look at the details carefully and that none of us falls into the trap of exaggerating what is being proposed. It is important that we have the discussion in the open, and that we have it without going for headlines.

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): Does the minister agree that nuclear submarines that need to be dealt with are currently being stored at Rosyth? Does she also agree that the current proposal by Babcock will isolate the spent reactors and allow the remaining hulks to be scrapped, and that the Ministry of Defence is actively looking for alternative sites outwith the Rosyth base to store the radioactive waste?

Sarah Boyack: I am happy to confirm that. It is important that we understand that this project is at the feasibility stage. However, I understand that existing float storage capacity is finite, so there is a need for us to look at this issue. I hope that the consultation will fully involve local members and the council, so that local communities can see exactly what is being proposed and, before a second stage of the project can be pursued, that there is a commitment that the independent regulators have to be completely satisfied that a case has been made for progressing safely.

Nick Johnston (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Does the minister agree that a major reason why Rosyth has survived as a dockyard is the expertise that was attained from the maintenance of the nuclear submarine fleet? To what extent will that expertise be put to good use with respect to the storage of radioactive waste at Rosyth?

Sarah Boyack: I appreciate that the issue of expertise is a critical one. In pursuing the discussions on this project, that expertise and confidence will be vital. In persuading the regulators and making the safety case to them, it is important that that expertise is used to the full.

Prisons

11. Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive which prisons are currently involved in the manufacture of goods for commercial enterprises. (S10-1839)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Angus MacKay): Prisons currently involved in the manufacture of goods for commercial enterprises are Aberdeen, Barlinnie, Dumfries, Dungavel, Edinburgh, Glenochil, Greenock, Inverness, Kilmarnock, Low Moss, Perth, Peterhead, Polmont and Shotts.

Ms White: Assuming that those ventures are run as a business and therefore generate profit, how much profit is made in each of those prisons, and where does the money go?

The Presiding Officer: May we have a total rather than a figure for each one?

Angus MacKay: I am afraid that I did not catch the second part of the question. I do not have to hand details of how much profit is made in each prison. Section 68 of the Prisons and Young

Offenders Institutions (Scotland) Rules 1994 requires every prisoner to work in prison. In its effort to make work available—as part of its rehabilitation programmes as much as anything else—the Scottish Prison Service seeks to secure contracts on a national basis, specifically to avoid prisons competing with local businesses. In addition, where practical, the Prison Service tries to secure work for products that are normally imported. I am happy to write to Sandra White with the details for each prison.

Ms White *rose*—

The Presiding Officer: May I repeat the second part of the question for you? Where does the money go?

Angus MacKay: The money stays within the Prison Service and makes a contribution towards the running of prisons.

Asylum Seekers (Health Care)

12. Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures are in place in Glasgow to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers who live in the city receive timely, appropriate and accessible health care services. (S1O-1837)

The Deputy Minister for Community Care (Iain Gray): The Greater Glasgow Primary Care NHS Trust is taking the steps it considers necessary to ensure that asylum seekers receive the same health care services as any other resident in the area.

Linda Fabiani: Will the minister commit to investigating fully the report of the Audit Commission, which was published today, to establish its relevance to Scotland so that we can learn from and avoid the mistakes that have been made in England and Wales? If additional funding is necessary to avoid those mistakes, will the minister commit to asking the Treasury for extra money?

Iain Gray: The Audit Commission report—as Ms Fabiani probably knows—is about the lessons to be learned from the interim arrangements introduced in England in November 1999. Those interim arrangements do not extend to Scotland, so the situation that was examined is not extant in Scotland. Nevertheless, some of the findings will be useful for Scotland. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities is aware of the report and is getting a copy on publication.

We have undertaken to examine, 18 months into its operation, how the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 is operating in the areas that are devolved to us. Any action that we take then will depend on the outcome of the findings that are relevant to what is happening here in Scotland.

Ministry of Defence (Housing)

13. Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has made representations to the Ministry of Defence concerning the disposal of surplus MOD housing in Helensburgh. (S1O-1811)

The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish): Yes. Negotiations continue between Defence Estates, Argyll and Bute Council, Scottish Homes and Dunbritton Housing Association.

Mr Quinan: I thank the minister for that answer. It is nice to know that the Scottish Executive makes representations on some reserved matters. Does the minister agree that it would be correct and honourable if the Ministry of Defence transferred all surplus housing in Scotland to the local authority or housing associations to assist in tackling the shortage of affordable rented housing?

Henry McLeish: I am pleased that Lloyd Quinan has raised this matter, because he allows me to tell members that the local MP, John McFall, and the local MSP, Jackie Baillie, have got this matter to the point at which there is going to be a satisfactory conclusion to the discussions.

On the rather pathetic preamble to Mr Quinan's question, it would be good if the SNP acknowledged that the MP and the MSP have been working with all concerned. On 30 May there was a meeting with all parties; there is to be a meeting soon to finalise the negotiations and I am delighted to say that local representation has won through. Whether it is a reserved matter or a devolved matter, this is partnership in action. The SNP may not like it, but it will provide a satisfactory solution to the homes issue in Helensburgh.

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): Mr McLeish, I failed to hear in that fulsome reply what the satisfactory solution is. That is what we want to know.

Henry McLeish: I could have prefaced my answer by saying that this is a reserved matter, but most people in the chamber, apart from the SNP, acknowledge that that is the reality. It is also important that this Parliament recognises, with a bit of humility, that the local MSP, the local MP and the MOD are dealing with the issue and they will come up with a satisfactory solution, details of which will be made available to the wider public at that stage.

Schools (Security)

14. Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to make resources available to local

authorities to allow security upgrades of schools to be made. (S1O-1830)

The Minister for Children and Education (Mr Sam Galbraith): Substantial resources have been, and continue to be, made available to authorities for the improvement of school security.

Tricia Marwick: Following the Dunblane tragedy, it was agreed that all schools should have a security audit. The minister is bound to be aware of the Educational Institute of Scotland report that revealed that 20 per cent of all schools have still had no security audit and, worse, that a quarter of those that have had an audit have not had the work carried out. What steps will the Executive take to ensure that the audits are completed and that the resources needed to carry out the work are made available?

Mr Galbraith: Following the Dunblane tragedy, £40 million over three years was made available to schools to deal with security. Since then, £13.3 million has been built into grant-aided expenditure to deal with security issues. Considerable funds are available year on year for schools and local authorities to address security. We will keep this matter under review. I am confident that schools and local authorities will continue to develop their policies in this area.

Tricia Marwick: Will the minister explain to the parents of Kennoway Primary School pupils why Fife Council has told them that there is no money to carry out the security work that has been identified as necessary?

Mr Galbraith: I suggest that the member take that up with Fife Council for a change. I greatly deprecate the undermining of local authority functions by the Parliament.

First Minister's Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

1. Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): To ask the acting First Minister when he last met the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues they discussed. (S1F-367)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): I am in regular contact with the Secretary of State for Scotland and expect to meet him on Monday at the joint ministerial committee on health.

Mr Salmond: Does the acting First Minister accept that local authority education budgets around Scotland are strapped, not least in Aberdeenshire—the only Liberal-run authority in the country—where there has been a £4 million cut to this year's education budget, which has caused great damage to the educational fabric in the north-east of Scotland? Given that many local authorities are in a similar predicament, will he accept as a point of principle that if the McCrone committee recommendations are to be fully implemented, they will have to be fully funded by additional resources from central Government?

Mr Wallace: I have had several meetings with Aberdeenshire councillors and I salute the fact that Nora Radcliffe and Mike Rumbles regularly keep me informed of what is happening there. As a result of the decisions the Executive took after the budget, some £30 million is going directly to Scottish schools. Aberdeenshire will get its full and fair share of that money.

I add my thanks to Professor Gavin McCrone and the other members of the committee for their efforts. I think that Alex Salmond knows it is a detailed and complex report and that we do no service by rushing to conclusions on it. As my colleague Sam Galbraith has said, there will be ample opportunity for consideration and consultation.

Mr Salmond: It might be helpful to answer the question. In principle, the acting First Minister owes it to the chamber to indicate to local authorities, parents and teachers whether the McCrone recommendations will be funded. Does he recall an excellent press release that he issued a couple of months ago, when he was Deputy First Minister, which demanded that the Chancellor of the Exchequer open up the war chest to fund Scottish education? Now he is in charge and speaks with the full authority of the Scottish Executive, does he still believe that the war chest should be opened up to fund Scottish education?

Mr Wallace: I certainly recall that press release—I remind Mr Salmond that I am still the Deputy First Minister. I think that he will find that in that press release I was talking about the investment of the equivalent of a penny in income tax. The consequentials that came to Scotland as a result of the budget were the equivalent of more than a penny in income tax. As I have said, a substantial part of that has gone into education as well as health, justice—for the police—and transport initiatives.

Professor McCrone is well aware that there will be discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the teaching unions about how his proposals will be taken forward.

Mr Salmond: I am fascinated by that response because the Liberal party leader in the Commons, Charles Kennedy, took a very different view on 21 March, when he pointed out that the additional education spending was worth a quarter of the value of cuts in tax that were awarded by the chancellor. Is it that Charles Kennedy speaks as a Liberal in London, but the acting First Minister is a Labour lackey in Scotland?

Will the acting First Minister address the point that concerns teachers and parents around Scotland? McCrone has said that his recommendations must be taken as a whole. The president of COSLA says that they must be funded or they will not be implemented. Will the McCrone committee's findings be implemented and funded by the Executive or not? Will he give a yes-or-no answer?

Mr Wallace: By asking for that kind of knee-jerk reaction, Mr Salmond does no justice to the complex report produced by Gavin McCrone. We have given a clear indication that we will consider and consult. That process is in hand.

On the first part of the question, I remind Mr Salmond that as a result of the budget, £86 million more has been put into education; that as a result of the coalition, £81 million of new money was put into education; and that as a result of what we have negotiated in the partnership, student tuition fees have been abolished and £50 million of new money is going into education. [*Applause.*]

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Order. There is far too much noise. Members cannot hear one another.

Joint Ministerial Committees

2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether there are any plans for future meetings of joint ministerial committees. (S1F-363)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): As I said in my answer

to Mr Salmond, the joint ministerial committee on health will meet in London on Monday. The Parliament will no doubt share my delight that the devolved Northern Ireland Executive will be represented at that meeting. Further meetings of joint ministerial committees will take place over the coming months.

David McLetchie: I welcome the participation of the Northern Ireland Executive in the meeting.

Will the subject of public consultation come up at the joint ministerial committee on health, which is the next committee to meet? Will the acting First Minister tell us a little about the Scottish consultation exercise on the health service, which I understand is forthcoming? Will it be the same as the meaningless and expensive gimmick that Alan Milburn has just launched down south?

Mr Wallace: Now that we have a devolved Parliament—which Mr McLetchie is now on record as saying he supports—I am slightly amazed that we are always being invited to copy England. We will do our thing in our own time. There has been extensive consultation on a range of health matters—there has been wide consultation with patients and staff on the future of the greater Glasgow hospital service. As we have indicated on many occasions, one of the hallmarks of this Executive is that we believe in wide consultation.

David McLetchie: We are not asking the Executive to copy the meaningless and expensive gimmick consultation exercise that has been launched by Mr Milburn down south; we are simply asking for information about the nature of the consultation exercise here. The wider issue is whether any attention will be paid to it. Given that, this week, the Executive has ignored the views of more than 1 million Scots who want to retain section 28, what assurances can the acting First Minister give us that his so-called listening Executive will pay any more attention to what the public think about health than it has paid to what the public think about section 28?

Mr Wallace: It is clear that we have been listening, because we have introduced an amendment on statutory guidance to local authorities to the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill and introduced to the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc (Scotland) Bill a section that talks about stable family life. That is a recognition that the Parliament and the Executive have been listening.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): At the next JMC, will the Deputy First Minister mention that drug dealers do not recognise borders? Will he highlight the importance of the establishment of the Scottish Drugs Enforcement Agency, which will contribute to the UK's fight against drugs and ensure that

dealers do not profit from their attacks on Scotland's communities?

Mr Wallace: It is clear that drug dealers do not recognise any national boundaries when they want to visit their evil deeds on communities north and south of the border, in Europe and elsewhere. That is why I particularly welcome the further announcements that have been made in connection with the Scottish Drugs Enforcement Agency and the clear commitment to target the drug barons who ply their evil trade in many of Scotland's communities.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): At the next joint ministerial committee, will the acting First Minister raise any matters of Liberal Democrat policy? If he does, perhaps he could look at a recent Liberal Democrat press release, in which one of his most senior colleagues, Malcolm Bruce, a Westminster MP, said:

"The Scottish Parliament itself will not be able to meet the aspirations of the Scottish people, however, until it has control over their own revenues."

He went on to say that, without that power,

"The devolution settlement for Scotland . . . is unsustainable in the long-term."

Does Jim Wallace support the press release from the party that he leads or the brief from the Labour Government that he works for?

Mr Wallace: It is all very pathetic and interesting. Those of us who worked in the constitutional convention recognised that there would be longer-term developments in the devolution settlement—but of course the nationalists were not there to make their case.

Volunteers Week

3. Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Executive intends to mark volunteers week. (S1F-365)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): I understand that 18 ministers and 80 MSPs are giving at least one hour of their time to volunteering during the week. I am undertaking a number of engagements to support and promote volunteers week.

Karen Gillon: I thank the Deputy First Minister for his reply. I am glad to hear that he is not volunteering to go horse riding again next week. Will he join me in commending all those involved in voluntary work, particularly those who work with disadvantaged young people and who have acted as mentors for the new deal in Scotland, helping 20,000 young Scots back into employment? Does he agree that a properly resourced voluntary sector, working in partnership with the private and public sectors, is the best means of ensuring the type of joined-up government that will tackle social

exclusion in urban and rural areas? Can the Deputy First Minister indicate what extra resources the Executive intends to provide for the voluntary sector?

Mr Wallace: I agree with Karen Gillon and join her in paying tribute to the many people the length and breadth of Scotland who volunteer. Our communities would be much the poorer without the efforts of volunteers. Today is an appropriate opportunity to put that on record.

Karen Gillon referred to the people who mentor young people and help them to take advantage of the new deal. That is a particularly useful and worthwhile form of volunteering and allows less able people to take advantage of the opportunities that exist. Karen Gillon may know that the Executive has made a commitment, with other funders, to try to create a more stable funding environment for the voluntary sector at national and local levels. The Executive has made a commitment to three-year funding. I have figures that show that £289 million each year is given for volunteering and that £6 million is given to support the voluntary sector infrastructure and central initiatives.

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): If I thought for a moment that the minister might be public spirited enough, I might suggest that the Executive mark volunteers week by volunteering to answer a question openly—yes or no—for the first time ever. We are sick of not getting proper, transparent information. Perhaps the Executive will volunteer to please the entire Scottish public by disappearing for a week.

The Presiding Officer: Can we come to the question, please?

Dorothy-Grace Elder: What does the Executive propose to do to stop the cuts in the voluntary sector—a sector that it purports to support, but does not?

Mr Wallace: The Executive has a very good record of supporting the voluntary sector. As I have already said, we want to make a commitment to three-year funding because we recognise that funding is a key issue for voluntary organisations. We are developing a more strategic approach to the funding of the voluntary sector. Dorothy-Grace Elder will also be aware that the Scottish compact commits the Scottish Executive to best practice in funding, monitoring publicly funded work and targeting resources effectively. Cumulatively, the Executive has been doing a considerable amount for the voluntary sector. However, in saying that I do not want to detract from the work the voluntary sector does to raise resources, making a valid contribution to the life of our community.

Museums

4. Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what plans the Scottish Executive has to introduce designated status for Glasgow museums that house collections of national importance. (S1F-358)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): The Executive has no plans to introduce a designation scheme for museums in Scotland.

Mr Gibson: I intended to thank the minister for his response, but as it was somewhat disappointing, I will not bother.

Does the minister agree with Glasgow City Council's convener of cultural and leisure services that

"the importance of Glasgow's collections cannot be underestimated"

and that we require urgently a

"debate at national and local level on the subject of an equitable funding structure for museums."

Does the minister accept, given that Glasgow City Council has absorbed cuts of £81 million, £43 million, £21 million and £24 million over the past four years, that the council has been forced to reduce its museums and galleries budget and staff by almost one third over that period?

Will the minister assure me that the Executive will consider seriously giving Glasgow museums and galleries of national importance the resources that are required to reach out and attract socially excluded target audiences—

The Presiding Officer: Enough.

Mr Gibson:—while improving and preserving rare collections?

Mr Wallace: I would be one of the first to recognise the value of Glasgow's museums and the collections they hold. Indeed, yesterday I had an opportunity to visit St Mungo's Museum of Religious Life and Art and found it a very worthwhile experience.

As Kenny Gibson will be aware, a national cultural strategy is proposed. The broad question of funding for cultural activities, including museums at both local and national level, is being examined as part of the development of that strategy. The strategy will not address the funding of any specific museum, but it will look at the strategic approach to the funding of museums at national and local level.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Given the fact that the minister is not considering designated status, will he reconfirm his commitment to looking after national treasures? On the basis of that commitment, has he given

any consideration to the fate of the Carrick? [MEMBERS: "The what?"] The Carrick.

Mr Wallace: I apologise to Mr Gallie. I, too, could not hear the question and I thought he said something completely different.

I am not in a position to make any comment or commitment with regard to that matter today.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Will the acting First Minister and the Executive consider including the Glasgow collections in the forthcoming national audit of collections, to enable the process to begin of having single, unified collections in Scotland, rather than the fragmented nature of the present museum system?

Mr Wallace: As I have indicated, the national strategy will look at a number of aspects and a wide range of cultural issues, including the funding of museums. I am not in a position to give a specific response to the question of including the Glasgow collections in the national audit, but I am sure that the debate that will follow the launch of the national cultural strategy later in the summer will allow many such important issues to be taken up.

Local Government Finance

5. Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive has any plans to introduce a local income tax in addition to council tax or to return non-domestic rates to council control. (S1F-360)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): No.

Mr Harding: Like Kenneth Gibson, I am not sure that I should thank the minister. However, perhaps that answer indicated a change in the Liberal flagship policy of introducing a local income tax.

Will the minister join me in condemning the leader of an SNP-controlled council for advocating such proposals and their consequential damaging effects on local economies?

Mr Wallace: I must apologise to Mr Harding also; it is becoming increasingly difficult to hear.

Mr Harding referred to local income tax being a Liberal Democrat policy. I make no bones about the fact that it remains a Liberal Democrat policy, but it was not included in the partnership agreement. Certainly it is not Liberal Democrat policy to add local income tax to the council tax, as Mr Harding seemed to suggest.

Mr Harding: I asked whether the minister would join me in condemning the SNP—

The Presiding Officer: That is not his responsibility.

New Community Schools

6. Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):

To ask the First Minister what is the current position on the development of new community schools. (S1F-373)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): Thirty authorities have established 37 new community school projects involving more than 150 schools. Each project has its management structures and most of its core support staff in place and has embarked on its planned work programme. The projects cover a wide range of activities including breakfast clubs, fast forward schemes to help boost reading levels, parenting courses and pupil performance monitoring systems.

I am pleased to say that the Minister for Children and Education announced yesterday that eight more new community school projects will receive funding under phase 2 of the pilot programme. A further two projects are under consideration. Decisions on them will be announced very soon.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):

Here comes Kenny Macintosh, the king of the planted question.

Mr Macintosh: I will leave that activity to Mike Russell, thank you very much.

Will the minister consider the examples that have been set by Woodfarm High School and Thornliebank Primary School in my area when evaluating the success of the programme? In particular, will he examine the model followed by East Renfrewshire in appointing a full-time social worker as a member of the school staff? East Renfrewshire has already made remarkable progress in reducing the number of pupil exclusions. That said, I hope that whatever measures are introduced, the minister will agree that investment in the new community school programme goes to the heart of our attempts to promote social inclusion.

Mr Wallace: I certainly believe that new community schools have a valuable role in promoting social inclusion. As Mr Macintosh might know, the Scottish Executive has commissioned the Institute of Education at the University of London to carry out a national evaluation of the new community schools initiative. I am sure that the review will include the examples of good practice that he highlighted. Furthermore, it is important that we do not just review good practice, but disseminate it.

I am not sure whether that was the last question. If it was, perhaps this would be an opportunity on behalf of the Executive to thank the city of Glasgow for its co-operation during our stay. It has been much appreciated and everyone has made us feel warmly welcome.

Rough Sleeping

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is the main debate on motion S1M-921, in the name of Wendy Alexander, on tackling rough sleeping in Glasgow and across Scotland, and amendments to that motion. I ask members who are not staying for the debate to leave quickly and quietly.

15:31

The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander): It is fitting that we are having a debate about rough sleepers and their needs while the Parliament is meeting in Glasgow, where Scottish homelessness is at its most acute. Today I want to update Parliament on how we are expanding the rough sleepers initiative to address the toughest challenges that face us as we meet our challenging pledge to end by 2003 the need for anyone to sleep rough in Scotland.

We made that pledge last September. In October, we increased funding by 40 per cent from £26 million to £36 million. In November, we identified the scale of the problem: 8,000 to 11,000 Scots sleep rough at least one night. One in three have alcohol problems; one in three have a drug problem; one in four have a physical health difficulty; and one in five have a mental health problem.

In January, the homelessness figures fell by 9 per cent on the previous quarter, with a 5 per cent fall in families in temporary accommodation. That was only the start. In February, we tackled the problems in rural Scotland with 30 new projects outside the central belt, encouraged prevention through 10 rent deposit schemes, and addressed the problem of homelessness following a spell in prison by funding 11 prison outreach projects.

In March, we committed to a homelessness strategy for each local authority, to improve the rights of all homeless people. Today we turn to some of the toughest outstanding problems. We have to get the solutions right in our largest cities—Glasgow and Edinburgh—and address the health and other complex needs of rough sleepers more effectively. In human terms, tackling rough sleeping is not just about putting a roof over people's heads, but about how successful we are in helping them to address mental health issues, alcoholism and substance abuse.

This morning, I visited the "Link Up" project in Bell Street, which is run by Turning Point, an organisation that runs excellent drug outreach projects, as many in the chamber will know. It also runs a residential centre in Bell Street. None of the young people to whom I talked about their needs

talked about the need for more hostels. They talked about their needs in terms of access to residential rehabilitation or detox facilities. They felt that they needed those things to make a new start. It is their experience that hostels can be part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. That is what we are acting on today.

However, there are places in Scotland where more emergency places are needed. In Edinburgh, there has been on-going concern about the lack of accommodation that is available for rough sleepers. Today, we are announcing £1 million of capital funding to build a new reception centre. It will provide 20 places that homeless people themselves say are really needed. It will be a tolerant regime, taking in couples, people with dogs and those who have been excluded from other hostels. While it is being built, we will support new temporary facilities, and 28 extra direct access accommodation places for rough sleepers in Edinburgh will be ready and open within two months.

The completion of the Edinburgh wet house facility by the end of June will double the number of places available for homeless men with alcohol problems. Overall, the rough sleepers initiative will be funding 35 extra hostel places in Edinburgh this year and all current rough sleepers initiative projects in Edinburgh will continue to be funded.

In Glasgow, we delayed allocating funds until we could consider the conclusions of the Glasgow review team. We set up the team in November to deal with the particularly difficult problems in Glasgow. I am extremely grateful to the review team for its hard work. Representatives of the voluntary sector, Shelter, the Big Issue in Scotland, the council's housing and social work departments and the health board have met regularly since December. Today, we respond to their interim conclusions.

We asked the Glasgow review team to examine hostel accommodation. Glasgow's hostels are too large, with up to 200 people living together in unsuitable accommodation. The Glasgow review team is developing a rolling programme of hostel closures, starting with the worst, and resettling people in supported accommodation. It has also identified an immediate need for support for homeless people where they most need it: in the existing hostels. Today's package begins the process of planned hostel closure and of putting support teams into the hostels, with £3 million more set aside for the recommendations that the Glasgow review team will make later this year.

Today, £5 million is being allocated to support continuation funding for all Glasgow's current rough sleepers initiative projects. In addition, we will create 250 supported furnished flats for people moving on from the hostels to independent

accommodation. We are supporting the development of a Glasgow-wide rent deposit scheme. We recognise the need for people to have better access to financial services and we are therefore funding the development of a savings and loans scheme for people in hostels who are at present excluded. We are also funding the provision of an advice service for serving prisoners in Barlinnie prison that will prevent them from becoming homeless on release and lessen the possibility of their reoffending.

The £8 million for Glasgow and the £5 million for Edinburgh completes our allocation of the £13 million remaining in the rough sleepers initiative fund. In addition, I am pleased to announce that the Executive has decided to prioritise rough sleeping and homelessness for additional funding by allocating an additional £12 million—a rise of 33 per cent in the budget for tackling rough sleeping and an 85 per cent increase since the Executive came to power.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I welcome what the minister has said, but would like to point out that—contrary to her press release—there is not a £25 million boost for rough sleepers, but a £12 million boost. Where did that £12 million come from? Was it diverted from the Scottish Homes budget? We want to help rough sleepers, but taking money out of a budget that is meant to provide housing for families who are the hidden homeless will have a negative impact on homelessness. Can she reassure us that the money did not come from Scottish Homes?

Ms Alexander: I can offer Fiona Hyslop the reassurance that she seeks. The additional funding for the rough sleepers initiative that we are announcing today will be met from underspends that are carried forward from the previous financial year. The Minister for Finance will issue a more detailed statement. Those funds are drawn from prudent financial management across the whole of the Executive's budget, not in any way from the existing housing budget.

Fiona Hyslop: It is of deep concern that the Government's management in the past year has meant that it has not allocated finances that could have helped housing, health or education. The announcement of the other £13 million is a delayed announcement from February. There must be concern that certain services were not delivered last year because of the underspending. People needed the money six months or a year ago. What we are getting from the Executive is delay and dither.

Ms Alexander: It is simply not true that anybody in Glasgow who has been involved in the rough sleepers initiative was screaming for this money six months ago. We set up a Glasgow review team after people who are close to the ground in that

city said that a new approach was needed. It was at their request that we did not make allocations in February, but gave that team the opportunity to decide the right way forward. It has now done so. We have just received its report, and we are allocating the money for Glasgow and Edinburgh. There has been an 85 per cent increase in the rough sleepers initiative budget since the Executive took office.

I shall now set out in broad terms how we are using the additional £12 million that has been allocated. In recognition of the severity of the problems in Glasgow, we want to speed up the process of taking the outdated Victorian hostels out of commission. We are therefore proposing to provide an additional £2 million to progress the work of the Glasgow review team this financial year, bringing the Glasgow total allocation to £10 million. That additional funding will accelerate the process of closing the most unsuitable hostels and will allow those in existing hostels who have a drug problem, for whom mainstream hostel accommodation is unsuitable, to move to more appropriate facilities.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I am glad that we are returning to the issue of helping rough sleepers instead of scoring petty political points.

The Glasgow Drug Crisis Centre carries out excellent work, but has far too few beds. What can the minister do to help that? Does she foresee the possibility of a scheme similar to that of Simpson House for Barlinnie, to give through-care to prisoners who have problems with drugs?

The Presiding Officer: I shall allow the minister extra time because of the interventions.

Ms Alexander: Thank you. I shall be brief and shall answer directly.

As part of that allocation, we are providing £26,000 for the resettlement project at Barlinnie. I can also confirm that we are providing £709,000 for Turning Point, to allow it to replicate the outstanding facility that exists at Bell Street on a larger scale. That will allow short-term emergency accommodation for 12 people and also longer rehabilitation facilities for a further six people.

That brings me to one of the other problems that we need to solve, which are peculiar to Glasgow. Half the women who are taking advantage of the rough sleepers initiative in Glasgow are involved in prostitution, and there are clear links between injecting drug misuse and street prostitution in this city. The routes out of prostitution social inclusion partnership, which is based in Glasgow, has identified that there is a problem, and we recognise the link that the Base 75 research has identified. I am therefore asking the Glasgow review team to consider how that problem can be

tackled.

Health issues figure prominently in the problems that are faced by people who are sleeping rough. Often the housing situation in which they find themselves makes their health problems worse. Last November, I announced that the health department was engaged in tackling that, and I am delighted to announce that my colleague Susan Deacon has earmarked £4 million for services for rough sleepers and those who are at risk of rough sleeping. That will come from national health service resources and will be delivered through the health trusts, but local rough sleepers initiative partnerships will be involved in its use.

The lion's share of that money—£2 million—will be allocated to Glasgow to address some of the key priorities there, to provide more support for those who are in crisis and who have complex needs. A further £1 million will go to Lothian Health for a package of projects that will put front-line staff resource where it is most needed and so that it can continue to upgrade services. The rest of the money will be allocated to other areas where the need is greatest.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Ms Alexander: No, I am sorry—I have taken a number of interventions.

That additional funding will extend partnership working at local level. The single-agency approach will fail; we need to work across service boundaries. Seamless services through joined-up working are a top Executive priority. The additional money will help us to put the philosophy into action.

The next tough problem—and one that we have in our sights for the first time—is temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The use of inappropriate bed-and-breakfast accommodation is unacceptable in housing terms, in health terms, and in terms of the security and stability of families. It is expensive and wasteful. I intend to make available much of the additional £6 million this year for local authorities to put in place a range of projects that will provide more appropriate accommodation for homeless households—projects that will be especially focused on reducing the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We are working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to consider how that money might best be allocated across local authorities.

This Parliament should be in no doubt about the Executive's determination to meet by the end of this first session of Parliament our aim of ensuring that no one in Scotland has to sleep rough. Before today, we had allocated £23 million to rough sleepers initiative projects. Today, we are

allocating £13 million to Glasgow and Edinburgh and we are announcing £12 million more. We are therefore providing a total boost of £25 million. We are committing health resources, we are getting the strategy right for Glasgow, and we are resourcing the implementation of projects and the funding of on-going commitments. We are getting to the heart of the problem and delivering effective solutions. We look across the chamber for support in doing so.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the commitment of the Scottish Executive to achieving its aim that no one in Scotland should have to sleep rough by the end of this session of the Parliament; recognises the allocation of funds through the Rough Sleepers Initiative to projects which address the complex needs of rough sleepers including health needs, and notes the progress of the high level review team in carrying out a strategic review of current measures to tackle the problems of street homelessness in Glasgow and across Scotland.

15:46

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I have pleasure in speaking to and moving the amendment in my name.

In preparing my remarks, I had cause to double-check some previous announcements by the Minister for Communities—not because of any lack of trust, but because I have found that it sometimes pays to check. On the first day of the first meeting of the Parliament in Glasgow, the minister announced her first £12 million of new money. We then found out that the money was not quite new. Today, at the last meeting of the Parliament in Glasgow, the minister returns to the chamber with another new £12 million. Or is it new? She has said that it comes from underspend, and the fact that there was underspend last year means that there are services that could have been delivered sooner but have not been.

I understand that the minister had her handbag stolen. I was very sorry to hear that, but she obviously found a purse. However, the question is: whose purse is it? Is it Susan Deacon's? Does it contain money from the education budget? Where is the money coming from?

Ms Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Fiona Hyslop: No. I want to move on.

Remember November? There was an announcement of a new extra £20 million, but that money had been announced by the minister the previous month, and her predecessor, Calum Macdonald, had also announced that money some months previously.

Today, we had the announcement of a £25

million “boost”. We hear that £12 million is new, but it is not really new because it is last year’s money. The £13 million is a postponed announcement. A question has to be asked: if we are talking about slippage expenditure, where will the continuing revenue costs come from?

I do not raise those matters simply to score points with the Minister for Communities; I raise them to demonstrate that, if the SNP in opposition is occasionally called cynical in its attitude towards Government announcements, it is because we have due cause. We must question and scrutinise to separate the spin from the fiction. We must challenge the Government when it says that no one need sleep rough. That is indeed something to be aspired to, but I am concerned that, under the wording of the Executive’s proposals, if enough hostel places are provided, but people are still sleeping rough, that might count as a success. I sincerely hope that that is not the case.

We must also challenge the moves to make the policy on rough sleeping the complete homelessness policy. The tackling of the inappropriate use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation is welcome, but this is not necessarily about rough sleeping. Rough sleeping is the most acute form of homelessness, but we have to remember hidden homelessness.

There is a difference between spin and fiction. When we are dealing with issues such as homelessness and rough sleeping and are asked to put aside party political differences, it becomes all the more important that we have a true picture.

Ms Alexander: Is Fiona Hyslop really suggesting that it is spin to continue every rough sleepers initiative project in Glasgow, and to provide an additional 250 flats, a rent deposit scheme, a credit union and a resettlement scheme for discharged prisoners from Barlinnie? Is that spin?

Fiona Hyslop: It is to be commended that we are raising the profile. That is not the issue. We welcomed the rough sleepers initiative announcement in February; we welcomed the homelessness task force report. Our responsibility is to make sure that the Executive is using public finances in the best way.

Our amendment tries to be reasonably constructive. We have removed the word “welcomes” and inserted “notes” in the opening sentence because we believe that we should welcome achievement, not ambition. We note that the commitment has been moved back from an original deadline of 2002 because there has been no satisfactory explanation from the Executive as to why it has moved away from that deadline. I understand that it wants more time for Glasgow, but that does not apply elsewhere. We inserted

the section on challenge funding because we believe, in common with many members, that it damages the ability to deliver the resources where they are most needed. We inserted the section on funding because we believe that the overall levels of funding for public and social housing in Scotland are dangerously low. We make those points not to undermine what the Executive is doing, but to raise valid issues.

Bearing in mind what the minister said about the delay, I want to refer to the situation in Edinburgh, where the challenge funding element has caused difficulties. The city council has been involved in a lengthy bidding process to tackle its rough sleeping problems. In February this year, I wrote to Jackie Baillie to express serious concerns about reports that I had received from homelessness workers, that there were now fewer hostel places in Edinburgh than there were when the rough sleepers initiative was introduced and that hostel closures were causing extreme concern. I received a sympathetic reply from her, stating that she was aware of the problem and was working towards resolving the difficulties.

Four months on, that saga continues. I now understand that Leith House is to be refurbished and will come on stream, but I raised the issue of Leith House in the housing debate in January. My concern about the delay is that the bids from the council for that service and other complex needs services were made in November and January, and were identified two years ago. If we want the homelessness policy and rough sleepers initiative money to respond to need, those services should have been provided already. I hope that the Executive will remove the challenge funding element from funding of services for rough sleepers.

I was told in February that the problem with the new hostel was planning permission. That was not the case—the problem was funding. The City of Edinburgh Council has been unable to acquire premises and to apply for planning permission because it did not have the funding that was needed. It got it today and that is great—but it did not have it until today. I am pleased that the complex needs bid for Edinburgh has now been accepted, but it falls £100,000 short of the original bid, which will mean difficult decisions. It should be done by need, not by challenge funding.

We all want to end rough sleeping and we want a cross-party consensus on that aim. However, that consensus must be based on robust analysis and on an honest appraisal of what works and what does not. The visible homeless problem of rough sleeping must be put in the context of hidden homelessness and general housing policy. We support the Conservative amendment and what the Executive is doing, but through our

amendment we want to send a clear message to the Executive that it is heading in the right direction but is a long way from achieving the objective of an end to rough sleeping.

I am particularly pleased to see Glasgow's problems recognised and money released to address them, but I hope that the motivation is to address the very real problems in Glasgow and not to bail out a minister in trouble.

I move amendment S1M-921.1, to leave out from "welcomes" to "recognises" and insert:

"notes the commitment of the Scottish Executive to achieving its aim that no-one should have to sleep rough by the end of this session of the Parliament; notes that this commitment has been moved back from an original deadline of 2002, and believes that the challenge funding nature of the Rough Sleepers Initiative aligned with a general fall in housing resources is hindering the ability of the Executive to meet its target of ending rough sleeping; however recognises".

15:53

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): We could be forgiven for having a feeling of déjà vu today, because this is the third time that this subject has been debated since the Parliament was established.

I am pleased to record that I feel that genuine progress is now being made towards dealing with what is obviously a tragic and visible problem, open for all of us to see in the streets of both Glasgow and Edinburgh. There has also been an acceptance on the part of the Executive that the issue is perhaps more complex than was at first thought.

I have no wish to enter into an exercise in semantics, but it is noteworthy that the Minister for Communities does not say in her motion that "no one will sleep rough". She says that

"no one in Scotland should have to sleep rough".

There is a difference. No one now should be sleeping rough; no one has, really, the need to sleep rough. After the Conservative Government introduced the rough sleepers initiative some years ago, the facility was always there for someone to have a bed.

Labour has continued with the Conservative party policy and, I acknowledge, has built upon it to some extent. What it has built upon, however, is to a large extent what my colleagues and I have been saying in the chamber in the two previous debates. The Executive is now, to a considerable extent, accepting some of the issues that we raised.

Ms Alexander: Would Bill Aitken care to remind members how much money the Conservative Government put into addressing the issue of rough

sleeping?

Bill Aitken: That is a question about which I would require prior notice—but it was a lot.

Ms Alexander: But less than one fifth of where we find ourselves now.

Bill Aitken: With regard to the much-recycled figure of £35 million, announced last year, I had the figure as £36 million. Perhaps the minister was being uncharacteristically modest. There was still some uncertainty about the figure: I notice that she said at one point that it was on a basis of three-year funding. Prior to that, she said that it was on a basis of five-year funding. In her summing-up, perhaps Jackie Baillie could clarify what the current thinking is with regard to that sum.

It is significant that, despite all the task forces, high-level teams, review groups and focus groups appointed by the Executive to deal with the problem, some three years after the caring, sharing Labour Government came to power, homelessness has soared to 45,000 plus, which is a highly unsatisfactory state of affairs.

By the minister's own statistics, provided today, homelessness, at its most extreme level—rough sleeping—is measured at 8,000 to 11,000, a highly unsatisfactory state of affairs. Obviously, some progress has to be made.

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie): Does Bill Aitken agree that the number of applications—45,000—does not reflect the number of homeless people? Does he further agree that the homelessness task force is seriously considering the matter and has produced a report to resolve the issue of homelessness in Scotland?

Bill Aitken: I would accept that that is the situation. However, on a like-for-like basis, there has been a significant increase from 1996 to 1999. I have the figures here, and I shall give them to the deputy minister afterwards. However, let us move on—we have to move on with the issue and we have to recognise where we are going.

I particularly welcome the 250 supported accommodation places in Glasgow. That is an opportunity to break the vicious circle. The profile of a rough sleeper is that they usually leave prison or some other institution, for example, a mental institution; they go to a hostel; they go from the hostel to the streets; and they frequently return to jail or hospital.

I hope that Jackie Baillie will address this: I am anxious to hear about the measure of support and the manner in which it will be offered to those individuals. We all accept that people who are rough sleepers have a different lifestyle from practically all of us. They are, in many cases, confused. They have a history of drug and alcohol

abuse. We know that, and the support therefore has to be fairly intensive. If we can break the vicious circle and can get them to sustain a tenancy, albeit in the short term—and bearing in mind that about 70 per cent of them have been evicted from a private dwelling house or a hostel—we will make genuine, tangible and visible progress.

Rough sleeping is a problem, and dealing with a rough sleeper as an individual is a problem. That is not only because of the addiction problems, with which I have dealt already, but because many rough sleepers are, frankly, unpleasant people with whom to deal. However, they are human beings, and all of us must make that commitment to try to help them.

I am pleased that all that has been said today has been constructive. I am gratified that the minister has taken on board the suggestions that we have made repeatedly since the matter was debated in Parliament.

Wendy Alexander is the only person I know who makes an announcement about expenditure and then makes a virtue out of announcing again how that expenditure is to be spent—a quite remarkable approach. Nevertheless, setting aside the inevitable spin that the minister puts on every announcement, what has been said today is welcome. At last, we will make some progress.

However, I make one suggestion, which I hope will be taken on board. To realise where we are at, we must know where we have come from. Let us get accurate numbers and measure in 12 months' time, and every year, exactly how many people we have succeeded in taking off—and keeping off—the streets. That will be the measure of the Administration's success or failure.

I move amendment S1M-921.2, to insert at end:

“and also recognises that concrete proposals are now essential to ensure that the commitments of the Executive are achieved, that these proposals must include provision for support to rough sleepers to enable them to obtain, and in turn to maintain, short and medium term tenancies with a view to enabling them to return to mainstream housing in the shortest possible time, and that such support should ensure that the needs of homeless people with drug, alcohol or mental health problems are met.”

16:00

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I welcome unreservedly the minister's statement on the difficult issue of rough sleepers and homelessness. I also welcome a number of the comments made by Fiona Hyslop and Bill Aitken. The debate has been characterised by the members who have a contribution to make to it—those who know about the problems of rough sleeping and homelessness, either directly from previous experience, from their experience as

members of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee or otherwise. It is also worth welcoming this, our third debate on the matter.

A difficulty in previous years has been the fact that housing policy has not been high up the political agenda, and it is high time that it was. Political pundits and spin-doctors tell us that health, education and crime are the top features that move the public, and which influence their voting intentions. However, surely the right to a home is basic in itself, as well as being a basic step in tackling those other issues.

One of the Parliament's most poignant and necessary commitments is that of ridding Scotland of the scourge of homelessness and, in particular, of eliminating the need for anyone to sleep rough by 2003, a pledge that the minister reiterated today. That pledge is backed by a high level of ministerial drive and commitment and by the united backing of the whole chamber, despite party rhetoric. Liberal Democrats welcome, unreservedly, the achievements to date, the minister's announcement and, more particularly, the sentiment behind the minister's announcement.

I want to add one or two caveats to the Parliament's approach. First, the target is moving—as fast we get young people off the street, with a support package in place, a new lot require help. People fall out with their families, come out of jails—an issue mentioned earlier—reach a crisis in their drug addiction or are victims of abuse. Initiatives such as the rough sleepers initiative are crucial but, inevitably, they deal with only one part of the sharp end of the problem. I fear that the door is revolving faster than projects are being established to deal with the problems.

My second caveat is linked to the inevitable issue of resources. It is no use putting in place resources to deal with the symptoms if there are insufficient resources to deal with the causes and to ensure that there is adequate early intervention to reduce the effect of the causes.

Drug addiction is a major issue among rough sleepers, but the formula for distribution of Government support for social work services seems to me to be seriously flawed. At lunchtime today, Margaret Curran, Pauline McNeill and I, among others, attended a briefing by the social work department in Glasgow. I found some of the figures that emerged quite interesting. Glasgow is recognised as having a particularly bad problem with rough sleepers, and it also has 40 per cent of drug dealing, 40 per cent of emergency drug admissions to hospital and nearly half of Scotland's problematic drug users. However, neither the formula nor the indicators for grant allocation recognise those factors properly. There

is no recognition of the sheer scale of the complexity of the problem in Glasgow. That is compounded by changes to the indicators, which meant that, for example, Glasgow lost £18.6 million for elderly and disabled care last year.

What has that got to do with rough sleepers? The point is that it affects the social work allocation. Social work resources in Glasgow are seriously straitened and are being hammered just at the point where they are most needed because of the increase in the homelessness problem.

The evaluation report of the homelessness task force identified the useful but unsurprising facts that about one third of rough sleepers have alcohol problems, one third have drug problems and 21 per cent have mental health problems. Wendy Alexander dealt with that in her speech in November on this issue. As the minister also pointed out, most rough sleepers in Glasgow have been banned from hostels—about three quarters of them have been evicted from previous accommodation, and most have a failed tenancy behind them. In that context, the homelessness task force's initial report and the framework of rights that is to be put in place are important. This is about both the strategy and the duties on local authorities, and the individual rights that—I say with some modesty—I am trying to address in my Family Homes and Homelessness (Scotland) Bill.

The minister talked about bed-and-breakfast accommodation. As Bill Aitken has said in other contexts, there is a sense of *déjà vu*—we have been here before, have we not? There has already been an attempt to reduce spending on bed-and-breakfast accommodation and to redirect it elsewhere, but we are now having to deal with the issue again.

Fiona Hyslop made a valid point, which should not be sneered at, about whether the £12 million is a one-off payment or whether it will be repeated in future years. That raises the long-standing issue of three-year funding for voluntary sector organisations, which we need to address properly.

The debate is not about the scourge of homelessness. It is not about local authority practice or Scottish Executive pledges. It is about individuals—men and women, more often than not sons and daughters of people whom we know and who are our neighbours. Often they are people with mental and physical health problems, difficult personal backgrounds and specific learning difficulties. How we treat our fellow citizens is a mark of the humanity of this Parliament and, if I may say so, its success or otherwise. This is an important issue that we must get right. We are making progress, and we must try to continue in that vein.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): We now move to the open part of the debate. Speeches are limited to four minutes, plus interventions.

16:07

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I am sure that no one in the Parliament will dispute the fact that the Scottish Executive's aim of eradicating rough sleeping by the end of this parliamentary session is thoroughly commendable. It will be difficult, but being in government is not about setting easy targets. It is important that we set the toughest possible criteria against which to judge ourselves as an Administration. This initiative is a fine example of that.

Scotland has a problem of homelessness. The city in which we are meeting today has the biggest problem of all. Every night, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of people in hostel beds in the greater Glasgow area, not to mention the countless others sleeping on this city's streets. In my constituency of Rutherglen, as in many others, there are people sleeping in alleyways, up closes and in disused factories. That is why it is so important for the Executive to tackle homelessness.

The problem in Glasgow is not just Glasgow's problem: it is Scotland's problem. The rough sleepers initiative team in the area estimates that, in the past month alone, between 30 and 50 homeless people left the South Lanarkshire area to sleep rough on Glasgow's streets. It is vital that the Executive works to ensure that rough sleeping is eradicated from modern Scotland.

So far the progress has been good. The rough sleepers initiative is working, and working well. In South Lanarkshire, the rough sleepers initiative team has dealt with more than 200 homeless people in the past two years and has managed to secure long-term accommodation for 80 per cent of those people. That would not have been possible without the initiative.

The rough sleepers initiative accounts for £36 million for the years 1997 to 2002. I believe strongly that simply throwing money at a problem without an adequate, joined-up, cohesive action plan to back it up is not enough. However, to provide a solution to any problem, the finance has to be put in place; I am glad that we are debating that today.

There is a clear need to ensure that an holistic approach is taken towards eradicating rough sleeping in Scotland. It is essential that the Executive works with local authorities, housing associations and voluntary groups to help Scotland's homeless to get off the streets and into

warm beds. While that work is taking place, it is important that we remember the many voluntary organisations, such as the YMCA and others, that provide food, blankets and other vital necessities to those in our society who have no choice but to sleep rough.

In that joined-up working, there should also be a concerted effort to combine the work of drugs and alcohol groups with homeless organisations. Not everyone who is homeless, be they sleeping rough in the streets or in temporary accommodation, is a drug or alcohol addict, but there is a clear and unmistakable link between addiction and homelessness. The rough sleepers initiative officer in my constituency estimates that 90 per cent of young homeless people in the area are drug users. Many of them were not drug users when they became homeless, but they succumbed to temptation once they were out on the streets. That has to be tackled.

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): Given Janis Hughes's remarks that young people often are homeless first and become addicts second, will she join me in asking that, when the Deputy Minister for Communities sums up, we hear for the first time something about the work that will be targeted on the young homeless? I am thinking in terms of research to find out the hidden numbers of young homeless who are sleeping on their pals' floors, which is what leads them down the road to addiction problems.

Janis Hughes: Fiona McLeod reiterated some of what I said. We are talking about a big problem. People are not always addicts if they are homeless, but they sometimes become addicts when they go down that road. I am sure that the Deputy Minister for Communities will address that problem when she sums up. The problem of the young homeless is a specific issue that must be addressed, and I am confident that we will hear something from the minister today.

It is important that society does not stigmatise those who are homeless or who are drug users. I am not saying that we should set them up as role models for our children, but we must give every assistance to enable people to escape the vicious circle of deprivation, drug use and homelessness.

The Executive is to be commended on its approach to solving this problem in Scotland. We should not castigate it for setting high standards. Rather, it should be praised for aiming to do the best that it can. Tackling homelessness is a responsibility that every one of us in this chamber shares. Whether we represent rural communities or urban ones, we must work together to tackle the problem.

16:11

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am sure that it is the intention of everyone in the chamber to make sure that the rough sleepers initiative works and that the money is targeted where it is needed most, but it will take more than hostel places to achieve the target of ensuring that no one sleeps rough by 2003.

Most people know about my role in Shelter in bringing a rough sleepers initiative to Scotland, but I am concerned by the announcement of £6 million to tackle the problem of families who have to live in bed and breakfasts. I say to the minister with respect that that is nothing to do with rough sleeping; it is to do with homelessness. We need to separate in our minds what we are talking about: homelessness is not rough sleeping and rough sleeping is not homelessness. However, the target date of 2003 is a realistic one and it can be met.

I am concerned, and concern has been expressed to me, about the interim research to which the minister referred. That research showed that between 8,000 and 11,000 people are sleeping rough in Scotland. The concern is that those figures are on the high side. I hope that they will not be used as a baseline against which to measure the success of the rough sleepers initiative in the future. It is fundamental that we deal with figures, but it is more important that we deal with people and that we do not get into games with statistics.

The RSI is only part of a homelessness strategy; it gives immediate help to those who are most at risk—the folk who are sleeping on the streets because they have nowhere else to go. We need to ensure that people do not end up on the streets in the first place and that, after they come off the streets, we put in place not just permanent accommodation, but the necessary support to help them to put their lives back together.

I will specifically discuss permanent accommodation, because we will ultimately tackle homelessness only by investing money in housing—there is no other way. The pity is that the Executive is cutting money for housing. Wendy Alexander has cut £85 million since she became Minister for Communities a year ago.

Ms Alexander: That is not true. By the end of this parliamentary session, Labour will have increased the total resources available for housing by 40 per cent above the baseline that we inherited from the Conservatives.

Tricia Marwick: In March 1999, Donald Dewar published "Serving Scotland's Needs", which was in effect Labour's manifesto for the Scottish Parliament elections. It showed that Labour intended to spend £1,764 million on the five major

housing budgets from 1999-2000 to 2000-01. A year later and a year since Wendy Alexander became the housing minister, the Executive published "Investing in You"—a misnomer if ever there was one. Those same five housing budgets show planned expenditure of £1,679 million.

Jackie Baillie *rose*—

Tricia Marwick: Let me continue. I want to make this point; I promise that I will let Jackie Baillie in.

Those five housing budgets show planned expenditure of £1,679 million—that is a cut of £85 million. The minister, who tries to get away with recycling previously announced money as new money, is the same minister who has agreed to cut housing budgets by £85 million. Where has the money gone? Into a black hole? Who knows? Perhaps the minister does—will she tell us?

Jackie Baillie: It is a matter of fact that, for 2000-01, planned expenditure on housing will be £579 million; for 2001-02 that rises to £597 million. I challenge Tricia Marwick to name one project that has been cut.

Tricia Marwick: In the planned spending on the five major housing budgets from 1999-2000 to 2000-01, there is a cut of £85 million from "Serving Scotland's Needs" to "Investing in You". Wendy Alexander said that the Labour party was responsible only for what had happened since it came to power. This is a minister who wants to be judged on her successes. If Wendy Alexander is as successful in the next three years as she has been in the past year, we will have lost £340 million from housing since she came to power. That is not just careless—careless is losing a handbag—but wilful when families are living in damp-infested houses and people are sleeping on our streets.

16:17

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I welcome the £6 million that is going to local authorities to reduce their reliance on bed-and-breakfast provision for the homeless. That kind of accommodation is especially hard for mothers with young children, who often have to thole spending much of their day out on the streets because they are turned out of the bed and breakfast at 10 o'clock every morning and not allowed back until the evening. Those families are often victims of domestic violence who have not found refuge space. Perhaps some of the £6 million might go towards local authority refuge spaces.

I welcome and support the motion on the rough sleepers initiative. I believe that the Executive has the right approach in identifying the needs of

Glasgow in particular. I also welcome its proven commitment to rural areas.

Rough sleeping in the open is not a major problem in the Highlands and Islands. Severe forms of homelessness tend to manifest themselves through people roughing it in bothies or camping in dilapidated caravans. However, during the winter, we have between 20 and 30 rough sleepers in Inverness. The considerable sum of money released by the Executive—Highland Council's bid was more than met in full—will help to fund a partnership of voluntary organisations, Church organisations, housing associations and local government agencies, which will ensure a winter night shelter for the rough sleepers, a year-round day centre and supported accommodation in newly converted flats for follow-on housing. The money will also cover a major initiative in Lochaber, where there has been an intractable homeless problem for several years.

The problem of homelessness in rural areas must be addressed by building or renovating affordable housing for rent. I welcome the Executive's approach. After meetings with housing providers from the Highlands and Islands, a pilot study on the best way of ensuring that there is affordable social housing in remote rural areas was established. I welcome the Executive's commitment to that initiative, which I hope will have a marked effect on rural housing provision.

It is essential that we take an holistic approach to the issue of rough sleepers. Homelessness is in effect the end result of a process. It is essential that we concentrate on prevention as well as cure. Domestic violence, alcoholism, lack of financial resources and mental health problems are some of the factors that can lead to people leaving their home, although sometimes they do not regard it as much of a home.

I stress the role that alcohol abuse, often allied to mental health problems, plays. I urge the Executive to give priority to tackling alcohol abuse by supporting the organisations that deal with it. We all recognise that alcoholism is a major contributory factor to homelessness. Much work is being done to try to help people. Alcohol problems are widespread in Scotland, but drug abuse sometimes seems to have a higher profile. I do not want to give the impression that tackling drug abuse is not important but, although alcohol abuse is less talked about and less recognised as an important issue, it is a far more significant factor.

Mr Raffan: Will Maureen Macmillan join me in asking the minister to speak to her colleague, the Minister for Health and Community Care, about the possibility of a consultation paper on alcohol misuse? It should not be like the one in England, as of course we want ours to be distinctive, but we need one soon, because alcohol misuse is too

often overshadowed by drug misuse.

Maureen Macmillan: I could not agree more. For example, in Inverness, Beechwood House, which is run by the Church of Scotland and has a four-bed designated place of care for people with alcohol problems, had a total of 1,206 admissions in the year before last. The problem of alcohol abuse must be tackled as a top priority.

There are no easy solutions to the problem of homelessness. It must be a priority to provide help to those who become homeless, but it must also be a priority to try wherever possible to prevent the downward spiral into rough sleeping. That means addressing issues such as alcohol abuse before they take over people's lives. Alcohol abuse is a serious issue in the Highlands and elsewhere and is at the root of many social problems.

16:22

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): We need to be absolutely clear about what Wendy Alexander is saying today. The press release talks about a £25 million package but, as Fiona Hyslop has pointed out, the amount that is involved is not £25 million. I am glad that the minister has admitted that. Will she further admit that the moneys that she has announced for Glasgow today could have been used six months ago? Why is that money being announced only today? This may sound cynical, but it seems rather strange that the minister makes the announcement on the final day on which the Parliament is in Glasgow. Will she say why the money was announced today and not six months ago?

Ms Alexander: I think that this is about the fifth time that I have had to say this, as I do not appear to be communicating: when we made the announcements in February, we said that the Glasgow review team had asked for more time to consider what the priority projects were. It is simply not true to say that people knew what that money would be used for. Yesterday, Sandra White could not have said that there would be a new "Link Up" project or new support for Barlinnie. She could not have said how much would go toward the provision of health care in every hostel or that there would be a credit union. How can she say that the announcement was old when she could not have named any of those things yesterday? We had to wait for the Glasgow review team because it invited us to do so.

Ms White: If I was a minister, I probably could have announced it yesterday—her press release was obviously put out yesterday but was not to be released until today. That does not wash.

The SNP—

Ms Alexander: On a point of order, Presiding

Officer. The member has suggested that a press release was issued yesterday. Perhaps she could say which press release.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could you clarify that point, Ms White?

Ms White: I did not say that it was released yesterday.

Ms Curran: Yes, she did.

Ms White: If I was a minister, I would know exactly what was going to be announced today. Margaret Curran can read the transcript—I am glad that I am getting her riled, as it is good to get some reaction.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please move on now.

Ms White: As I was going to say, the SNP welcomes any initiative, but we want an honest announcement, not a recycled, rehashed announcement, as the minister normally gives us.

Jackie Baillie *rose*—

Ms White: I said "normally".

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way?

Ms White: No, I do not want another intervention, thank you very much. I want the minister to look at some facts.

Jackie Baillie *rose*—

Ms White: The minister will have time when she sums up.

In Glasgow, there are more than 13,000 homeless people, 78 per cent of whom have been victims of crime. I accept what the minister says about hostels, which are not always the best place to put people, particularly the most vulnerable.

In his speech, Robert Brown highlighted the fact that people have many differing problems. That is why I welcome, and think that everyone should welcome, the initiative launched today by Strathclyde police to examine different ways in which to handle rough sleepers.

Although I welcome the Executive's initiative, I have some concerns, which I hope the minister will answer when she sums up. In particular, I am concerned about the 250,000 furnished flats. It is great to get people out of hostel accommodation into their own homes, but it has been proven that if the Executive goes ahead with the housing stock transfer there will not be enough houses for people who are on the waiting list.

Ms Curran: The member said that it was proven. Where?

Ms White: It is proven in certain records that I have. I will get them out and the member can have

a look.

Ms Curran rose—

Ms White: Excuse me, let me answer. If the member looks at the literature on the housing stock transfer, she will see that it says that there are not enough houses. Once the housing stock transfer goes ahead, houses will be demolished. There will not be enough—

Ms Curran: Will the member give way?

Ms White: The member can look at the leaflet. I will send her one. May I carry on?

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Ms White: Yes, Kenny.

Mr Gibson: On 22 September 1998, the HACAS document, which was the first document about the stock transfer, announced that the target for housing under the stock transfer in Glasgow was 74,420 units. Currently, 94,000 houses are occupied by tenants, 4,000 of which will be sold or demolished before stock transfer, leaving 16,000 tenants homeless.

Ms White: Thank you, Kenny. The difference is that we in the SNP can add and subtract. All Labour can do is spin. [*Interruption.*] May I carry on?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You may carry on for about a minute.

Ms Curran: Must she?

Ms White: That was rather—

Ms Curran: If the member cannot take it, she should not give it.

Ms White: May I make a point of order?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Just come to the point.

Ms White: I will try to come to the point. The problem is further exacerbated, as local government social work departments and agencies, which provide the specialist back-up, find themselves under increasing pressure because this Executive is cutting local authority spending. I ask the minister to address that point when she sums up. The Scottish Executive must recognise that the problems of rough sleepers can be solved only if the agencies that provide the support are properly funded and resourced.

16:27

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I will concentrate my remarks on how rough sleepers are affected by drug abuse and alcohol misuse. Janis Hughes quite rightly said that not all rough sleepers have alcohol or drug problems.

However, a huge majority of them do.

There has been a consultation paper on alcohol misuse in England. I agree with the Deputy First Minister that we do not have to follow England by doing something or doing it in the same way, but it is important to develop a strategy to cope with alcohol misuse. The Scottish Advisory Committee on Alcohol Misuse was charged with advising on a Scottish alcohol strategy. In a reply to my colleague, Robert Brown, at the end of last year, the Minister for Health and Community Care said that she expected to be able to make an announcement on the committee's recommendations in the new year. I hope that we will get that announcement soon, and before next new year. I know that she is under immense pressure, but alcohol misuse is a central issue.

I totally agree with Maureen Macmillan that alcohol misuse is too often overshadowed by drug misuse. That issue is close to my heart; it is a subject in which I take a great deal of interest. It is important to realise that, although there are, in my view, well over 30,000 addicts in Scotland—12,500 to 15,500 of whom are in this city—alcohol is an even more extensive problem, which is overshadowed by an understandable concern about the way in which drug problems have increased in the past 20 or 30 years.

The minister referred to the Glasgow Drug Crisis Centre, which I visited a few weeks ago with the convener of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, Margaret Curran. We were hugely impressed—I think that I can speak for her, too—by the work of Turning Point. However, it is a crisis centre—a detox centre. The problem lies in getting people into treatment—giving them help so that they do not leave and relapse—whether stabilising their condition through methadone maintenance or through residential treatment or day care treatment. We need far more treatment facilities.

Given its scale, drug addiction in Glasgow is like a raging inferno on which we are turning only one hose—the crisis centre. I do not mean to diminish the work that the centre does, but it can only scratch the surface of the problem—we need to do more.

The Executive must rebalance the policy on drug misuse away from enforcement towards treatment and prevention. If we can find £10.5 million for a Drugs Enforcement Agency just like that, surely we can find a similar amount of money for treatment and prevention. That is what we should focus on. As the national treatment outcome study showed, £1 spent on treatment saves £3 on enforcement. That is the key point.

In the past 18 months I have visited Saughton prison, Craiginches and Cornton Vale.

Unfortunately, I have not been to Barlinnie, although I hope to go shortly.

Bill Aitken: Hear, hear.

Mr Raffan: Of course, Mr Aitken has already been there, but they let him out. Barlinnie was obviously much more lenient with him than I would be.

The problem in the prison system is that people who are trying to get off drugs go into drug-free zones. They get off drugs by going cold turkey—which is all to their credit—but, without sufficient counselling and support, they come out of prison and relapse. That does not make economic sense. It costs some £27,000 a year to keep someone in prison, only for them to relapse, reoffend and go back into prison. It would be much more sensible to have drugs courts. I hope that we will get those eventually, although we cannot make them effective until we have treatment centres to which the courts can send people. We need through-care, as Simpson House has shown, although it is on too small a scale. I hope that the minister will take that point on board.

I am disappointed that the SNP has discredited itself and demeaned the Parliament by not coming up with any ideas. I know that the SNP does not understand underspend because it makes so many spending commitments—£3.3 billion since September, not £1 of which would go towards helping rough sleepers. If there were rough sleepers in the gallery today, they would think that that party did not care about them at all, because it has not come up with one idea to help them or £1 to spend on them. Like the minister, I care about rough sleepers, but the SNP apparently does not.

16:32

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I have two areas of concern that I would like to discuss today. First, I am concerned about the problems faced by people suffering from depression and mental illness. Secondly, I am concerned about the difficulties faced by young people leaving care. Those two groups form a significant proportion of the people who are currently homeless in Scotland.

From personal experience, I would say that people suffering from depression go through a revolving door process. I tried to help someone and found that there was no way in which to get the psychologist, the doctor and the housing department together to have a conversation about the best way of accommodating that person. I accompanied him to the housing department, where we were locked in a little booth, with the door shut behind us. For someone suffering from any kind of depression or mental illness, that is an extremely constrained and unpleasant situation to

be in. There was a shelf in front of us, with the back of a computer facing us. An apologetic, helpful and pleasant housing officer came in and told us that the person whom I was trying to help would get one offer of accommodation; if he refused that offer and one further offer, officially he would be homeless again. That is what I meant by the revolving door; people are offered accommodation twice, then they are out. There must be a more sensitive way of helping people with a mental illness or depression through housing departments. The regulations need to be changed.

Perhaps the problem of young people in care has been addressed in committee, and the Executive may have given it some thought, but it occurs to me that finance for care for those young people could be continued after the age of 16 to provide suitable accommodation until the age of 20 or until the young person gets a secure job and secures their own accommodation. Again, we should go down the road of prevention rather than cure, and solve the specific problem that is faced by young people in care before it occurs.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one minute left.

Robin Harper: I am prepared to stop now. I have made the two points that I wanted to make.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. We are back on time.

16:35

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's important debate.

Over the past two decades, the sight of homeless people sleeping rough has become depressingly common; that is why ensuring that no one has to sleep rough on Scotland's streets by 2003 is a truly ambitious target. I, for one, am pleased that we are facing up to the real challenges that are facing our country and that the Scottish Executive is determined to confront and deal with some of the root causes of rough sleeping. I am pleased, too, that our ambition is reflected in the level of resources that the Executive has committed to tackle the problem. I welcome, in particular, today's announcement of additional money. That is not spin, as has been claimed by some, but real money to help to solve real problems faced by real people.

Increased spending on its own is not enough. We must ensure that the extra spending makes a real difference to the many people who have a miserable existence on our streets. We must ensure that we have meaningful partnerships between all relevant agencies and that those

agencies share a common understanding of both the problem and the goal. Such partnerships must exist at all levels—between national and local government, between health boards and the voluntary sector and, most important, between service providers and service users.

Health boards have a vital part to play in the fight to eradicate rough sleeping. In many ways, rough sleeping is a health problem as much as a housing problem. Rough sleepers often have a complex and diverse array of social and psychiatric problems. Of the 200-plus clients dealt with so far by North Lanarkshire Council under the auspices of the rough sleepers initiative, 31 per cent of those who answered questions relating to health had mental health problems. Providing proper and sustained support in a community setting for someone who is suffering from a mental illness is infinitely preferable to attempting to deal with the same problems in the context of a cycle of rough sleeping and broken tenancies. We must ensure that local community care plans, mental health strategies, and rough sleeping and homelessness strategies are complementary and demonstrate clarity of purpose. In so doing, we should aim to ensure that, where possible, people are prevented from falling into a cycle of rough sleeping.

I welcome the recent focus on prevention, and where better to start a prevention programme than with our young people? Too many of those young people, especially those who are leaving supported accommodation and residential care, end up living rough on our streets. The Scottish Council for Single Homeless notes that, in 1997-98, at least 10 per cent of homeless applications to most local authorities were from single people under the age of 18. It is vital that we focus our efforts on supporting vulnerable and often damaged young people.

Once again, early intervention can help to prevent the decline into rough sleeping and I am pleased that North Lanarkshire Council has recently been awarded £120,000 for a pilot project that is designed to deal with rough sleeping. The rough sleepers initiative is beginning to make a difference throughout Scotland. North Lanarkshire has benefited from almost £1.4 million to create direct access accommodation, outreach workers, a resettlement team and support for vulnerable young people.

However, we must build on those measures. In a decent, modern Scotland, we cannot accept the sight of people having to sleep in doorways. We must neither turn our backs on the plight of people living rough nor give up on some of our most vulnerable young people. We owe that to the many people we pass each day. I believe that we have made a start on which we can build.

16:40

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I welcome the minister's announcement of extra money and I hope that some of it will be used for voluntary organisations that help people to sustain tenancies and prevent them from becoming rough sleepers at all.

It seems that I am coming at this issue from somewhat the same angle as Robin Harper. Many of the rough sleepers of tomorrow are currently undergoing the disastrous experience of trying to sustain a tenancy, or do not have a tenancy at all because they do not think that they can manage. However, some very good organisations throughout the country can help those people. For example, this morning I visited a group of organisations that Malcolm Chisholm and I have supported for some years in the Pilton area. Those organisations give a lot of support to people suffering from stress while they sustain tenancies. They provide everything from starter packs, cooking lessons and help with decoration to the more important human support that people need to sustain tenancies and thus have the self-esteem to find employment, live a life and make a go of having a tenancy.

I want to draw attention to three particular groups, two of which have been mentioned, which unfortunately provide an exceptional number of rough sleepers. First, many ex-military personnel who come out of the structured life of the military forces find life on civvy street very difficult. Although there are organisations that try to help those people both when they are in the Army and when they leave it, more help and co-operation must be given to them.

Secondly, people who have been in council care are expected to sustain a tenancy when they are 16 or 17. I shudder to think of the mess that I would have made of being given the key to an empty council flat in a large block at that age and told to get on with it. It is idiotic to expect youngsters whose only experience of home life is either a disorganised family or council care to make a success of that. Much more help should be given to them.

Keith Raffan referred to my third group—people who have come out of jail. I have been assured by a lady who does much to help prisoners with voluntary activities that the rules specifically discourage people just out of jail from accepting a job, because they lose benefits and so on. We need to review the rules and sort out those matters better. Employment—not just housing—has much to do with rough sleeping.

I have no great advice to give on rough sleepers, because my own experience has humbled me. When I had slightly more free

evenings, I was part of the Edinburgh churches soup-and-blanket circuit and found my chat very inadequate when dealing with rough sleepers. Once, when two of them were having a somewhat drunken territorial brawl—they were both trying to sleep under a staircase in Edinburgh University—I was cowering back, seeing headlines in the local press such as “Councillor in drunken brawl with rough sleepers”. However, the two ladies with me resolutely marched forward and said, “Come, come—none of that.” The men stopped instantly. Therefore, my solution is that we should have some resolute ladies to sort out the rough sleepers. [*Laughter.*]

16:44

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Rough sleeping is an ever-present problem that is all too obvious in our cities. It is a problem that we all have a duty to resolve but it is also a problem that it would be impossible to eradicate completely. That is why the Executive’s pledge to end the need for rough sleeping rather than end rough sleeping is correct.

The level of rough sleeping is difficult to assess, but it seems that it is growing, even under a supposedly caring and socially inclusive Labour Government. In November, the Executive’s research project on rough sleeping reported that many more people are sleeping rough than was previously estimated. As we heard today, it appears that there may be as many as 8,000 to 11,000 people sleeping rough in Scotland in the course of the year.

Research has also highlighted an acute homelessness problem in Glasgow, which highlights some of the difficulties that we face in resolving the problem of rough sleeping and that the Executive will face in delivering its pledge to end it—a pledge whose target has been moved back from 2002 to 2003. The difficulty is that, usually, there should be no need for people to sleep rough. The problem arises because of the difficult nature of the clients and the revolving-door syndrome mentioned by Mr Harper in the services put in place by councils.

The Executive’s research shows that many people need more than just a roof over their head. They also need support with health and addiction problems as they are helped into accommodation. Without that, they can find themselves back on the streets again. However, rather than take direct action on Glasgow’s problems at once, the minister announced yet another high-level team. Even so, I am pleased that progress is being made. We applaud that.

The problem is greater than simply the number of people sleeping rough. The number of

homeless people was reduced between 1994 and 1997, showing that Conservative policies were working to help those most in need. In 1998-99, the latest year for which full figures are available, the number of people registered as homeless rose to a record high of 45,000. That is an 11 per cent increase since Labour came to power, and the figure is still rising.

The Labour party, in opposition, continually criticised the Conservative Government on the issue, but its figures show that it has presided over a massive increase in the number of homeless people in Scotland. It was the Conservative Government—in the form of Michael Forsyth, if I may mention the name—who introduced the rough sleepers initiative and I am pleased that it is being continued. I am also happy that resources were increased last September, but as the minister is so fond of reannouncing the same money—we calculate it to be £36 million, although she says that it is £35 million—and confusing the time scales, no one is sure whether the money is to be spent over three years or five, as originally stated. Perhaps the minister could clarify that.

A key aim must be to put more money into medium-term supported accommodation to end the vicious cycle of homelessness. Labour was short-sighted when it used the rough sleepers initiative to sweep people off the streets and into an increasing number of hostels. That is not a sustainable, long-term solution, as the Glasgow research illustrates. That mistake has been acknowledged, and we welcome the fact that the problem is being addressed. Without medium-term support, many homeless people find themselves unable to cope in mainstream housing and return to the streets or hostels. That causes them to suffer further problems and might cause other problems in the housing estates in which the council sometimes places them without support.

It is imperative that funding is used to prepare people for tenancies, as we called for a year ago in our Scottish Parliament election manifesto. Shelter also agrees that that is the only way forward and that a change of policy towards supporting people and helping them to keep their accommodation should be backed up with research on the outcomes of the rough sleepers initiative spending.

We appear to have a growing problem of homelessness and rough sleeping in Scotland. Ministers seem to be addressing the problem. We support the use of the rough sleepers initiative and are pleased that funds have been identified to provide better medium and long-term support. If the promised action is taken in the way that the Scottish Conservatives suggested a year ago, there will be a long-term improvement in the lives of rough sleepers throughout Scotland, which is to

be welcomed.

16:50

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP):

On behalf of the SNP, I thank the Executive for facilitating this debate. I would like to highlight the contributions of Robert Brown, who emphasised the effect on local authorities of the rough sleepers initiative, Maureen Macmillan, who introduced the issue of alcoholism, and Bill Aitken. Unfortunately, during this debate the lines have been blurred where they should not be. Homelessness is not rough sleeping. We should not confuse the two.

The aims of the rough sleepers initiative are laudable and have the full support of the SNP. It is unacceptable that anyone in this country should suffer nights in the open, but it is equally unacceptable for a hostel place to be considered a home. Hostel beds are a safety net for those whom the system has failed: people leaving long-term care or prison, as Donald Gorrie indicated, and people leaving the military services. They are also a safety net for many 16 and 17-year-olds who, being ineligible for benefit, find the tensions and financial pressures of living in their parental homes intolerable, and for those for whom a change of home is essential to ensure that their children escape violence.

It has been said previously in this chamber and elsewhere that homelessness is not about bricks and mortar. If someone is sleeping with their children on a friend's floor, or borrowing a settee, it certainly is about bricks and mortar and having a home of their own. Many statistics on homelessness have been thrown up this afternoon, and it would be pointless to go over them again. However, we should consider the Executive's commitment to end homelessness—not rough sleeping, but homelessness.

To reduce the number of people who are homeless, we must invest in housing. That may involve many different types of housing: halfway houses for those who are leaving custody, supported accommodation for those who are leaving social care and sheltered housing for the vulnerable and infirm. It is not just a matter of bricks and mortar, but without bricks and mortar how can we provide the support services that are required to ensure dignity and security for all in our society?

I return to a point that was made earlier in the debate. When he was the housing minister at the Scottish Office, Calum Macdonald made a commitment before the Scottish election. He said that Scottish Homes would have £877 million to spend. He also made a commitment that we would have two new housing budgets: the new housing partnership and energy efficiency, which became

the warm deal. For those initiatives, he committed £348 million. Both those commitments would begin to tackle elements of homelessness, and both were published in a well-known document called "Serving Scotland's Needs".

What happened to those commitments when Wendy Alexander took control of the budget? According to the Executive's document "Investing in You", the commitment was £828 million for Scottish Homes and £312 million for the NHP and the warm deal. I am not very good at mental arithmetic, but I recognise that £877 million plus £348 million adds up to considerably more than £828 million plus £312 million; indeed, it comes to some £85 million less.

That brings us to the nub of our argument. Despite the rhetoric, the Executive is not willing to commit sufficient funds to meet the target that it has set itself and this Parliament. An end to rough sleeping has always been a commitment that requires political will backed by sufficient funding. It is our contention that, although this Parliament has the political will and the commitment, the Executive, by its actions, is undermining the collective desire of this Parliament and the people of this country to end the shame and disgrace of people sleeping in our streets, squatting on floors and suffering abusive relationships because they have nowhere else to go.

Mr Gibson: Does Mr Quinan agree that rough sleeping and homelessness would not be at record levels if the Scottish Labour party and Conservatives, in successive Administrations, had not conspired to reduce capital investment in Scottish council housing by £723 million cumulatively over the past four years?

Mr Quinan: I would have to agree with everything that Mr Gibson has to say.

The message from the SNP is fairly straightforward: restore the £85 million, and recognise that bricks and mortar are the only sound foundation on which to build a comprehensive strategy to eliminate rough sleeping, to eradicate homelessness and to provide the decent, affordable homes that our citizens rightly demand. I support the amendment.

16:54

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie): It is a tragedy, and an indictment of our society, that too many people have experienced sleeping rough, without the possibility of finding accommodation. The reasons for that can be varied, and they are often complex, but that will not deter this Executive from tackling the problems head on—problems that are associated not just with bricks and mortar, but with alcohol and drug addiction or with being caught up in prostitution.

Those problems are exacerbated by isolation, loneliness and increasing exclusion. This debate has recognised the problems of rough sleeping, especially in our two major cities, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Recent research tells us that here in Glasgow, of people living in hostels, 42 per cent of 16 to 24-year-olds and 45 per cent of 25 to 34-year-olds have slept rough on at least one night in the previous 12 months. Tackling rough sleeping must be, and is, a top priority for this Government. We have set ourselves a tough target, and rightly so. We aim to ensure that no one has to sleep rough by the end of this Parliament. That is precisely why we are focusing our resources on addressing the problems of this most socially excluded group.

We are ensuring that all those who are involved with the homeless target their resources in a co-ordinated way to ensure that those resources are used to best effect. In Glasgow, those measures are being enhanced by the work of the Glasgow review team, which is developing, in partnership, a strategy for tackling street homelessness in the city. The review team is tackling, head on, the problems of the present provision of hostel accommodation in Glasgow.

Too many people are living in poor hostel accommodation, with no one addressing their support needs. They are at risk and they are receiving very little help and encouragement to move out of those hostels into independent accommodation. We will put that right. We need to help those who can to move out of the hostels, and we need to provide more intensive support, in more appropriate accommodation, for those whose needs are more complex.

We need to do more than just tackle the problems of accommodation. We recognise the importance of involving the health service, the social services, the police and the prison services in order to make a difference. We need to break the cycle that often exists: rooflessness leading to criminality, leading to prison, leading back to rooflessness. We have the opportunities to intervene, and we need to ensure that those interventions are effective.

We have taken all our partners with us in the fight against rough sleeping. We have involved local authorities, the voluntary organisations, the health boards—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. There is far too much background buzz from private conversations.

Jackie Baillie: Thank you. I just try to talk over it.

In the effort to tackle rough sleeping, we have involved everybody. We are all committed to the

delivery of sound and truly cross-cutting conclusions.

I would like to deal with some of the points that have been raised. I was amused by Bill Aitken. Yes, the Conservatives started the rough sleepers initiative. Yes, they put in £4 million in 1997-98. Contrast that figure with the £20 million—five times more—put in by this Executive in 2000-01.

Bill Aitken: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: No, I will not.

Bill Aitken also raised the issue of tenancy support. The need for such intensive support will be a key part of the review team's next phase of work.

The SNP contribution was again disappointing. There is a depressing degree of consistency about it. The SNP wanted to talk about figures, so let us do that. There was £26 million in the RSI budget when we took over—there is now £48 million, an 85 per cent increase. The SNP is silent on what it would do. The long list of what we are doing includes £708,000 to "Link Up", run by Turning Point, to tackle drugs, equipping 250 furnished flats, developing a homeless action team and rent deposit schemes.

Mr Quinan: Where is the £85 million?

Jackie Baillie: The rhetoric has come from Mr Quinan's benches; the action has come from ours.

Tricia Marwick: Will the minister give way?

Jackie Baillie: I find myself increasingly agreeing with Keith Raffan, which I am sure is detrimental to his career. The SNP—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. The minister is not giving way.

Jackie Baillie: Thank you. The SNP has demeaned and discredited itself today. It has no answers, no solutions—only sniping. The difference between the nats and the partnership Government is that we believe in delivering. We believe in dealing with the problem and not constantly sniping.

Robert Brown asked about the £12 million new money. It is in-year and the projects are predominantly capital based—£4 million of that money comes from mainstream health resources and we hope to extend that in future. Robin Harper and Donald Gorrie made absolutely correct points about focusing on prevention. We recognise the cost in human terms of someone becoming homeless or sleeping rough. I promise that we will focus attention on that.

Today we have demonstrated our commitment and that of all our partners to thoroughly tackling the problem. In October we announced an

increase of 40 per cent in the RSI budget; today we allocated £13 million of that money to Edinburgh and Glasgow to get to the heart of the problem, to tackle rough sleeping.

Tricia Marwick: Will the minister give way?

Jackie Baillie: There was plenty of opportunity during the debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. The minister is not giving way.

Jackie Baillie: Today we also announced an extra £12 million. From the start of the rough sleepers initiative that is 85 per cent more. It is new cash to tackle the health problems of rough sleepers; new cash to replace Glasgow's unsuitable hostels; new cash to end the problem of unsuitable, temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation, particularly for families. It means more resources going where they are needed, and going now. Let no one be in any doubt that the Executive's commitment to ending the need for anyone to sleep rough in Scotland is absolute.

Insolvency Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of motion S1M-889, in the name of Angus MacKay, on the Insolvency Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament endorses the principle of including in the Insolvency Bill a power for the Secretary of State, with the consent of the Scottish Ministers, to make regulations to implement the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law model law on cross-border insolvency and agrees that the relevant provisions to achieve this end in the Bill should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Angus MacKay.*]

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motions S1M-926 on the designation of lead committees, S1M-925 on the draft Census (Scotland) Amendment Order 2000 and S1M-924 on the draft Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation) Order 2000.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following designation of Lead Committees—

The Finance Committee to consider The Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 4) Order 2000.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Census (Scotland) Amendment Order 2000, to the extent that it relates to the particulars printed in italics in article 2 (3), be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation) Order 2000 be approved.—[*Mr McCabe.*]

Decision Time

17:04

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S1M-922, in the name of Alex Johnstone, on behalf of the Rural Affairs Committee, on a Borders rail link, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament recognises and endorses the case for the establishment of a railway linking the Scottish Borders to the national network at Edinburgh and Carlisle and urges the Scottish Executive to consult with the Strategic Rail Authority and others to facilitate its establishment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S1M-921.1, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S1M-921, in the name of Wendy Alexander, on tackling rough sleeping in Glasgow and across Scotland, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)

Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 42, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S1M-921.2, in the name of Bill Aitken, which seeks to amend motion S1M-921, in the name of Wendy Alexander, on tackling rough sleeping in Glasgow and across Scotland, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
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 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
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 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
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 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
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 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
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 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
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 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
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 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
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 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 41, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S1M-921, in the name of Wendy Alexander, on tackling rough sleeping in Glasgow and across Scotland, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the commitment of the Scottish Executive to achieving its aim that no one in

Scotland should have to sleep rough by the end of this session of the Parliament; recognises the allocation of funds through the Rough Sleepers Initiative to projects which address the complex needs of rough sleepers including health needs, and notes the progress of the high level review team in carrying out a strategic review of current measures to tackle the problems of street homelessness in Glasgow and across Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S1M-889, in the name of Angus MacKay, on the Insolvency Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament endorses the principle of including in the Insolvency Bill a power for the Secretary of State, with the consent of the Scottish Ministers, to make regulations to implement the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law model law on cross-border insolvency and agrees that the relevant provisions to achieve this end in the Bill should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that motion S1M-926, in the name of Tom McCabe, on the designation of lead committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees the following designation of Lead Committees—

The Finance Committee to consider The Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 4) Order 2000.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The seventh question is, that motion S1M-925, in the name of Tom McCabe, on the draft Census (Scotland) Amendment Order 2000, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Census (Scotland) Amendment Order 2000, to the extent that it relates to the particulars printed in italics in article 2 (3), be approved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The eighth and final question is, that motion S1M-924, in the name of Tom McCabe, on the draft Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation) Order 2000, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation) Order 2000 be approved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. I remind members that, after I close this meeting, there will be a brief address by the deputy lord provost of Glasgow.

Meeting closed at 17:07.

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