

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 4 September 2003

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 4 September 2003

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

Closing the Opportunity Gap

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-293, in the name of Margaret Curran, on closing the opportunity gap. There are three amendments to the motion.

09:30

The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran): I very much welcome the opportunity to speak on this issue this morning and I welcome my new opponents on the Scottish National Party benches. I will miss Kenny Gibson, to whom SNP members can send my fondest regards—they know I do not really mean to joke. In any event, it is fitting that, in the first week after we return from the summer recess, we should debate the economy one day and closing the opportunity gap the next, as those represent the two crucial elements of the Scottish Executive's strategy. We recognise that, in order to tackle poverty, we need a vibrant economy and that, in order to achieve economic growth, development and regeneration, we need to include all our citizens, use all our talents and maximise all our opportunities. Economic and social regeneration must go hand in hand. That is the Scottish Executive's commitment.

Some would say that we did not mention poverty enough in the partnership agreement, as if mentioning the word was a substitute for an effective and coherent strategy to deal with it. Let us therefore examine the partnership agreement and consider the proposals that the Scottish Executive is bringing forward to tackle poverty.

What, precisely, do people think is not tackling poverty? Perhaps the commitment to reducing the gap in unemployment rates between the worst 10 per cent of areas and the Scottish average by 2006 is not about tackling poverty. Perhaps targeting specialist child care support will not assist in tackling poverty—particularly when we target it on areas of high unemployment to help people there who are in work, training or education.

We are extending the concessionary fares scheme on public transport, including the introduction of a national free off-peak bus scheme for older and disabled people. We are committed

to giving additional resources to health improvement in order to tackle the root causes of ill health. We are investing additional resources in drug treatment and rehabilitation services. We are developing community health centres. Moreover, we are providing free fruit in primary 1 and primary 2 and giving support to all 16 to 19-year-olds from low-income families in order to allow them to continue their education. Is that not what tackling poverty is all about? Is it, instead, about our continuing commitments to tackle fuel poverty so that, by 2006, we can reduce the number of households living in fuel poverty? We can now deliver on a commitment to eradicate dampness in social housing—a commitment that would have been undreamed of before. Is anyone seriously saying that those measures will not tackle poverty?

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): I do not think that anyone is saying that many of those measures are not good and worthy; indeed, I acknowledge that they are. However, will the minister admit that it is the amount of money in people's pockets that determines how they can live their lives and the quality of their lives? Does she accept that the fundamental power to change people's lives is the power over tax and social security policy, which provides the only way of fundamentally lifting people out of poverty?

Ms Curran: Almost every organisation that tackles poverty would fundamentally disagree with that argument. There is indeed an argument about the level of benefits, which I will come to, but people will say that it is not possible to tackle poverty by that means alone; they will persistently cite gaps in education, health inequality and other such issues, which they will always call on us to tackle. Using the benefits system alone will not address the problem. Rent stability in Glasgow will help the incomes of working-class people there, whereas increasing housing benefit alone would not provide the answer.

It is being said that the partnership agreement does not address poverty. In fact, everything that I have just listed indicates that we are tackling poverty. I do not think that anyone could argue that allocating resources to deal with homelessness is not tackling poverty. Is anyone suggesting that supporting credit unions in providing affordable loans or in extending their money advice services is not tackling poverty? That is what anyone who considers how to solve the problems of poverty says should be done and it is exactly what the Scottish Executive is doing.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Will the minister take an intervention?

Ms Curran: I will go with Mary Scanlon first.

Mary Scanlon: Credit unions are always spoken about only in relation to poverty, but I believe that everyone should have a commitment to a credit union, as the increase in the pool of money from both rich and poor helps everyone. Does the minister agree?

Ms Curran: Yes, I agree with that. That is the way in which our policy has been developed. There is no doubt that credit unions also help to tackle poverty, as lower-income people do not have the access to banking facilities and credit that they need. Mary Mulligan is doing a lot of work to ensure that we develop not only credit unions but appropriate banking facilities.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the minister give us a definition, based on annual household income, of what she believes income poverty to be?

Ms Curran: A section of my speech is on statistics, so I can perhaps answer that point later. If not, I am sure that we can pick it up at an appropriate time in the debate.

Some would suggest that, by focusing on antisocial behaviour, the Executive is not tackling the opportunity gap—as if there were a choice between the two. As many members know, I have spent the summer visiting communities throughout Scotland, consulting on our proposals to tackle antisocial behaviour and to put communities first. One of the most striking elements of those summer meetings was that people were telling us that, for the first time, they are being listened to. They are saying that they have never had a voice before and that they have never been listened to before.

People have told us that, although antisocial behaviour is evident throughout rural and urban Scotland, it is at its most severe in poorer communities and that, unless we tackle the problem effectively, not only will we undermine efforts towards regeneration, but we will abandon too many people on the margins of society. The Government will not do that. We will stand up for those who elected us—the ordinary, decent people who bear the brunt of antisocial behaviour. That is why we are committed to introducing antisocial behaviour orders for those under-16s who will not change their behaviour. That is why we are committed to introducing parenting orders for those parents who consistently fail to engage with support.

We will challenge those who argue that nothing can be done and those who say that only more resources will solve the problem. Tackling antisocial behaviour is a vital part of closing the opportunity gap. We cannot effectively combat poverty in communities that are blighted and demeaned by antisocial behaviour without taking

serious action—action must be taken on a number of fronts if we are to tackle poverty and move to close the opportunity gap. That is the fundamental task that we face in tackling poverty in Scotland. We must improve the living conditions, opportunities and choices of our poorest citizens. We must remove the barriers that have prevented people from fulfilling their opportunities and from creating the means to improve their quality of life.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): In rural areas, one of those barriers is the lack of affordable housing. For example, in Ullapool, a small village in the west Highlands, there is a housing waiting list of 122 people. Will the minister give a commitment to examine seriously what is happening with affordable housing in rural areas and ascertain what can be done about it?

Ms Curran: I will talk a wee bit about housing later in my speech. I hope that I will convince the member that we have a commitment to tackling rural housing issues. The Executive will certainly address the outstanding issues in rural housing.

We must tackle the inequalities that still permeate our society, from the most obvious to the subtle and institutionalised. We must work towards creating a fairer, more equal Scotland. Although incomes and prosperity are rising across the board and opportunities are increasing, we must ensure that disadvantaged citizens get a fair share of those increasing opportunities.

We must face up to the serious challenges of closing the opportunity gap. That means specialised spending, targeting and positive action; it means responding not just to those who speak the loudest. It also means not saying one thing in Glasgow—supporting a claim made there for extra resources, given the scale of deprivation—and then saying that similar measures would be unfair in Aberdeen.

It is incumbent on us not just to lay out our aspirations, but to articulate what requires to be done. How do we improve living conditions, remove barriers, tackle inequality and fundamentally close the gap? The core of my argument today is that progress has been made, but that much more remains to be done. Since 1997, we have halved the number of children living in absolute poverty—the figure is down from one in three to one in six.

Shona Robison *rose*—

Ms Curran: I ask Shona Robison to bear with me. That absolute measure tells us about progress from a fixed baseline, whereas the measure of relative poverty tells us about current inequality. Both measures, therefore, are important.

Shona Robison: Is it not a bit disingenuous to claim that a measure of absolute poverty should be used when, clearly, the gap is growing in relation to the 1996-97 measure? Would it not be more accurate to consider relative poverty according to today's standards? On that basis, does the minister accept the fact that 10,000 more children are now living in poverty than when Labour and the Liberal Democrats came to power in 1999?

Ms Curran: No, I do not accept that and will refute it when I go through the package of statistics that I have with me. Shona Robison did not listen to my last sentence. I said that both measures are important. When we tackle poverty, we need to improve the baseline figures and people's living conditions. That is why we must be able to measure long-term trends as well. We are not being disingenuous. We are not abandoning the relative measure. We are still using it. Both measures are important. The relative figure shows that inequality still exists at a time when living standards are rising quickly. That is why the relative figure is still an important measure.

Median income has increased by 19 per cent over the five-year period—which indicates some success in our policies—but we must still work hard to close the gap. In the same period, we have taken 60,000 children out of relative poverty. Since 1997, we have taken 130,000 children out of the severest poverty. That is a reduction of 50 per cent, as the rate has gone down from one in five to one in 10. We must look at the trends.

As recent figures from the Department for Work and Pensions show, families in the poorest fifth of the population are now £2,400 a year better off than in 1997, 42 per cent of families have seen a reduction in hardship since 1999 and 20,500 lone parents in Scotland have entered work through the new deal for lone parents. We have also helped more than 3,000 lone parents to enter higher education with child care grants. Finally, the proportion of children who live in a household in which no one works has fallen from 19 per cent in 1997 to 14 per cent in 2002. All those key indicators show that we are tackling poverty.

There have also been key changes for pensioners in low-income households. In 1996-97, 29 per cent of pensioners lived in a low-income household. By 2001-02, that figure had reduced to only 9 per cent in absolute terms and 20 per cent in relative terms. That is a drop of 80,000 in relative terms.

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): I am a reasonably intelligent person. Can the minister explain to me the difference to a senior citizen between living in absolute poverty and living in relative poverty? Good grief, if someone is living in poverty, they are poor. How can the

minister look for praise for differentiating degrees of poverty? If that is what she has come to, I am sorry to say that she has come to a sad end.

Ms Curran: I disagree with the member on that—

John Swinburne: That is because she has never lived in poverty.

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Ms Curran: With all due respect, I do not think that John Swinburne can say that. Perhaps if I were to take him through my personal background and compare it with his, he might say that I have a wee bit more experience of poverty. I beg him not to go into that kind of territory, because he will come off badly from it.

It is important that we consider the difference between the absolute measure and the relative measure. The absolute measure allows us to chart improvements in people's living conditions and to state the year-on-year change from the baseline. The relative figure allows us to compare people's circumstances with the general rise in income. We use a relative measure and an absolute measure. Where we may disagree is on our decision—and I would say that the Westminster Government has taken the right measures in this respect—to tackle the problems of the poorest pensioners first. That was the right thing to do. The statistics will show that we are reducing the gap, which is something that John Swinburne claims he supports. Tackling the poorest pensioners first was the right thing to do.

Tommy Sheridan *rose*—

Ms Curran: I must go on, as I am drastically running out of time.

Of course, poverty is about more than that, as poor people themselves will confirm. Poverty is typified by poor housing and damaged environments. Our commitment to the introduction of a decent homes standard and our community ownership programme will revolutionise housing quality for the most disadvantaged in Scotland. As Harry Burns from Glasgow has said, "If you want to tackle health problems in Scotland, invest in housing." That is exactly what the Executive is doing.

Communities Scotland is spending £266 million this year. That will help to build 6,000 new and improved homes across the country, bringing high-quality affordable homes to people who live in our most disadvantaged communities. The investment will also create new homes for people living on low incomes where demand exceeds supply, for disabled people and for people living in remote communities.

Tommy Sheridan *rose*—

Ms Curran: I am genuinely running out of time. That is why I must continue.

Likewise, social inclusion partnerships have given us the means to focus support on specific geographic and thematic communities and to engage local communities in the process. Again, everybody says that that must happen in tackling poverty. This year, £60 million will go to SIPs. That will allow for local work that will, for example, improve access to employment and education, provide child care and improve health and overall quality of life.

Community planning should also provide a platform to engage communities further in the process of regenerating their communities. Communities Scotland will support that work by working at the local level to ensure that tackling disadvantage and poverty is at the forefront of community planning.

I have explained what the Government is doing and what impact our actions have had. I have also said what requires to be done and how that is to be funded. Those members who do not support the motion must tell us what should be done, how it would be funded and how that would tackle the poverty figures. The Scottish Socialist Party must tell us how the introduction of free school meals would reduce poverty figures in Scotland. The SNP must tell us the level to which benefits would have to rise in an independent Scotland in order to abolish poverty. It must lay out its policies and tell us today which benefits would rise—or whether all benefits would rise—and the levels to which they would rise, as well as the consequences of that.

Ultimately, we all know that to close the gap we must take action to improve health, increase education opportunities and create opportunities for work.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Executive's continuing commitment to breaking down the social, educational and economic barriers that create inequality and the commitment to working to end poverty by tackling deprivation and social needs, and notes that to close the opportunity gap the Executive will deliver community regeneration to build strong, safe and attractive communities; measures to increase financial inclusion to reduce debt, measures to improve standards of housing and to tackle homelessness and measures to overcome barriers to training and employment to increase participation in the labour market.

09:46

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): I look forward to having many a debate with Margaret Curran on poverty and social justice issues. I warn her that my use of language will not be as colourful as Mr Gibson's was—

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): That will be a shame.

Shona Robison: I know.

As I said in my intervention, we support many of the initiatives that the Executive has introduced. Indeed, some of them were SNP manifesto commitments at previous elections. We support those initiatives and welcome them—few would argue against them. However, let us not be under any illusion that those initiatives alone will bring an end to the scourge of poverty in our society. That will be the tenor of my argument this morning.

It would be unreasonable for me to stand here and say that the Labour Government at Westminster or the Labour-Liberal Government in Scotland should already have eradicated poverty. I will not argue that, as that could not realistically be achieved in the short term and it is right that it is a long-term aim. However, it is reasonable to expect that we should be going in the right direction, with poverty levels in Scotland diminishing. Unfortunately, that is not the case, for reasons that I will outline.

Child poverty is one of our national scandals. Danny Phillips, who is the head of the Child Poverty Action Group, said:

"It is simply unacceptable that in a rich nation such as Scotland so many children go without and enter the cycle of poverty into adulthood."

There have been so many failed targets on child poverty—set by both Governments—that it is hard to keep count of them all. On 26 March 1999, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, announced a £0.5 billion strategy to reduce the number of children living in poverty by 60,000 in Scotland. In its programme for government in 2000, the Scottish Executive stated that it would reduce the number of children living in poverty by 100,000. Neither of those targets has been met, despite what the minister said.

The scandal is that, since 1999, child poverty in Scotland has, in fact, increased. There are 10,000 more children living in poverty now than there were in 1999, when Gordon Brown announced the Westminster initiative.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): For the benefit of the debate, will the member clarify that she is talking about relative poverty, as opposed to absolute poverty? There has been some confusion, which arose from the minister's speech.

Shona Robison: I am thankful for the opportunity to clarify that I am of course talking about relative poverty. For me, that is the measure. The measure should show the disparity in levels of poverty now, rather than going back to 1996 figures. Relative poverty is the measure of

poverty that we should use and, on that basis, more children are living in poverty now. That is nothing short of a national scandal.

Perhaps it is because the Scottish Executive accepts that it is failing to come anywhere close to meeting its targets that it seems not to have included any targets for ending child poverty in this year's partnership agreement—those targets are strangely missing. Perhaps the minister would like to comment on that when she sums up.

The motion talks about

“measures to increase financial inclusion to reduce debt”.

I take that to be political speak for tackling low income. Despite the rhetoric about reducing inequality, the truth is that all the currently available statistics show that, under the Blair Government, inequality has increased at a much faster rate than it did even under the last Tory Government.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Shona Robison will be aware that some people argue that the big issue is the concentration of poverty in communities such as those in areas of Glasgow. If she thinks that relative poverty is so important, surely she agrees that we need to target more and not less moneys towards those communities. Is the SNP in favour of targeting more of those moneys to close the gap? Is it in favour of changing the balance in the way in which we spend money?

Shona Robison: I agree that it is appropriate to target money, but I was talking about children who are living in the poorest areas. The 10,000 children about whom I spoke are the poorest children in society who live in the most deprived areas. Despite what the minister said, the gap is widening.

The gap in incomes is also widening. Let me give some figures. The incomes of the poorest in our society increased on average by only 1.4 per cent during the first three years of Blair's Government, from 1997 to 2000, whereas the large incomes of the richest fifth of the population grew by twice as much a year. That increase meant a rise of only £2.94 per week for those on low pay, whereas the increase for the top earners was £19 a week. Those figures hardly fit with the strategy that the minister outlined. They show that what Labour is trying to do here is being undermined by what is being done at Westminster.

The motion refers to

“measures to overcome barriers to training and employment”.

However, between 1999 and 2002, there was an increase in the number of 16 to 19-year-olds not in education, training or employment. That means

that nearly 11,000 school leavers did not enter education, training or employment.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Given that the SNP amendment talks only about changing the place where powers are exercised, what is the SNP proposing to the chamber today? Shona Robison is six minutes into her speech and yet she has not tackled the central issues. The minister laid out the coalition's policies. What are the SNP's policies?

Shona Robison: The point of my speech is that, in order to tackle poverty, we need to have those powers. No matter how worthy the Executive's initiatives are—and I support many of them—they are not enough.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Shona Robison: I need to move on.

Research published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development suggests that around 20 per cent of people in Scotland fall within the lowest literacy levels and that a further 30 per cent might find their skills inadequate to meet the demands of the so-called knowledge society. I support some of the initiatives that have been introduced to tackle those problems, but far more needs to be done on the education front.

It is depressing to note that the opportunity gap in relation to health is as wide as ever. I was shocked to read that, according to recent figures, Scottish females have the lowest life expectancy at birth in the European Union and that Scottish males have the second lowest life expectancy. I was also shocked to read that people in Glasgow have the lowest life expectancy in the United Kingdom.

Recent figures show that men in Glasgow are dying younger than used to be the case. Things are not getting better for men in the poorest areas in Glasgow; they are getting worse. Scottish local authorities account for more than half of the 10 United Kingdom local authorities whose residents had the lowest life expectancies. Seven of the 10 areas for men and six of the 10 for women were in Scotland—that is not a good picture.

In addition to low life expectancy figures, Scotland has shocking suicide rates, which have continued to rise. For young people aged between 15 and 24, the rate is almost double the rate in England and Wales. Research indicates that suicides are twice as likely to occur in the most deprived areas of Scotland. The incidence of suicide in those areas has increased. For those young people, the opportunity gap is not being closed.

Mr Monteith: Will the member take an intervention?

Shona Robison: I have to move on. I have only two minutes left.

Even on homelessness, which is a policy area that the Executive can influence, there are still problems. The Executive has failed to meet the targets that it set on rough sleeping. Mysteriously, that target has been dropped from the latest partnership agreement. Shelter Scotland estimates that more than 2,000 children became homeless during the month it took members of the Scottish Parliament to get elected or re-elected. That is a sobering thought. Around 11,500 young people aged between 16 and 24 apply to their local authority as homeless, yet a study has estimated that more than 85 per cent of councils do not believe that they have the resources to tackle homelessness in their area.

The minister talked about community regeneration. There are major problems with the SIPs. A report commissioned by the Executive from Cambridge Economic Policy Associates contained a range of scathing criticisms, such as that the SIPs' boards were being filled by what are described as Labour placemen—I am sorry, I should say “place people”. The report also criticised SIPs for failing to lift people out of the benefit trap, for wasting money in excessive bureaucracy and for a lack of monitoring. The SIPs were given £300 million to spend, but fraud investigations have had to be made into six SIP projects. Not all is well with the SIPs and that has to be looked at.

Ms Curran rose—

Shona Robison: I am sorry, but I am in my last minute.

Some of the criticisms that I have made might seem overly harsh. I sympathise with the Executive. It knows that, because it does not have the powers, it is unable to tackle poverty or close the opportunity gap. To pretend anything else is nothing short of a con. Dr Helen Fawcett of the University of Strathclyde said:

“To protect people from poverty, one option would be to change the social security and unemployment policy, but Scotland has no control over this.”

Without control over social security or tax policy, it is impossible to tackle poverty. All that the Scottish Executive can do is tinker around the edges with policies, however worthy those policies are.

Measures taken in Scotland can be directly undermined by policy decisions that are made at Westminster. I will cite two examples. I do not believe that the removal of additional benefit payments to single parents helped to tackle child poverty. I also do not believe that the removal of

benefits to 16 and 17-year-olds has been shown to tackle homelessness among young people.

Control over tax and benefits, in addition to the powers under devolution, would at least give a Scottish Government a fighting chance—presuming that it had the political will—to launch a full-blown attack on poverty. To put things simply, the Parliament needs the power to be able to use our nation's wealth and resources to deliver people out of poverty. Without that power, we will continue to see too many of our people living in poverty without opportunity or hope. Poverty is something that all of us in the chamber want to change.

I move amendment S2M-293.3, to insert at end:

“but recognises that none of this action will be enough to reduce poverty levels in Scotland, which will only be achieved once the Executive has power and control over tax and social security policy.”

09:57

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

Given that this is my first speech on my new brief, I want to use my eight minutes to concentrate on and acknowledge the problems. Unless we do that, we cannot set about addressing them.

In the motion, Margaret Curran talks about

“the Executive's continuing commitment to breaking down the ... barriers that create inequality”.

My research leads me to recognise that, although the Executive has such a commitment, the truth is that on many issues the opportunity gap is not closing, but widening.

The Liberal-Labour coalition partners also need to realise that, in order to close the opportunity gap, the coalition needs to give people choice. The truth is that waiting lists have increased by 24 per cent—more accurately, by more than 22,000—since 1999. More taxpayers' money is going into the national health service in Scotland, yet patients are waiting longer and fewer are being treated. My colleague David Davidson will address those issues in his speech.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education found that 25 per cent of secondary 2 pupils are not reaching appropriate levels of literacy. It is a fact that more than 3,000 pupils leave Scotland's schools with no qualifications. My colleague Lord James Douglas-Hamilton will address the widening gap in education.

I will turn to the economy and address the issue of water rates. Over the past decade, household bills in Scotland have risen by about 94 per cent in real terms, compared with a rise of 22 per cent in England since 1989. It is now estimated that Scottish businesses are paying between five and 10 times the cost of equivalent water bills in

England. That is hardly proof of equal treatment and opportunities in Scotland, which has lower standards of drinking water, more pollution leaking from sewers and more wasted water from leaky pipes.

Robert Brown: For the information of the chamber, will Mary Scanlon clarify whether the Conservatives still propose to tackle those matters by reducing, through their tax-cutting agenda, the resources going into them?

Mary Scanlon: Robert Brown needs to get real and to start reading our manifestos properly. If he examines our proposals for mutualisation of the water industry and our not-for-profit proposals, he will find that what he suggests is certainly not the case.

On the subject of strong and safe communities, we need look no further than the Scottish household survey, which found that almost a quarter of Scots felt either “not particularly safe” or “not safe at all” when walking in their neighbourhoods after dark. In fact, 17 per cent of people with incomes of more than £20,000 did not feel safe, while 33 per cent—nearly twice that figure—of people with incomes of between £6,000 and £10,000 did not feel safe. Our justice spokesman, Annabel Goldie, will address those issues later.

On measures to reduce debt, I certainly welcome the Executive’s support for credit unions and the extension of debt counselling. However, I refer the Parliament to figures from the Scottish Low Pay Unit, which confirm that 76.5 per cent of female manual workers were on low pay in 1998 and that exactly the same percentage were on low pay in 2002. The gap is neither closing nor widening; in fact, no impact at all has been made in that area. Moreover, there has been a 4 per cent increase since 1998 in the number of male manual workers in the low pay category.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I am surprised at the member’s observation. Does she not agree that the minimum wage has helped many women on low pay?

Mary Scanlon: Cathy Peattie will need to discuss that matter with the Scottish Low Pay Unit, because I am quoting from its figures. I am happy to give her a copy of them.

Of course, no social justice agenda can be addressed unless there is joined-up thinking and working in our public services. In that respect, I refer members to the Highland Council’s homelessness strategy, which says:

“For people with mental health issues, housing alone is not the answer. Unless support is provided and provision made for risks resulting from their condition, the allocation of housing could simply exacerbate vulnerability.”

Ms Curran: Does the member therefore acknowledge the Executive’s commitment to the supporting people programme, which now has £300 million to address that very issue?

Mary Scanlon: Although I always welcome the Executive’s inputs, I would rather measure matters by their outcomes.

The Highland Council has also expressed the same concerns in relation to ex-prisoners. When the needs of a person—patient, pupil, ex-offender or homeless person—are addressed as the driving priority, the service should follow. One lasting memory of my time as a member of the Parliament’s Health and Community Care Committee in the previous parliamentary session is of how fiefdoms, bureaucracies, jobs and budgets were protected and prioritised, rather than how public services worked together.

This morning the minister mentioned investment in housing; indeed, my intervention was on that very point. However, according to the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, fewer houses were built in Scotland last year than in any year since records began. As a result, it is little wonder that house prices are escalating and that many young people are excluded from the housing market.

Furthermore, even Shelter Scotland has stated:

“The investment in social housing in Scotland has hit an historic low since devolution.”

Using that organisation’s figures once again, I remind the minister and Parliament of the widening opportunity gap by pointing out that, in the last full year of Conservative Government, public sector investment in Scottish housing stood at £1,106 million, while in 2002 the figure had fallen to £351 million—a third of the investment that was made under the Tories. I am happy to give those figures to the Executive.

If all those figures are not enough, I should highlight the Registrar General for Scotland’s concerns about fertility rates in his recent annual review. He states:

“population decline is often regarded as being symptomatic of poor economic performance and may even reduce confidence in the economy.”

Moreover, he points out that the

“demographic consequences of low fertility suggest an unstable future for Scotland’s population with implications for Scotland’s economy and society.”

Given that population decline and aging are being partly driven by low fertility, we must recognise that the rates for those factors are increasing faster in Scotland than they are in the rest of the UK. In dipping back into my previous health brief for a moment, I should point out that many couples obviously choose how many

children to have and, indeed, whether or not they should have children. However, I look for more joined-up thinking and working on this matter and hope that more attention will be paid to conditions such as chlamydia and endometriosis, both of which can lead to infertility. In that respect, I welcome the establishment of Susan Deacon's cross-party group on the issue.

As an MSP who represents a Glasgow constituency, the minister should also be concerned that the standardised mortality rate in the city of Glasgow is 22 per cent higher than the Scottish average, which in turn is already 15 per cent higher than the UK average. Let us have debates about the opportunity gap, but let them be based on an honest and factual appraisal of the problems.

I move amendment S2M-293.1, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert

"notes with concern that waiting lists are getting longer, children are failing to meet education attainment levels, violent crime is increasing, anti-social behaviour is rising and our economy is lagging behind that of the rest of the United Kingdom; recognises that it is the poorest and most vulnerable in society that suffer most as they are trapped in failing schools, most likely to suffer from ill health and most likely to be victims of crime, and believes ultimately that only by reforming key public services through offering choice and decentralisation, whilst encouraging economic growth by cutting business rates, removing red tape and mutualising Scottish Water, can we close any opportunity gap and give the people of Scotland a better future."

10:06

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): More than 90 years ago, the great socialist Richard Tawney said:

"What thoughtful rich people call the problem of poverty, thinking poor people call, with equal justice, the problem of riches."

That should form the background to this morning's debate on closing the opportunity gap. At every opportunity Executive ministers take to get to their feet, they tell us that we have low unemployment, low inflation and low interest rates and that our economy is apparently booming. I am afraid that a large part of our society is not sharing in that apparent growth. Over the past two decades, there has been a growth in the inequality between those who have and those who have not, and the situation has been accentuated by the past six years of new Labour in Government at Westminster and by the new Labour-Liberal Executive in Scotland.

During the minister's speech, I asked her in an intervention—and again from a sedentary position—to put an income level on what she believes represents a low-income household, but she failed to do so. I would appreciate it if she would now inform the chamber what, in income

terms, the Executive believes to be a low-income household. She said that she was going to do that, but did not.

Ms Curran: I will not deal with Tommy Sheridan or anyone else on that basis.

Tommy Sheridan: Okay. I made that request because I hope that all of us, not just the socialists, were shocked by the Scottish household survey figures that were released three weeks ago. Mary Scanlon mentioned the number of individuals who are frightened to leave their homes and then cited figures for the number of individuals on low incomes who are even more frightened to leave their homes.

However, the real scandal is the number of households in this country that are living on a household income of less than £10,000 per annum. At the moment, 41 per cent of lone-parent households and 73 per cent of single-pensioner households are trying to survive on an annual income of less than £10,000, which is why I hope that the minister accepts that the Executive's measures are nowhere near enough to tackle poverty among our pensioners. Across our whole society, 31 per cent of Scots—one household in three—are trying to survive on an income of less than £10,000 per annum.

Johann Lamont: I wonder whether Tommy Sheridan will explain how his policy of free school meals for children like my own—who would not eat them—will somehow help the situation that he has just described. Does he agree that there is a case for targeting and focusing our money much more thoughtfully instead of on the kind of gesture politics that free school meals represent?

Tommy Sheridan: It is insulting for an elected member to refer to the policy of free school meals as gesture politics. The Child Poverty Action Group, the One Plus lone parent group and the Scottish Low Pay Unit probably know a lot more about poverty than Johann Lamont does and the British Medical Association probably knows a lot more about health than she does. All those organisations back the policy of providing free school meals. Perhaps the member should have a bit more humility in relation to that campaign.

Ms Curran: That does not answer Johann Lamont's point.

Tommy Sheridan: I offered the minister the opportunity to come to her feet, but she declined. *[Interruption.]*

If the minister will be quiet for a moment, I will point out to her that 100,000 children from low-income households are excluded from free school meals because they belong to households of the working poor. From the minister's voluntary sector experience in her former life, she should know that

although the biggest growth in poverty is among the working poor, their children are excluded from free school meals. It is the working poor who would be helped by universal free school meals.

Ms Curran: Johann Lamont's point was that providing free school meals for everyone would not address that situation. Will Mr Sheridan tell us what level of income he thinks would abolish poverty in Scotland? What is the Scottish Socialist Party's policy for tackling poverty in Scotland? How much money does he think he can give people and how will he do it?

Tommy Sheridan: CACI Ltd, which has produced wealth of the nation reports for the past seven years, estimates that the average household income in the United Kingdom in 2003 is £29,000 per annum, but that 52 per cent of households in Scotland earn less than £15,000 per annum. That is how far behind the rest of the UK Scotland is falling.

It is important that we do not only criticise the Executive—although there is a lot to criticise—but that we offer concrete alternative policies. The minister asked what we would do. First and foremost, within the public sector, which the Parliament controls, we would set the minimum wage not at the pathetic £4.20—it is soon to rise to £4.50—which gives less than £10,000 per annum, but at the low-pay threshold of £7.50 per hour. That would guarantee a decent standard of living for the 490,000 workers in the public sector.

The redistribution of wealth would operate through the abolition of the unfair council tax. Johann Lamont asked how free school meals would help well-paid workers such as she and I. We would pay for universal benefits such as child benefit and free school meals by taxing people like Johann Lamont progressively on their higher income. That is what the service tax would do and it is why abolition of the council tax is a priority. Our pensioners live in poverty because they are being hammered by the council tax.

Provision of free school meals, abolition of the council tax and a higher minimum wage for public sector workers are within the minister's grasp. None of them is outwith her power, but the problem is that she would have to grasp the nettle of redistribution of wealth. However, the fact of the matter is that new Labour and the Liberals are not prepared to do that because they represent the wealthy.

I move amendment S2M-293.2, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"condemns the failure of the Scottish Executive's policy over the last four years to deal with the problem of poverty in Scotland; notes the findings of the recent Rowntree report on poverty and social inclusion which shows that the proportion of the population living in poverty in Scotland

has risen to 23% and the proportion of children in poverty to 30%; believes that the problem of poverty will never be solved until there is a fundamental redistribution of income and wealth which requires an independent Scotland, but considers, however, that even with its limited power the Parliament could begin this process by abolishing regressive council tax and introducing a Scottish service tax based on people's ability to pay and, in addition, introduce a minimum wage in the public sector of £7.50 an hour and free, nutritious school meals for all state school children in Scotland."

10:13

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): We all recognise the personal commitment of the minister and of both parties in the Executive to tackling poverty seriously. The gulf between incomes, opportunities and quality of life of individuals in this country and between countries round the globe is an issue that fires me up more than any other.

The Executive has made good progress in tackling a difficult problem. For example, it has committed to providing more affordable housing. There is an argument that that commitment does not go far enough, but at least it is a step in the right direction. The Executive has also made serious attempts at community regeneration, although there are issues about whether such regeneration is genuinely democratic. Because it is difficult to achieve real local democracy, the rhetoric about partnership often means simply that the local council tells people what to do. However, the idea is sound and we must build on it.

I will suggest a few ways of achieving our goal of helping communities to help themselves. We must make better use of existing funds and we must increase funding for voluntary organisations. We need a triangle of co-operation between national Government, local government and the voluntary sector to ensure adequate core funding for voluntary organisations, many of which make huge contributions to communities. We must ensure continued funding for bodies that are proven to be successful, but provide less funding for the trendy new projects that continue to appear nationally and locally and which merely create a cycle of short termism in the voluntary sector.

A lot of enterprise and intelligent activity exists within poor and deprived communities but, at the moment, the best outlet for such people is to sell drugs. We must stop people doing that and we must encourage more useful local enterprises. We must develop more one or two-person microbusinesses that can build up and allow people to make a living. There are some good projects, but they often meet with huge bureaucratic problems.

We should also develop the community enterprise projects that exist in many areas. Through co-operatives or in some other way,

communities can make a contribution by creating manufacturing or service industry projects in their areas. The co-operative aspect of life, which is a strand in the Labour party and has been in the Liberal party, should be developed further.

We should encourage voluntary organisations to develop activities that are not profit distributing but which are commercially successful. One strand in Scottish life is that everyone expects a grant. Some projects need grants to provide good facilities—for example, a kids' football team cannot make a profit and therefore must be funded—but many local organisations have the talent and opportunity to make an impact on the market and to pay their way. Such organisations might require initial funding, but thereafter they can operate profitably and put money back into the community.

There is an opportunity to fund such projects in a wider area. I recently read the suggestion that churches could become more involved in credit unions. That is a specific suggestion, but other bodies and people with money and ideas could help develop local credit unions. Credit unions have the great strength of knowing who the local chancers are and to whom it is worth lending. Banks would do a lot better to put money into credit unions rather than constantly encourage individuals to get into debt, which is what they do at the moment.

We must also try to develop the quality of life in communities. An example that hit me was that of a voluntary health promotion group in a large housing estate, which was so successful in making people feel better that savings to the national health service on the cost of pills ran into thousands of pounds. However, none of those thousands of pounds of savings went back into the community. We must have a grown-up system that can achieve that end.

Sport and cultural activities can do far more in the community. I was told the other day about the leading tearaway in one large housing estate who was persuaded to enrol in a local ballet class. Subsequently, there was a huge drop in crimes in that area. The most unlikely things can work, not just football, although it is important. Artistic, cultural and community activities make life much better.

Yesterday, we heard the good news that many more apprentices are going into shipyards. However, the apprenticeship system has the serious defect that it concentrates on a particular age group. We should make the system easier, so that 14 to 16-year-olds can start work in that way while continuing their education. There is actually a financial incentive to firms not to employ older people who would like to take up apprenticeships, which is just ridiculous.

Among the people who cause problems in communities, especially among the young people, there are relatively few leading villains. If they were given intensive one-to-one support from people who could really get to them, a large number of them would be turned around, which would make the whole community much better.

We need more personal support to help young people and others to take up tenancies. There are a lot of sensible individual things that we could do to promote the ideals that the minister and all other members hold. We have to improve our communities and we must give all individuals and communities in Scotland an equal chance to develop and use their talents.

10:21

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I should say that I am suffering a bit with a sore eye this morning, so I hope that members will be sympathetic towards me. It is not that I have had another argument with one of my colleagues.

I hope that the debate can be about more than swapping statistics, even if the statistics do show record levels of investment, with moneys being strongly directed towards communities and areas of concern, and to initiatives that address inequality.

I heard a great thing on the radio yesterday: the interviewer said, "I know record levels of investment have gone into the health service, but—". It is that "but" that we must address when we are considering our strategies. We recognise that money is going in, but we have to look at how that plays out. It is important for the Executive to listen, to monitor and to be willing to change as things progress. It is also incumbent on those who seek to criticise the Executive to take a mature approach.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation report is mentioned in Tommy Sheridan's amendment. It would be fair to say that, when that document was published, the way in which it was represented in some quarters was not the way that the authors themselves had represented it. That report was a challenge to us all, but some people would be as well lifting it up and hitting the minister over the head with it, because they have not focused on the report's key messages about how initiatives play out on the ground.

There has been some discussion about powers. As far as I am concerned, it is not a question of where power lies, but of how it is exercised. I do not understand the relevance of saying that in order to tackle poverty we must somehow do so in Scotland, as if there were no issues that could be

addressed at UK level—issues that have an impact on us all.

“Closing the gap” cannot be a slogan; it needs to be the hard grind of strategy. When it comes to equality issues, we could talk about everything in the world, but we cannot simply wish for change; we need to resource it and understand its complexities. Fundamentally, poverty and low income are central in creating and sustaining inequality, so it is important that we develop good jobs and good working conditions for people. We must work alongside the UK Government to examine the benefits system and the national minimum wage, and we must consult the trade unions to monitor how our initiatives are playing out.

Some people who lived in poverty needed a chance to have the jobs that the Tories denied them; when they got those jobs, their lives got back on track. However, we must recognise that, for others, poverty and exclusion have brought other burdens that require a focused and targeted approach, through social inclusion partnerships and other agencies—public, voluntary and private—to supporting people. That is why I have always argued for the needs of my city to be addressed in a more focused way, because the concentration of poverty in our communities is a problem even for those who live in those communities but who are not themselves poor. We must address how that cumulative effect of poverty can hit ordinary people’s lives.

We know that poverty affects different groups differently. Women have more care responsibilities, are more likely to be lone parents and are more likely to be poor pensioners in their old age. We have to graft that into our strategy. We must understand that people with disabilities will be affected differently by poverty, as will black and ethnic minority communities. Even if they are comfortably off, however, women, people with disabilities and the black and ethnic minority communities face other aspects of inequality that have to be addressed. The key issue in tackling inequality and closing the gap is the involvement of individuals, groups and local communities in making that change.

We have to understand how policy plays out on the ground. My opposition to free school meals is driven not by contempt for the organisations that support such a policy, but by my understanding, based on 20 years as a schoolteacher—

Tommy Sheridan: Will Johann Lamont take an intervention?

Johann Lamont: Tommy Sheridan should let me finish. I spent 20 years as a schoolteacher working with some of the most excluded young people, who told me how they were stigmatised by

their poverty, their disability and their inability to do their work. They never once said that their stigma was caused by having a free school meal; if only we could get rid of stigma in our communities by doing that. I would prefer to spend money giving the children who are not even in school a free school meal than give free meals to my daughter. Here is a reality check: it is easy to give somebody a free and nutritious meal, but if Mr Sheridan will tell me how we can make them eat it he will be a friend for life.

Tommy Sheridan: Will Johann Lamont take an intervention on that issue?

Johann Lamont: Not on that issue—I would like to move on.

Tommy Sheridan: Is the member frightened of debating that issue with me?

Johann Lamont: I am not frightened to debate free school meals with Tommy Sheridan.

There are a number of other initiatives that I would like to touch on briefly. In my constituency, the Sanctuary Scotland Housing Association gives people power over their own housing, which some would characterise as privatisation. Pollok Credit Union Ltd is a great success, because it is visible and credible in the community. It urges young people to save and plays an important role in addressing financial exclusion. I urge the Executive to ensure that there is joined-up thinking on the co-operative development agency, so that the potential of co-ops and mutuals in local social and economic development can be realised.

Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP): On joined-up thinking, given that she is keen on exercising the Parliament’s existing powers rather than acquiring any more, does Johann Lamont agree that it would be a good move for the Scottish Executive to remove the 75 per cent clawback in housing capital receipts that is preventing local authorities from investing adequately in the public housing stock? Not only has Labour inherited that policy from the Tories; it has accentuated it.

Johann Lamont: That matter has clearly been addressed through the prudential programme. Mr McFee’s party ought to address the issues surrounding the possibilities that co-operative and community housing strategies can afford us.

Last, I would like to say something about antisocial behaviour. There is an attempt to separate that problem from poverty. Addressing antisocial behaviour is snifflily dismissed by some commentators as being populist, which probably means that it is popular but they do not agree with it. We have to understand the frustration and depression of those who live in communities that are broken by antisocial behaviour. We must

recognise the reality that there are people in our communities who are aggressive, intolerant, abusive and vindictive to their neighbours, to their communities, to firefighters, to shopkeepers, to bus drivers and to everyone who crosses their path.

Yesterday, we heard the bizarre phrase, "national self-esteem". I do not know what that means, but I know what it means for a community to have so little self-esteem that the people who live there are ashamed to bring people into that community. If we want to address poverty and inequality, we must support people who are living with the consequences of that behaviour in their communities. We must also recognise that life chances are lost to children who are pulled into youth disorder and who are involved in behaviour that makes them vulnerable and exploited. That is the challenge of antisocial behaviour; we must address the inequality that results from it, not just for those who suffer it, but for those who are involved in it and who desperately require support to get away from it.

I urge the Executive to continue to recognise the importance of monitoring what it does, and to respond to the challenge that has been laid down by those who want it to go further.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

There is no time for all members to speak for seven and a half minutes. I must ask successive speakers to stick to the time limit.

10:29

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): While doing my background reading for this debate, I was struck repeatedly by the language of the various reports on poverty, social inclusion, regeneration and community planning. The same things are said time and again: that we must make national and local organisations work together; that we must build skills and confidence; and that we should work together better and build a shared vision. It seemed that every time I turned a page, I was being promised the goods, with phrases such as "delivering change", "how we will work", "making change happen", "our action plan" and "implementing our action plan", but I never quite got to the goods.

I read the startling revelation that people in deprived communities are less likely to have resources and learned that

"The role of the social economy ... is in social and economic issues."

If communities are really going to be brought in and made the main partner in the community planning process that has been promised to deliver services, all of us must look more closely at how to communicate ideas. After the commitment

to do less, better, perhaps we need a commitment to write less but mean more.

There are strongly and passionately held views in the chamber and no member takes poverty lightly. It is a shame that people watching this debate might see it as just a slanging match between opposing sides. There are genuine opportunities to use the Scottish Parliament's current powers to make a difference and there are untested proposals and ideas that we would try in Scotland if we had the powers to do so.

As I have only a few minutes, I do not have time to focus on everything. However, I will briefly consider transport, employment and health and then say something about a Green Party proposal.

On transport, around £1 billion has been committed to investment in road building. Margaret Curran and I represent a city in which 60 per cent of households do not have access to a car. We are looking at a 40 per cent increase in traffic congestion in that city. Such a situation has many consequences—air pollution, stress for drivers and lack of exercise, as healthy forms of transport, such as walking and cycling, become unbearable. There should be some objectives or indicators—to use the language that is used in reports—relating to the number of bus routes to deprived communities, traffic reduction, especially in residential areas, and the relative costs of public and private transport. In real terms, public transport has become steadily more expensive during my lifetime whereas the cost of driving has stayed pretty much the same.

On employment, we need to protect local jobs and services. The documents that I have read recognise that need, but far too many jobs and services are still lost to out-of-town supermarkets and shopping centres, which in turn increases the need to travel. The quality jobs that hold communities together are often lost. We cannot just

"make communities more attractive for business"

and solve the problem, as one report suggests. We need to give real advantages to local firms through the planning system and in public procurement. As Donald Gorrie said, we need to seize on huge opportunities from co-operatives and the social economy. We should consider the number of local jobs, rates of pay in local communities and survival rates for small businesses.

I have a background in using social and educational approaches to try to improve health and am aware of the difficulties in achieving such improvement in a society that actively undermines health. I have talked about air pollution and dangerous, oppressive and unattractive public spaces. Every bus shelter is plastered with adverts

for high-fat, high-sugar foods. The Executive has recognised the implications for communities in which the only business might be the local off-licence. Too often, that business is joined by a chippie and a video shop, which does not have the makings of a healthy night in. We should consider local food supplies, diet, air quality and the number and quality of public spaces, play spaces and parks within walking distance for children in local communities.

One of the untested solutions that we could use if we had full parliamentary powers is the citizens income scheme. Many Green parties throughout the world are in favour of such a scheme, which is about getting resources directly to the communities that need them. The scheme is a redistributive policy that would increase the social participation of people who cannot take part in employment or volunteering opportunities, or who find it difficult to balance employment and volunteering with caring for others. Such a scheme would be a relatively simple change to make if the powers that currently exist at Westminster were used. A few steps over a number of years would be needed, but it would recognise our mutual dependence on the ecological and economic systems that sustain us all. It would do away with the false division between those who are perceived to take from the benefits system and those who are perceived to give to the state through tax. The scheme would recognise that we must share this world and its wealth.

10:35

Campbell Martin (West of Scotland) (SNP): Before the election in May, I used to watch proceedings in the chamber on a television in an office in parliamentary headquarters. Kay Ullrich thought I was working, but when the cat is away, the telly can be watched. I thought then that the minister was one of the Scottish Executive's more talented members—I say to Margaret Curran that it is early days in my speech and that she should not get excited.

I genuinely believe that the minister wants to help and wants to tackle Scotland's problems. I am sure that, as a minister, Margaret Curran would love to eradicate poverty and provide opportunities for everyone in Scotland. For that reason, I do not intend to resort to knockabout politics or to quote statistics to back my case. All of us know that we can be selective in our use of statistics.

I want to ask the minister to consider some facts. Scotland is potentially one of the richest nations on the face of the earth, yet the reality is that one in three kids still lives in poverty and one in four pensioners lives in poverty. The minister wants to tackle such problems, but it has been

said that under the new Labour Government, inequality has worsened and is getting worse than it was under the dreaded Tories—that is the reality with which people must live and that the minister must tackle. The unfortunate reality is that the rich continue to get richer and the poor continue to get poorer under this Government. That issue is too important for us to start knocking about figures. People are really suffering out there and are looking to us to help them.

Johann Lamont: Will the member give way?

Campbell Martin: No, thank you.

Tommy Sheridan referred to the phenomenon of people who are working but who are poor as well as people living in poverty because they are unemployed and cannot get work. From day to day, some people do not know how long their jobs will last, as they are on short-term contracts or in low-paid jobs, but they know that they must feed their kids. They have unbearable stress. Hearing people in the entertainment industry or senior politicians say that they are "stressed" annoys me—they do not know the meaning of the word. Stress is not knowing whether one can feed one's kids at the end of the week or whether one will have a job the next week or even the next day. That is the reality that too many people in Scotland must live with every day.

The minister and the Executive have brought forward a range of initiatives that they hope will tackle our problems in Scotland, but there is still crippling poverty and inequality and things are getting worse. Perhaps in summing up, Mary Mulligan will say something about the fact that there is evidence that children who live in poverty will grow into adults living in poverty. They will not be able to escape the poverty trap. People are looking to us to challenge and change things. As I said, we can bandy about figures to bolster our case, but we need to tackle such problems—people elected us to the Parliament to do so. People are looking to us to deliver solutions to problems that in many cases have been created by successive Governments, which have not helped matters.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): The SNP talks about the Executive having power and control over tax. Does the member agree that the Parliament has some power—albeit a blunt instrument—to vary tax? What is the SNP's current position on whether the Parliament should use its current tax-varying powers before we go looking for additional powers?

Campbell Martin: As a member of the Scottish National Party, I make it clear that I am not here to manage devolution—I am here to move the Parliament on to independence. We must raise our horizons and aspirations and take back the

powers to deliver a better life for the people of Scotland. The powers of devolution are not enough to tackle the problems that we have in Scotland.

The minister knows that people are trapped in poverty and that on average those people will die 10 years before their wealthier neighbours, who might live within a mile of them. We all know the reality of areas in our constituencies where people live in absolute poverty and relative poverty. We can talk about the difference between those terms, but if someone is poor they are poor; they know they are poor and it is patronising to say, "You are not really that poor."

We can make decisions and take action in this Parliament, but until we have powers over macroeconomic policy, taxation, social security benefits and pensions—the areas of policy that keep people poor—we will not be able to tackle the problems. We need the powers that come only with independence. Only independence would give the Parliament the real powers to tackle the real problems that affect people in Scotland.

While we are prepared to accept a limited Parliament with limited powers, we will be limited in what we can do for the people of Scotland. I know that we currently have a committed minister but, without the powers of independence to tackle the real problems in Scotland, that committed minister is destined to continue to fail.

10:41

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): When Campbell Martin was speaking, I could not help remembering being in the home of President Roosevelt and seeing on the walls the photographs of the haunted expressions of unemployed men and women who could not get work anywhere during the great depression. One of President Roosevelt's great contributions was to give them hope and implement the policies that would go with that hope to bring down unemployment considerably and close the opportunity gap. The aims of the Executive are admirable, but I am concerned about the outcomes.

I will address the role of the education system in closing the opportunity gap. We believe that our education system should be geared to making certain that children, whatever their family circumstances, special needs or additional needs, should be provided with the opportunity for fulfilment. It goes without saying that good educational qualifications or training should be the passport to jobs, other opportunities and fulfilment—taking into account the child's ability, aptitude and inclination.

However, what concerns us is that there may be insufficient devolution of school management. For

example, after staffing costs and ring fencing are taken into account, the controllable budget can be as little as 5 per cent of the school-level costs. In other words, headmasters and school boards have a say over only relatively little of the overall school costs. We believe that there could be room for improvement in that area.

We believe that as many decisions as possible should be in the hands of the school so that it can cater for each and every child and allow him or her to develop their potential to the fullest amount possible and increase their opportunities throughout life. We want a grass-roots approach that reflects the needs of the local school and communities rather than a top-down approach, which may not take account of all relevant circumstances. In the struggle to widen opportunities, we must have an educational system that strives to offer diversity. Only then can every individual child have an education that is suited to his or her abilities, needs, interests and joys. Notwithstanding the imposing and stern figure of John Knox that overlooks us as we come in the front entrance of Parliament, we want to have not only a national educational strategy, which he supported, but one that young people can and should enjoy. If John Knox were here today protesting that education and enjoyment do not always peacefully co-exist, my answer would be that some of us are Presbyterians with leanings towards Christianity and there should be a place for enjoyment in education.

Maureen Macmillan: I think that John Knox might also have something to say about the "Monstrous Regiment of Women."

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton said that only 5 per cent of education funding could be spent in schools, because of the amount that is spent on salaries. Do the Conservatives intend to increase the education budget—I had thought that their policy is that they do not want to increase any budgets—or are they considering cutting teachers' salaries?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. The education budget must be extremely substantial and must be whatever it takes to do the job really well. As education is, along with health, one of the most important services, I have no doubt that it should be substantially funded. Health will always receive increased funding in real terms because many more people are living longer. Both those subjects are critical in their demands on the Scottish block.

I say to the minister that care should be taken not to set targets that may not be capable of being realised. The Administration was committed to providing 100,000 out-of-school places by the beginning of 2003, but the figure achieved is only 49,700. The Executive should choose targets that can be realised.

The key issue is how we can offer genuine opportunities to everyone. Our conviction is that professionals in their respective public services should be given the opportunity to do their jobs with as little direct Government intervention as possible. If schools have the opportunity to teach and teachers have the facilities to impart their learning, children will have much greater opportunities in the challenges that will confront them in life.

The only way that the opportunity gap will be closed is by widening and extending choice to young people in and out of education. That may mean additional support for popular schools, as well as for schools in areas of deprivation. We want to devolve power down to every individual in society to increase individual responsibility and freedom and create a dynamic, forward-looking economy, which will close the opportunity gap for young people.

The hallmark of our policy can be summed up in three letters, SCO, which stand for standards, choice and opportunity and also stand for Scotland. Whatever Administration may be in power, I hope that those thoughts will be kept alive and at the forefront of Government thinking.

10:47

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I would love to have had six minutes to talk about diversity in education and the possible problems, but I will address the topic of today's debate.

I think that we all agree with the view that Tommy Sheridan expressed that too many households are in poverty. There is no problem in agreeing with that. Consider the statistics in the Stirling partnership for urban regeneration area in my constituency. It is the partnership for the most disadvantaged areas. The statistics show that unemployment levels are at 20 per cent, the percentage of children who live in overcrowded conditions is 38 per cent and the figure for having no access to a car is 50 per cent. I share Tommy Sheridan's concerns about all those issues.

However, we must consider the policies that have been implemented and some of the ways in which we have been trying to address the problems. For example, we should recognise the work of the employment connections project, which has been set up in the Raploch. It has tried desperately hard through taking a partnership approach—and with funding from various agencies, including Stirling Council, the European Union and the local enterprise company—to make the link between unemployment and training by creating a one-stop shop for the area where people can come along and be given help. The type of help that is being provided by various

learning centres where people participate in education, training and lifelong learning—I am sure not only in my constituency but in other constituencies—will be helpful in addressing the problems.

Tommy Sheridan: Does Sylvia Jackson agree that one of the biggest barriers to all the worthwhile work that is being done in those sectors is the poverty trap that many families fall into when they move from unemployment to employment? The wages are so low and so many benefits are withdrawn that they are worse off than they were when they were unemployed.

Dr Jackson: As Tommy Sheridan knows, benefits are not a subject that we discuss here. They can obviously be discussed elsewhere.

The employment connections project has had startling results. A total of 863 residents registered with the project between its launch in February 2000 and December 2002; of those, 39 per cent—that is, 337 people—have been supported into employment, and 25 per cent have been supported into education and training. Those results are far in excess of what was originally envisaged. I gather that the numbers continue to increase, so the results look good. There have also been spin-offs from the project, one of which is called launch pad. It has objective 3 European funding and has been considering barriers to employment that came to light through the original project. That is a good example of one project leading to another in the effort to get over problems.

I want to turn to points that Maureen Macmillan has raised on affordable housing. As the minister knows, I am a staunch supporter of affordable housing, an issue that arises not only in urban areas but in rural areas. That has been well documented. We had a debate on rural housing not long ago during which many issues to do with finding available land and providing the necessary infrastructure were raised. A massive waiting list has emerged in urban Stirling and in the rural areas. We will therefore have to push for pressured area status when that subject is considered shortly. We have to use legislation to reduce waiting lists. Almost 3,000 households are on the waiting list for a council house.

We must also consider homelessness. I do not mean to suggest that good work is not being done—for example, by the Forth Housing Association and the Rural Stirling Housing Association. However, we must help them to fight their corner for pressured area status. I desperately hope that the recent news on Scottish Water's investment programme will bring help to rural Stirling. We desperately need help in areas such as Tyndrum and Crianlarich to get the necessary water and sewerage infrastructure.

I have recently been asking about the work of the children's worker at Scottish Women's Aid. That group's work is only scratching the surface of the work that is needed to support 15 and 16-year-old teenagers who find themselves in situations of family domestic abuse. Will the minister tell us as soon as possible what will happen with the domestic abuse fund? There is grave concern that some of the support might be lost.

I have mentioned very little about the voluntary sector, but a lot of good work is done in my constituency by groups such as Homestart and by faith organisations such as the Baptist Church, which will, using new facilities, be doing more work with young people and families. As the minister has said, we need to take an holistic approach to this problem.

10:53

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I want to test the wording of one of the headings in the Executive's annual social justice report. On a red page with the heading "Every Older Person Matters", the report says that the Executive's vision is of

"A Scotland where every person beyond working age has a decent quality of life."

I want to address that point on behalf of our older people, focusing on health and general levels of poverty.

To give some background, United Kingdom figures show that people over the age of 65 use 40 per cent of our health care resources. In Scotland, nearly 4 million general practitioner consultations are taken by older people. Many over-65s report difficulty with one or more everyday activity—and I think that I am joining their number. There is therefore a huge need for aids and adaptations. Obviously, provision for that need should be in place before someone has an accident.

There is a case study in the annual report—one that the Executive was bound to pick. There is a cheery lady with apple-red cheeks. She has her central heating and her cup of tea, and her grandchildren love her. That is absolutely fine. I am sure that the lady exists and that there are others like her. However, there are other case studies that are not in this report. I will give members an example. I know of an elderly lady in the Scottish Borders who broke her back in December. She was brought home and is wheelchair-bound. Medical reports have gone to her housing association asking for a walk-in shower. She has not got a walk-in shower. She is washed where she sits and she will continue to be washed where she sits because the housing association has told her that it has no capital to make that adaptation to her house. That case study is not in the report.

Ms Curran: I do not want to get defensive over individual case studies that have still to be resolved. I want to ask Christine Grahame a political question that relates to the point that Elaine Smith raised earlier. If a gap is found in a service—I assume that there is a real need in the case that Christine Grahame describes, although I do not know the details—does she feel that the tax-raising powers of this Parliament should be used to provide for that lady?

Christine Grahame: The tax-raising powers of this Parliament can be used but they will not redistribute wealth in any meaningful way until we are in charge. Ms Curran is a serious contender for the title of a responsible minister, but until we are in charge of tax-raising powers and the redistribution of wealth to help the needy in our community, we will be tinkering at the edges. We need independence, my dear.

Ms Curran *rose*—

Des McNulty *rose*—

Christine Grahame: Let me proceed. We cannot deal with problems until we are in charge. Until then, it will all be red, shiny brochures.

The lady I mentioned is just one example. I suggest to all the elderly people who are in queues for aids and adaptations that they write a little case study to the minister, including a picture. An alternative brochure could then be produced of what is actually happening to our elderly people out in the community—for want of a handrail, for want of a walk-in shower, for want of some assistance. Those people usually end up back in hospital having come out far too soon.

In the brochure, the Executive says:

"We have introduced Free Personal Care for older people to take away the burden of financial worry so they can be confident they will receive the personal care and support that they deserve."

The truth is that care homes are closing. There is a raw crisis out there. Families are worried sick about what is happening to their elderly parents, and not only when they are actually in care homes.

I have learned a terrible thing: unless GPs have a patient in a care home, the review of the medication of the residents of that home does not necessarily take place. Some of those souls have been in there for years on the same prescriptions, and nobody is reviewing their prescriptions. For some of them, the use of the term "care home" is an abuse of the definition of the word "care". That is the reality. The minister is pulling faces, but the brochure says:

"We are ensuring higher standards of care in both care homes and at home".

That is simply not true in many cases.

I turn to the poverty of health provision. I have here the words of a respondent to a test on how people were being cared for. The respondent says:

"Thank you very much for my TV licence but I'd really like to have my cataracts done so that I can see the TV in the first place."

Let us consider the real things in life. Let us consider the poverty of older people. Let us look at what happens to older people who have very low pensions.

The Executive's figures show that 200,000 pensioners are in poverty. Those figures are in the brochure. John Swinburne is right: poverty is poverty. If someone is in a supermarket queue with a wee basket that has only odds and ends in it and they look at others who have their wine for the weekend and their barbecue and everything else, they are poor. They are worried only about getting food to do to the end of the week and about paying the rent. They are not interested in whether their poverty is absolute or relative—it is poverty.

A report on Scottish poverty by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2002 concluded that, in the seven years since 1994, the overall sense was one of little change. I say to Margaret Curran that nothing will change until we have control of tax, benefits, pensions and the redistribution of wealth. Without those things, all we will get are shiny wee pink or purple brochures that do not reflect the grim reality and the greyness that people experience. Nothing will change until we are in charge of our economy.

10:59

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I endorse Sylvia Jackson's eloquent speech and agree with what she said. I will focus my brief remarks on housing.

We are debating closing the opportunity gap in communities. One of the most important ways of closing that gap is to provide high-quality, affordable rented accommodation. That is especially important for people with physical disability, people in need or elderly tenants. The provision of the best-quality rented accommodation is also vital to sustain local communities by ensuring that affordable local housing exists for local people.

Tomorrow, I will have the pleasure of officially opening a 20-home development in Lauder in my constituency. That £2 million development is the latest from the highly respected Eildon Housing Association, of which the minister will be aware. The development is a mixture of family houses

and cottages for rent on a site that poses architectural difficulties and which is on the southern edge of the town.

Eildon Housing Association is a victim of its own success: it has a huge waiting list. Sylvia Jackson commented on some of the problems in her constituency. Those problems are echoed in the Borders. With a housing stock of approximately 1,800 houses, Eildon Housing Association has a waiting list of 1,100 people. That situation is reflected in every housing association in the Borders. Even with the unprecedented £70 million investment for the estate of Scottish Borders Housing Association, there is a demand for more houses and better housing for all the people in the area.

When I drive from my home in Galashiels to the Parliament, I pass houses that are on the market for as little as £30,000 and others that are for sale at more than £1 million—those houses are within 10 minutes of one another. I do not deny the need for executive homes, nor the impact of welcome economic growth in the area—my members' business debate yesterday highlighted some reasons behind the need for investment in structures such as the railway to Tweedbank—but I ask for sympathetic mixed housing developments to ensure that local people are not priced out of their own areas.

Tommy Sheridan: Does Jeremy Purvis agree with the points that Mary Scanlon tried to make? Shelter is calling for an investigation into the construction of social housing and says that there has been a drop of 28 per cent in such construction in the past year. Does he agree that the Executive is failing to construct enough social housing?

Jeremy Purvis: The evidence that the Minister for Finance and Public Services recently supplied to the Finance Committee was that the growth in expenditure on social housing is higher than the average growth in expenditure overall in Scotland. The focus must be on the kind of housing that is built. Tommy Sheridan will excuse me talking about rural areas such as my constituency, but housing type is important in such areas. I do not deny the problems in urban areas—they are acute—but a report that was carried out in the early 1970s showed Galashiels as the town with the highest proportion of outside amenities for housing.

To that I add further difficulties that we have in rural areas, such as low wages. I will put that into context: the Borders have the lowest wages in mainland Scotland. The difficulty comes from the kind of communities that we represent. In my constituency, the average wage is 5 per cent higher than that in the Scottish Borders, because my constituency includes Peebles, which is a

relatively wealthy area, and parts of Midlothian. I applaud the Parliament's work in the previous session to address homelessness, but I appeal to members not to consider homelessness and the lack of affordable housing as purely urban issues.

I will touch on the effectiveness of housing policy and the need for social landlords to work seamlessly with local authorities. It is a startling and important fact that the delays in turning around applications for housing benefit can cause real problems with the implementation of much of the Executive's positive work. No strategy in the world will be effective if housing benefit applications are not processed speedily by local authorities. Approximately 4,000 tenants in the Borders are on full or partial housing benefit, so the issue is major. It affects the implementation of strategies such as the antipoverty and homelessness strategies and whether we reach the social justice milestones. If those processes are to be effective, housing associations and local authorities must work together. I hope that ministers are aware of the Scottish Borders housing forum, which is an innovative forum for social landlords and the local authority to work together.

I ask ministers to be aware of the difficulties that we have in the Borders with receiving support for some of the innovative work that we are doing, particularly the work that the housing associations are doing on mediation. The deputy minister was welcomed to the Borders as part of her antisocial behaviour strategy consultation. She learnt of the mediation services that are brought in at the beginning of antisocial behaviour problems, before they become acute. We are paying for that out of our own budget, so I appeal to the minister for the wider action grants for housing associations to be used imaginatively to compensate them for the work that they are doing.

11:05

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Last weekend, the former convener of the Highland Council told me that the Highlands are being transformed by the Executive. Like every other part of the country, we are seeing the fruits of the Executive's policy in addressing the years of underinvestment and neglect. I appreciate that much remains to be done. We could all find examples such as the one that Christine Grahame found, but I find the nationalist solution—the idea that independence will cure everything—to be facile. The debate is not just about funding; it is also about local structures and the capacity to ensure that the Executive's plans are delivered.

Christine Grahame: Will Maureen Macmillan give way?

Maureen Macmillan: No.

I will give an example of what I am talking about. In a couple of weeks' time, Mary Mulligan will be in Inverness to open officially the new day centre for the homeless there. That centre was made possible by collaborative working between the Executive, Highland Council and the voluntary sector and was funded by money from the rough sleepers initiative. It complements the night-time facilities that have been developed by Highland Council and which were funded by the supporting people initiative, which also funds the new women's refuges that are being and have already been built throughout the Highlands and Islands. However, there are difficulties with the way that the Executive administers the supporting people grant, in which the snap-shot method of deciding future grant levels disadvantages organisations that support a fluctuating number of people, such as the homeless or women seeking refuge.

I commend the Executive's support for communities in the Highlands that have to combat a significant drugs problem. I welcome the funding for such grass-roots organisations as Alness Mothers Against Drugs, which supports drugs abusers in their attempts to give up their destructive lifestyle and offers them job training opportunities to prepare them for a return to mainstream life.

Mary Scanlon: I, too, welcome the approach to addressing the drugs problem. I mentioned joined-up working in my speech. Is Maureen Macmillan as concerned as I am that, after over a year, there is still no social worker at Osprey House to support people and families with drug and alcohol problems? I discussed that subject with Mary Mulligan in her previous job as Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care.

Maureen Macmillan: I support Mary Scanlon in that and acknowledge that there is not yet enough capacity in the Highlands to support people with drug-abuse problems.

Alness is one of the most go-ahead villages in the Highlands. The huge social problems that were left by the closure of the aluminium smelter and the disappearance of the oil fabrication industry are being overcome by the residents' sheer grit and determination. They have made the village a tourist magnet year after year by winning the Britain in bloom award. One of the local councillors, Andy Anderson, who is an SNP councillor, has high praise for the Executive for the money that is being put into environmental improvements in the once-bleak housing estates in Alness. Such projects might seem minor and unimportant to some commentators, but they make a tremendous difference to the quality of life of people who live in such areas, which in turn boosts their self-confidence and their sense of self-worth.

It is crucial that our communities have such a sense of well-being. I therefore welcome the Executive's proposals for tackling persistent antisocial behaviour, which it will not be easy to turn round. The culture of drunken, loutish and threatening behaviour has grown strong in our communities, and it is shaming to see the growing list of Highland villages where public drinking has to be banned. When it is passed, the antisocial behaviour bill will demand joint working between police and local authorities and good will from children's panels and sheriffs. Antisocial behaviour orders will, of course, be used as a last resort.

I commend the Executive's support for programmes that are delivered through local authorities and the voluntary sector and which give intensive support to children and young people at risk, such as the excellent projects that NCH runs in Inverness. I ask the Executive to examine the funding for core children's services, which are still under stress and have to cope with the most deprived and damaged children—those who need the opportunity gap to be closed most.

In the summer, I chaired a seminar on social inclusion in Shetland that was addressed by representatives of Shetland NHS Board and Shetland Islands Council. The seminar was attended by about 40 individuals and group representatives. All the issues that we have discussed were raised. Time and again, by organisation after organisation, the plea was made for better transport services. I know that transport is not part of the minister's brief, but throughout the Highlands and Islands we are seeking better transport links—from local bus services to cheaper flights. Transport is at the root of much inequality in the Highlands and must be one of the Parliament's major concerns. I know that we do not have unlimited funds for transport projects in the Highlands and Islands and ask the Executive to judge very carefully where available funds should go to ensure that we provide the greatest benefit to the most disadvantaged and fragile rural areas.

11:11

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): I want to start with a fairly consensual comment. I ask the chamber to agree that without health there is no opportunity. People can have all the opportunities in the world—jobs and so on—but if they do not have the health support to enable them to cope physically with life, they are in trouble.

This morning we have wasted a great deal of time on negative attempts to define poverty. Poverty is not based just on cash, as Mr Sheridan would have us say; neither is it based just on independence. In health, poverty and deprivation

are a lack of access to health support and care—nothing more. The Scottish Executive has let us down with constant ideological arguments about what is and is not poverty. If a millionaire pensioner with a health problem goes to the Isle of Skye, where do they get their treatment? If someone has an accident and is admitted to an accident and emergency department, it does not matter how wealthy they are—they are a patient. That is the basis on which the health service should operate and on which the chamber should approach the delivery of health care.

Tommy Sheridan: Does the member agree that it is a fact of life that the lower someone's income, the worse their health? Two weeks ago the Scottish household survey told us that lower-income households have less access to health services.

Mr Davidson: Precisely. The member is agreeing with me about the importance of access to health services. People's problems have causes. Some people have health problems because they have genetically inherited those problems. Some have problems because of accidents, whereas others have problems because of poor, damp housing. Most of all, people have health problems because of poor education about what they should do about their health.

Shona Robison *rose*—

Mr Davidson: I look at Shona Robison as a new mum and congratulate her on that. I know that she will have taken great care of her health while she was carrying the baby, because that is often the crucial time for giving someone a start.

Shona Robison: Of course I took the best care of my health.

Does the member accept that the life expectancy figures that were published recently showed a clear link between people's life expectancy and where they live? That was evident for areas of the highest poverty and deprivation. Do those figures not prove that people with the poorest health are people with the lowest incomes?

Mr Davidson: I accept that people with low incomes have health problems. That is a fact of life. However, as John Swinburne reminded us, health problems are not limited to young people, but affect people in other age groups. They are also not limited to people who are poor in relative terms.

We can argue about that issue, but the important point is that the NHS and the back-up systems that feed into it must be reasonably accessible. We cannot have everything in every village and community, but there must be

reasonable provision for assessment. Early assessment is important, because many conditions can be dealt with early if they are detected early. However, people are often ignorant about lifestyles. They do not know what they should do and how the health service works. There is almost a need for advocacy, so that people can be shown how to use the health service, having taken responsibility for the things that they can do to influence their health.

I am fed up with talking about waiting times and waiting lists. We have had four years in which those issues have got completely out of control. The situation was bad enough from 1997 to 1999, but under the Labour and Liberal Executive waiting times for access to treatment have increased dramatically—despite the fact that in Scotland we spend 18 per cent more per head on health care than in the United Kingdom as a whole. That is equivalent to health spending in most of Europe, where waiting even a week for assessment of some conditions is unthinkable. However, we are saying that we have done well because we have reduced waiting times to eight weeks.

Ms Curran: Does the member accept that there is a correlation between someone's income level and social and economic experience, and their health levels? People may have access to health care facilities, but if those facilities do not recognise people's social and economic experience they are not properly targeted or effective. Tackling health issues is a broader challenge than just providing health services. It is about addressing poverty in the round.

Mr Davidson: I do not dispute that. Poverty is one aspect of health.

Ms Curran: Does the member agree with the point that I make?

Mr Davidson: I agree with it in general terms. Today the minister has made certain claims about housing associations. Communities Scotland is there to do a job. Many members receive letters attacking housing associations—I am not thinking just of one or two letters that may have reached the minister—on the quality of maintenance that they provide. That issue requires the minister's involvement, because she runs Communities Scotland.

In this debate there has been a great deal of chat about many issues. The basic point that I want to make is that inner cities and rural and remote areas suffer from deprivation of access to health care and support. Christine Grahame spoke about the difficulties of obtaining help in the home. I am amazed that SNP members, for all their chatter, are never able to tell us how they would redirect and reprioritise the current budget. Let us

face it, we have a fair-sized budget: at issue is what we do with it.

I ask the minister to speak to her colleagues in the Health Department and to suggest that they consider giving health professionals, carers and people in the front line more control of how they design and make available services, so that they do not spend their lives ticking boxes, filling in forms and producing initiatives and glossy leaflets. We need practical provision on the ground. We need the bodies to deliver it and to raise the skill base.

11:17

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP):

I warmly welcome the laudable sentiments in Margaret Curran's motion. I cannot take exception to any part of it. I welcome the fact that poverty and how it should be addressed has been highlighted as the key factor.

I refer to poverty in all its forms. Those include the single pensioner eking out a poor existence in a care home on the miserable personal expenses allowance of £17.50 per week—I ask members to think about that—the child living with a single mum in a run-down flat in a tower block and the homeless person living a hand-to-mouth existence in the streets of our cities.

I will not talk about whether they are suffering from relative or absolute poverty, because their knowledge and experience of poverty is all that matters. They are the experts: they know that they are poor and that they are living in poverty. I am amazed and deeply saddened that that is happening in a rich, developed, so-called civilised country in 2003. What sort of society do we want to live in and to provide for future generations?

The Acheson report of 1998 argued for policies that increase the income of the poorest and showed how important it was to raise benefit levels, to restore the link between pensions and earnings and to introduce more progressive taxation. However, new Labour has given pensioners means-tested benefits such as the minimum income guarantee to help those who are in poverty. The fact that the Labour Government offers those benefits is an admission that the basic state pension is totally inadequate to live on.

Winter fuel allowance of £200 per annum or £4 per week per household is failing to reduce the rate of deaths from sudden winter death syndrome among the elderly, which is three times higher than that in Scandinavia. Of course we should be grateful for free television licences for the over-75s, although that will not cost the Government a great deal, given that life expectancy for men is less than 73. I am—73. I apologise for using Jonathan Watson's black sense of humour.

Despite Gordon Brown's promise in Labour's 1993 manifesto to restore the link to earnings for pensions in the lifetime of the Labour Government's first term in office, we are now well into the Labour Government's second term and the link is yet to be restored. Pensioners will no longer accept that they should continue to suffer as second-class citizens. As I said, poverty is experienced primarily on an individual level. However, it is essential to recognise the collective dimension of poverty and how it is experienced at community and society levels.

If young people feel socially excluded, their behaviour might appear disruptive and antagonistic to the rest of the community. If a father loses his low-paid job, his subsequent behaviour might appear unacceptable to the rest of the community. Many proud senior citizens deny their poverty to maintain their self-esteem. They do not wish to go through 47-page forms to claim means-tested benefits. The Executive must do much more to provide an adequate understanding of how individuals experience poverty.

Scotland is not a poor country, but it is being led poorly as policies result in the gap widening between rich and poor. I am disillusioned because the Scottish Executive is willing to settle for the sticking-plaster solutions to the massive wounds that are scarring the country rather than raise expectations and look for the correct treatment to eliminate poverty in Scotland.

Elimination of poverty of all kinds is our top priority and to achieve that we must have fiscal autonomy. I am not talking about independence; we could still have our constitutional monarch and we could let Westminster do the Foreign Office bit and other bits and pieces. Give us fiscal autonomy to run our own country financially while remaining within the union. That is our policy and it should keep everyone happy—I suppose that it will not keep some people happy, but it will make them an awful lot happier than they are at present. We should not accept anything less for the people of Scotland. I recommend that members support either Tommy Sheridan's amendment or the SNP amendment, both of which are laudable.

11:22

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I am still slightly uncertain about what John Swinburne's true colours are. I am proud to be a member of a Labour and trade union movement that has consistently advanced the anti-poverty agenda for more than 100 years.

It was Labour that introduced the national health service and it is a Labour Government that is putting more resources into health and into

addressing poverty than have ever been put in before. It was Labour that revolutionised the way in which we educate our children in this country and it is Labour that is putting more resources into education in poorer areas, such as the area that I represent.

It was Labour in the 1920s and 1930s that revolutionised housing conditions and it is Labour that is putting more resources into upgrading housing conditions and improving social housing. It is Labour that has crusaded consistently for getting rid of the curse, the scourge of unemployment. At present we have the lowest level of unemployment that we have had for generations and lower levels of unemployment than any of our major competitor countries in Europe.

It is interesting to listen to what the SNP members are saying, given what John Swinney said about the economy yesterday, because he had nothing whatever to say about poverty. All he said was that we need constitutional change. One of the main reasons he gave for constitutional change was demographics. As a former sociologist, I say to John Swinney that one of the reasons for demographic change, not only in Scotland or Britain, but throughout Europe, is that the absolute poverty that existed in the 1920s and 1930s has been tackled. Labour has tackled it in this country.

We have dealt with many of the issues that gave rise to the demographic problems that we had in the past. Poverty was forcing people to have more children than they wanted and housing conditions meant that children lived in poor environments. If John Swinney wants constitutional change to reduce business rates and water rates, which is what he talked about, that is fine. However, we are here in the Parliament to tackle poverty. That is our priority; that is what we want to do and we will not lose our focus.

I am sorry that Tommy Sheridan has peeled away from the socialist, Labour and trade union movement. He is interested in giving people false promises. He is interested in telling people about the land of milk and honey and how much more money he could make available, in the firm knowledge that there is nothing that he can do, because he will never be in power. All he can tell people is what I think amounts to lies.

In Clydebank, in my constituency, I have spent a lot of time over the past three or four years considering what we have to do to change our people's circumstances. We considered the practical issues and opportunities in our area to advance the economic and social regeneration of Clydebank—tackling poverty practically. We need more jobs. We need to upgrade our people's skills. We need to use the physical resources that have

been freed up, such as the brownfield land along the Clyde. We need to consider how to use that for the people and how to create improved education. By moving Clydebanks College from its semi-derelict building into an improved place of learning for people from an area in which there has been significant educational underachievement in the past, we can boost our resources.

The Clydebanks waterfront project is the most important project in Scotland. If it is executed properly and the resources are made available in the right way—I suggest that they should be made available to local authorities, local enterprise companies and partners that have identified what needs to be done—we can bring about a profound social and economic regeneration of Clydebanks and the wider Clyde area.

Labour has always been practical. We have always said that we want to identify the practical steps to deliver material change. That is not about conjuring up statistics or empty political rhetoric, such as we get from Tommy Sheridan. It is about asking what we can do and how we deliver resources more effectively to change things. That is what I am about; that is what Labour is about; and that is why this Government has an agenda for dealing with poverty. It is not just Margaret Curran's agenda; all the ministers have to get involved with it.

We want to make a better Scotland. We are the people who are going to deliver it and I have not heard anything from any other party that suggests that they even want to get into the debate.

11:28

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I am sure that Des McNulty saw his speech as a labour of love, but I do not know what it was for the rest of us.

The Minister for Communities mentioned yesterday's debate on the economy. I agree with what the minister and others said about how a strong economy and partnership working should help eradicate poverty—I emphasise the word "should". I reiterate what my colleagues and John Swinburne and Tommy Sheridan said—poverty cannot be tackled properly with the few powers that this Parliament has. We need full powers and full independence. Poverty can be dealt with properly only by our taking on board all the powers of an independent country. Only by doing that can we close the opportunity gap.

The opportunity gap has been mentioned time and time again. However, we are talking not only about opportunities, but about getting rid of the dependency culture that exists for many of our people. I blame the members of the Unionist parties for that. Those members seem to think that

if people are kept in a dependency culture they will be pliable and will not realise their aspirations.

We in the SNP, and people who believe in independence, want the Scottish people to realise their aspirations. We want to give them the opportunity to believe in themselves and to take control of their lives. That will come only through independence.

Mr Davidson: Will the member take time out to tell us what things she would like to do in Scotland and why we cannot do them now? It could be that the choice is there.

Ms White: I was about to say that we are always being accused of not saying what is happening with the powers of the Parliament and what we would do within those powers. I will pick out what the Executive Lib-Lab coalition has attempted to do in two areas under the powers of the Parliament and what the SNP would do differently. It might be novel to give such an explanation, but I will attempt to do so.

The first area I will deal with is inequality in the education system. Des McNulty went on about the education system and people going back to college and university. It is great that that area falls within the powers of the Parliament, but let us consider some of the figures. The number of young people who are between 16 and 19 years of age and who are not in education, training or employment has risen between 1999 and 2002. It is even higher than it was when the Tories held office in 1997. It must amaze members that the Executive can do a worse job than the Conservatives did, although it does not seem to amaze the minister and it certainly does not amaze me.

I said that I would inform David Davidson what the SNP would attempt to do. We would introduce a scheme to introduce closer working between schools and colleges to allow young people aged 14 and over to study in a more adult environment. Such a scheme would encourage more people to stay within the education system to develop their skills. That is one answer.

Robert Brown: Will the member take an intervention?

Ms White: No, I am sorry. Please sit down.

Let us consider some other statistics that make equally grim reading. Research has been produced that suggests that about 20 per cent of people in Scotland are at the lowest literary level and that a further 30 per cent find that their skills are inadequate in today's society. That is a terrible indictment of the Lib-Lab coalition, as that area falls within the Parliament's powers.

Cathy Peattie: Will the member tell us what her party would do about the situation?

Ms White: If the member would stop interrupting, I will show her how to sort out the problem, even using the Parliament's limited powers.

We are committed to cutting class sizes. Although the Executive has spoken about cutting class sizes, we believe that that is a priority. It is widely accepted that cutting class sizes would represent the single biggest step towards closing the attainment gap. Professor Lindsay Paterson of the University of Edinburgh has said that reductions in class size of one or two pupils do not make any great difference and that it is class sizes of fewer than 20 pupils that make a difference. It is time that the Parliament started to treat the causes rather than the symptoms. That is the answer on education.

Mr Monteith: Will the member give way?

Ms White: I am sorry, but I do not have time. I want to move on to social inclusion partnerships, which Shona Robison mentioned. The minister and I have had a great deal of correspondence about SIPs.

I will read out the Executive's vision. SIPs are supposed to be in

"Areas suffering from multiple deprivation ... bad housing, high unemployment, low educational attainment, poor health and other problems".

SIPs embody a partnership approach and are

"the core element of Scottish Executive policy on regeneration in Scotland ... a range of 47 Social Inclusion Partnerships began their work on 1 April 1999."

I had to cut short the quote.

Those fancy words are fine, but according to a report that the Executive commissioned, the reality is that the boards of SIPs are filled with Labour placemen, there has been a failure to lift people out of the poverty trap, money has been wasted and there has been a lack of monitoring of SIPs. Six SIPs have been investigated and some have been reported to have cost £300 million. SIPs have been dismissed as

"sounding boards ... hijacked by Labour placemen and old-style talking shops".

That report was not mine; it was commissioned by the Executive.

That is my answer to Patrick Harvie, Des McNulty and the others who asked, "What about the powers?" I have mentioned what the Lib-Lab Executive is doing with the powers that we already have; it is not doing a very good job with them. Independence and full fiscal powers represent the only way of getting rid of poverty.

11:35

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland)

(Con): Today's debate is based on what might seem to be an anodyne notion of closing an apparent opportunity gap. I use the word "apparent", because the Executive's programme has involved talking about various strategies, pilots, targets and consultations, all of which are at the edges and do little to affect the actual problems on the ground.

Although I do not impugn the Executive's sincerity or the manifest passion of new man McNulty, the wash of whose speech is still cascading over me, the best way to close any gap is to tackle our public services head on. That would offer real reform, rather than condemning everyone to a poverty of ambition and a lack of choice and freedom. If we do not do that, instead of having an opportunity gap we will have something much worse—a Scottish Executive-created opportunity trap, which will trap the most vulnerable.

Micro-managing from the centre simply increases the swell of bureaucracy, rather than helping the vulnerable. Giving our teachers, police and hospital staff the freedom to run services while facilitating choice and freedom would be a huge step in the right direction of improving opportunities for all Scots. The fact that the Executive has shied away from such radical ideas for four years condemns us all to a widening opportunity gap that none of us wants and creates the trap to which I referred.

My main interest is justice. One of the best ways to improve Scottish lives would be to tackle our straining justice system. That is vital, because crime preys disproportionately on the poorest and most vulnerable in society. Mary Scanlon mentioned the deeply troubling statistics in the Scottish household survey for 2001-02. That survey indicated that those who rent their homes from local authorities or housing associations are twice as likely to suffer from vandalism and drugs. Johann Lamont referred to her city and nowhere are such threats more potent than in Glasgow.

Scottish Conservatives believe that a neighbourly and compassionate society that is built on strong and supportive relationships within families, between neighbours and throughout the community is our best defence against crime. It is essential that we achieve a safe, secure and law-abiding society, because such a society is the foundation on which everything else is built.

It could be argued that there is no finer example of the Government's all words and no action approach than the youth crime problem. On Friday, we had to endure two press releases on related topics—one from Mr McConnell about

getting the police out from behind their desks and back on our streets and the other from the formidable Jamieson-Curran duo on how to deal with youth crime. By dodging the firm, clear policies that are necessary to combat crime, the Executive—through its inertia—is creating the very environment in which crime flourishes. Not content with that, the Executive hides behind flowery initiatives and wordy press releases, thinking that the public will be duped into believing that something is happening. The facts tell a chillingly different story: a quarter of our people do not feel safe outside their front door. The Executive's record on crime is woeful.

Ms Curran: Given that the member has insulted our press releases, I feel obliged to defend them. I assume that one of the press releases to which she referred was the First Minister's announcement about the need to tackle the problems that are associated with off-licences in Scotland, with which most members will be familiar. There are huge problems outside off-licences—communities will testify to that. Is it wrong to tackle those problems?

Miss Goldie: It is not wrong to be concerned about those problems, but it is utterly wrong for a block-headed First Minister to fail to identify forensically how to address the issue. There is existing law to control unacceptable behaviour by groups outside off-licences and—just as important—to address unacceptable conduct by off-licence retailers, who risk prosecution or losing their licence. Instead of simply using words, the Executive should invoke the law as it stands and show the public that we are prepared to enforce it.

The facts to which I am about to refer are uncomfortable. It is a disgrace that a crime is committed in Scotland every 1.2 minutes. Violent crime has gone up 25 per cent since 1997 and vandalism has gone up over 18 per cent over the same period of time. Drugs crime has gone up an unbelievable and deeply disturbing 37 per cent.

Time and again the Scottish Conservatives have called for a commitment to responsive, accountable, zero-tolerance policing with a beefed-up Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. We believe in what works. Indications from places such as New York are that such an approach is successful in reducing crime and the fear of crime and thereby brings benefits to society.

Scotland does not need to see its Executive ministers engaging in cheap political soundbites. We must start offering real reform. Judging by today's debate, I regret that it seems that we are resigned to four more years of inertia and verbiage.

11:41

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I start by making some contribution to the issue of relative poverty and absolute poverty, because there seems to be a bit of a misunderstanding as to why they both have to be measured. The experience of the person who is living in poverty does not depend on whether their poverty is absolute or relative. We must be able to identify whether policies are helping to lift people out of poverty in both senses.

Someone who lives in a poor-quality rented flat somewhere in Britain and has a poor standard of income might not be poor compared to someone in the developing world who lives in a shanty town. However, in comparison with the rest of society, they might be poor. It is important that we measure whether we are lifting people out of absolute poverty and whether the poor are keeping up with everyone else.

There have been several versions of the single transferable speech in today's debate and Campbell Martin's was one of my favourites. However, he is not correct to say that the poor are getting poorer. The poor are not catching up with everyone else and average incomes are increasing. I am concerned about that and it is important to monitor and address the problem, although I do not believe that that will be as easy as we are trying to make out.

Tommy Sheridan: It is encouraging to know that our poor are perhaps not as poor as those in Africa and the developing world. What does the member consider to be income poverty? What is the level of income that represents income poverty?

Dr Murray: That would depend upon circumstances. I would not try to put an exact figure on poverty because a lot would depend on how high someone's rent or mortgage was and the rest of their outgoings.

We must recognise that poverty is not just a financial measurement. It is also about opportunity and the lack of opportunity for people to develop. It is therefore particularly appropriate that the Executive has had to monitor how it is addressing closing the opportunity gap throughout its portfolios and over the entire span of its activities. That has been an important development during the past couple of years and I welcome the document that sets targets. I know that the Executive is often criticised for producing glossy documents and target-setting, but if we do not have targets and outcomes, we cannot judge whether policies have been successful.

Shona Robison: Does the member therefore agree that it is wrong not to have a target for child poverty?

Dr Murray: We have a target for child poverty. In fact, we have a number of targets that relate to child poverty and a number of other issues. For example, in the sport and culture brief, there are targets for the participation of people in more deprived areas. I was quite enticed by Donald Gorrie's image of a ned who had taken up ballet and given up crime, but we must not underestimate the contribution that sport, culture and the arts can make to the closing of the opportunity gap, to the improvement of people's self-esteem, to people indulging in lifelong learning, and to enabling people to get themselves out of poverty.

I take exception to the idea that no one is doing anything about it. If we consider the record of the Labour Government in Westminster and the coalition here in Scotland, many actions have been taken. No one is saying that everything has been solved and that there is not a long way to go. Of course there is a long way to go, but people have been trying. I am talking about such things as the minimum income guarantee and the minimum wage.

John Swinburne talked about fuel poverty and pensioners, but what about the action taken on free central heating for all pensioners who did not have any form of central heating, and the expansion of that scheme that is planned for this session of Parliament? We are taking action to tackle poverty. It is difficult, but action is being taken.

John Swinburne: Will the member give way?

Dr Murray: I am sorry but I have taken rather a lot of interventions and I am not making the progress that I should.

We must recognise that poverty manifests itself differently in different geographical areas. Johann Lamont and Patrick Harvie talked about the concentration of poverty in some of the cities, particularly Glasgow where there are huge areas where people live in poverty. It is essential that anyone who describes themselves as a socialist sees that we have to tackle that as a priority.

We have to recognise—Jeremy Purvis mentioned this—that poverty is manifest differently in rural areas. In a rural community, the poor can live next door to the rich. We cannot use the postcode definition of poverty that we could use in the cities. Sometimes poverty in rural areas is hidden. In rural areas, we cannot use car ownership as a realistic measure of poverty. Someone who lives in Eskdalemuir in my constituency will probably spend their last pound on their old banger because that is the only way that they can access the doctor's surgery in Lockerbie or Langholm. The only way that they can get to the shops is by car, because public transport is not very good in rural areas.

We have to acknowledge that the way in which we try to close the opportunity gap is different in different parts of Scotland. The Executive realises that, but as someone who represents a semi-urban and semi-rural constituency, I know that the problems are different in different areas and that we need different solutions to tackle those problems.

11:47

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I hope that I do not shock the chamber when I say that an independent Scotland will not be a land of milk and honey. We are not arguing that, with independence, everything is suddenly going to be fundamentally changed beyond our wildest dreams. However, as Shona Robison said in her speech, it will give us a fighting chance to make a difference on a time scale that allows us to progress as a society.

Independence will allow us levers on economic growth and income distribution, and to find ways of making sure that we tackle poverty properly. Had Scotland achieved the same economic growth as the rest of the United Kingdom since Labour came to power, and had the Parliament controlled the revenue raised from the same rate of taxes as would have been levied by the UK Government, we would have had £2 billion extra to invest.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I want to make progress. That extra money would have driven up the wages of our public sector workers and it could have been used to help those in poverty. The issue is about economic growth, but it is also about ensuring that we have a handle on income redistribution.

Annabel Goldie talked about poverty traps. We do not have the opportunity to tackle the poverty trap. The tapering nature of the benefits system means that people who want to get into work have difficulties. We have to have the power to integrate tax and benefits so that we can resolve that.

Tony Blair has done something about redistributing wealth. He has given it to the rich. One of the most fundamental indictments of the Westminster Government is the gap between the poorest and the richest in society. Tony Blair is redistributing wealth, but he is doing it the wrong way.

We have heard some serious reflections on the impact that poverty has on people's lives. The problem is that the Executive is dealing with the symptoms and not the causes. I would support many of the Executive's initiatives but there is a danger that until we break the cycle of a third generation of families living in poverty, all we are doing is chasing our tails and dealing with the

consequences of poverty rather than its causes. It is quite interesting and very telling that, although there are targets in the budget for biodegradable waste, there is no target for child poverty. Does that mean that there is no budget line for tackling child poverty?

I want to reflect particularly on our young people. We are about to embark on a bill—the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill—to deal with the special needs of young children in education. One of the most worrying consequences of poverty is the number of young people who enter primary 1 with social, emotional and behavioural problems, many of which are the consequence of having been brought up in the stressful and anxious circumstances that were discussed earlier, where there are generations of a dependency culture that people cannot break out of. Although it is worthy of the Parliament to deal with the consequences of that and to make provision to support social, emotional and behavioural problems, we should ensure that those young people do not have those problems in the first place. Effort in that area would make a difference.

Milestone 9 in the “Social Justice...a Scotland where everyone matters: Annual Report 2002” talks about

“Bringing the poorest-performing 20% of pupils, in terms of Standard Grade achievement, closer to the performance of all pupils.”

That is a worthy aim, but if we consider the Executive’s statistics on page 43 of the report we can see that it is moving in the wrong direction. That is our problem. We are not even moving forward. On many other indices—we have also heard about child poverty—we are moving in the wrong direction.

The consequences of that are not just the personal impact, particularly on young people, that I spoke about earlier, but the impact that it has on the public purse. We have a declining population; the pensioners that John Swinburne talked about will increasingly rely on health services that we do not have the people to generate the wealth to pay for. Unless we break the cycle of dependence, we will have severe problems. If we break that cycle, we might have a fighting chance.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I have two minutes that I can give to Mark Ballard, but it is a very strict two minutes.

11:52

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will do my best.

I thank Donald Gorrie for his speech, which recognised the value of community enterprise and

the voluntary sector. It has been said several times that things would be different in a Scotland that had control over its tax and benefit system. Patrick Harvie mentioned a citizens income scheme, which would be an effective way of integrating our current disunited tax and benefits system. It would be a key way for a Scotland with control over its tax and benefits to provide a solution to the poverty trap.

Under the scheme, every person would receive a basic income from the state, which would be set at a level high enough to provide people with their basic needs of shelter, food and heating. That income would be non-taxable and would replace the personal tax allowance. That would help to end the current poverty and benefit traps. It would put an end to a situation that meant that when I was unemployed and was offered four hours of part-time work, I had to turn it down because I would have lost more in benefits, such as housing benefit, than I gained from working. That is what we should do in Scotland when we have control of our own tax and social security.

11:54

Tommy Sheridan: The debate should be broken into two areas. First, we would like to have more power in order to assume the maturity of a small nation—like any other small nation in Europe—so that we can genuinely tackle the big problems. When I intervened on a new Labour member earlier, she replied that that is the responsibility of benefits, which are to do with Westminster. Precisely. That is the problem. If we are to tackle poverty, we require the powers to address our benefits system, our wages and our pensions. That is a fact of life. No member would dispute that. Some members would dispute whether we should have those powers in Scotland and some, such as Scottish Socialist Party members, would argue that we need those powers here in Scotland.

It is important to address what is called antisocial behaviour with a combination of real investment in community facilities and significant investment in genuine community policing, so that we have police on our streets who are visible, interacting with our communities. However, I hope that new Labour members would agree that the concern about antisocial behaviour that is the preserve of Westminster, and which is shared in Scotland, does not appear to arrive at the doorsteps of the real perpetrators of antisocial behaviour—the rich and the multimillionaires who refuse, day in and day out, to pay their taxes, whether corporation or income taxes, to society. They deny the Exchequer £85 billion a year in resources. While new Labour wants to get tough on under-16s, it does not seem to want to get

tough on the multimillionaires who are the real perpetrators of antisocial behaviour. Those are the ones we should be getting tough with, using the powers that we have. It is important that we use those powers to the maximum.

I have here a report from four months ago, based on Help the Aged's investigation into the council tax. According to the research, over the past 10 years,

"the massive 80% council tax rise has been matched by only a 40% rise in the state pension ... This upward trend has meant that council tax payments are now taking an increasing bite out of older people's disposable incomes."

The report states:

"Rising council tax places an unfair burden on older people by accounting for an average of 5% of their household income, compared with 3% of expenses for working age households. This difference has the same effect as making pensioners pay an additional 2p in income tax compared to ordinary households."

Help the Aged further states:

"Our research shows that council tax is not just a property tax but a pensioner tax."

The Scottish Socialist Party is determined to address that question because we have the power to address it in Scotland; it is not reserved to Westminster. We can tackle what is now known not just as a property tax but as a pensioner tax, because it puts a disproportionate burden for paying for local government jobs and services on the shoulders of pensioners and low-income households. That is why the amendment, which I hope members will vote for later today, asks that we address the question directly by abolishing the unfair council tax and replacing it with an income-based tax. In that way, we can have a progressive and redistributive tax, which takes the burden off 77 per cent of Scots, and particularly off our pensioner households. If we want to tackle poverty, there is the route. It puts more money into the pockets of the poorest Scots, who are currently being hammered by the council tax system. I hope that the minister will reply to that.

I ask the minister whether the question of household income is one of semantics. To measure poverty in our society we must have an income level to measure against. What does the minister consider to be the household income level below which a household is living in relative poverty? Can she give me a figure? The Scottish household survey tells us that 31 per cent of Scots households have an income of less than £10,000 per annum. That would appear to indicate that one in three households are living in poverty. However, other research from CACI tells us that the average household income in Britain is now £29,000 per annum, which means that 52 per cent of Scots households live in poverty. I ask the minister to give us an income level for poverty.

Finally, does the minister agree that drugs and the drugs strategy should not be tagged on to a debate on closing the opportunity gap? The Executive's drugs strategy must be analysed on its own in a dedicated fashion. That strategy has been not only a remarkable failure, but a tragic failure. Now, 382 lives have been taken by drug-related abuse. That is more than ever in Scotland's history. The Executive's drugs strategy is failing miserably. Does the minister agree that we need a proper debate to address that problem?

12:00

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I believe that everybody in the chamber is concerned about poverty, deprivation and lack of opportunity and about the restrictions on freedom that they create. Despite the efforts of Governments, Executives and councils over the years, the reality is that too many people in Scotland live in poverty, however it is defined.

We have heard a welter of statistics, which sometimes help and sometimes confuse. I will give one example as a contribution to the discussion of absolute and relative poverty. We have debated fuel poverty many times in the chamber. The interesting phenomenon is that if the price of electricity or fuel decreases, an enormous number of people are taken out of fuel poverty, but we all accept that that is not accompanied by a fundamental change in the central heating systems or the fuel efficiency of houses, for example. If we concentrated too much on that statistic, it would be misleading.

In outlining the Executive's achievements and aspirations for the forthcoming session, the minister said that the rightness of policy is not determined by those who mention poverty the most or who shout loudest about it. That comment was echoed a little by Patrick Harvie, who said that it was important to acknowledge that everyone in the chamber is concerned about poverty. That is why the debate has been passionate and committed as we test our solutions against one another.

We can take useful insights from some of the contributions to the debate from all parties. My colleague Donald Gorrie was right to stress the importance of the voluntary sector and of small and local contributions to building communities and building opportunity. Tommy Sheridan and Shona Robison were right to worry about the growing gap between rich and poor, but wrong to dismiss the need to tackle absolute poverty. James Douglas-Hamilton was right to talk about the need to give hope and the need for choice. David Davidson and Elaine Murray talked about recognising that poverty is not measured only in cash; it is based on a lack of access to a series of

what might be termed social goods, such as the health service and educational opportunity.

We must take on board and meet head-on some of the suggested solutions. The most important solution was that proposed by the main Opposition party—the SNP—and by some SNP members' colleagues who take a similar line. The SNP has been high on analysis but low on remedy. Independence is a red herring. What counts is what is done with power, not where it is exercised.

Despite challenges from many members of different parties, we have heard nothing about what the SNP—the main Opposition party, which argues that it is the main alternative to the Executive—would do with current or extra powers. Sandra White came the nearest to addressing that when she talked about the need for people to have the opportunity to study in a more adult environment. I agree with her, because, among other things, that proposal is in the Liberal Democrat manifesto and in the partnership agreement. She would do well to read the Executive's proposals before she makes that point. If that is the height of what the SNP seeks to achieve, it has a significant poverty of aspiration. Campbell Martin went so far as to say that he was not interested in managing devolution. Oddly enough, that echoed John Swinney's comment yesterday that he was glad not to be in the Executive. Perhaps the SNP is adopting a new policy of not aspiring to manage devolution or to become the Scottish Executive.

I will make a more positive point about education that one or two members touched on. Significant achievements have been made in education, such as pre-school education for three and four-year-olds; the McCrone settlement; and support to our universities and colleges through abolishing tuition fees and restoring student grants to an extent. The Executive and the Parliament have acknowledged the key need for colleges and universities to drive not only the education of our people, but the production of new ideas and initiatives in the enterprise economy. Widening opportunity is important. Education is central to what we do in this country, and Scotland is a net exporter of educated people.

Several members—Tommy Sheridan was the most recent—talked about antisocial behaviour. We should not be obsessed by the policy on control mechanisms, important though they are. It is significant that a huge proportion of those who are young tearaways at 16 also needed care and protection at the age of six. That goes to the heart of the problem. Therefore, it is important that the Executive's policies contain considerable measures to tackle that at source. We should concentrate on that central issue.

An older word for opportunity is freedom, in the Beveridge sense of freedom from want and so

forth. Throughout the ages, the struggle for freedom has been the defining characteristic of politics and its central challenge. The Parliament and the Executive are doing much on that. Opportunity is an inspiring and life-giving concept. The idea of opportunity has led people to leave this country to go elsewhere and led people to come here in search of opportunity and better circumstances. The debate is about the opportunity for people to lead their own lives, to develop their talents to the full and to build better and more prosperous lives for their families. We should leave the debate with at least a message of hope to our people that the Scottish Parliament is united in trying to deal with this endemic problem in our society.

I support the Executive's motion.

12:07

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The debate and, in particular, some of the duelling between the minister, Margaret Curran, and Shona Robison, have been interesting. There has been a discourse on absolute and relative poverty and I detected in the minister a welcome change towards emphasising absolute poverty. Shona Robison talked about income growth and said that the lowest paid have seen slower income growth than the highest paid have. Of course, if the number of the lowest paid has fallen, absolute poverty will have decreased too, while relative poverty will have grown. It is right to focus most of our attention—but not all of it—on dealing with the difficulties and causes of absolute poverty. If that is a change of emphasis, I welcome it.

As Tommy Sheridan said, the biggest issue that many of us need to face up to is low pay. A record 30.7 million people in the United Kingdom pay income tax, which is 1.3 million more than last year and 4.5 million more than in 1997. Members might be surprised to learn that that increase is not necessarily caused by growth in the number of employed people. In the main, the causes are changes in taxation and the taxation thresholds, which hit the lowest paid hardest. The result of freezing tax thresholds is that the lowest paid pay more in tax as a proportion of their earnings. More of the lowest paid than of the well paid are caught by that. Any Government should be concerned about that and should change the situation.

Opportunity gaps do not arise just because of a lack of income. They can be the result of Government policy. Several of my colleagues described some of the difficulties and I will mention a few more. The growing indiscipline in our schools, where a teacher, jannie or dinner lady is assaulted every 15 minutes, contributes to poor attainment and widens the opportunity gap, particularly for those who need education to allow

them to escape from poverty. Government policy has contributed to that growing indiscipline in our schools.

Let us consider attainment: 72 per cent of pupils have reached level D by primary 7, which is below the target of 80 per cent. By secondary year 2, only 50 per cent of pupils are making the targets, so we can see that our education system is not doing enough to narrow the opportunity gap. The Executive's target was to bring the poorest-performing 20 per cent of pupils closer to the performance of all pupils. The Executive's own statistics and statements admit that that group has not improved. Essentially, only those who pay twice, through taxation and independent school fees, have the real opportunity in this society. We must seek to ensure that more people, including those who use the state system, see the opportunity gap narrowed.

Not all the Executive's interventions have been bad. Credit should be given where it is due. I congratulate the Executive on its school rebuilding programme, with £1.15 billion being announced by Cathy Jamieson, then Minister for Education and Young People, before we broke up for the elections. However, we know that that programme could not have been delivered on such a significant scale were it not for the conversion of Labour and the Liberal Democrats to the private finance initiative/public-private partnership system.

We need to take firmer action in ways that are not to do with money, but where policy can impact on the opportunity gap. One third of all school arson incidents in the United Kingdom are in Scotland. That is a scandalous statistic on crime—in particular youth crime—which impinges on people's opportunities by forcing schools to close, which disrupts pupils' education. We need a secure, safe Scotland to ensure that public services can be delivered and accessed.

Let me move on from the Executive's record, which many members have already addressed, and consider what has been done by the Tories. The Tories recognise that it is economic activity that improves opportunities. By doubling the number of people who own their own homes from 33 per cent to 66 per cent, the Conservatives were able to narrow the opportunity gap. There are many other factors, but I do not have enough time to go through them.

If we had the luxury of being in power, we would cut business rates and charges and we would reduce regulations—we would seek to revitalise the Scottish economy and in that way reduce the problems of the opportunity gap. We would seek to strengthen public services by giving people a passport to real choice in health and by giving parents a passport to real choice in education. We would ensure that the people of Scotland had a

secure and safe society, in which public services could be accessed and in which economic growth ensured people's ability to narrow the opportunity gap. Sadly, if we take the lessons from this debate, there is as yet no consensus on the type of change that is required, and much work still requires to be done.

12:13

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): The Executive's document, "Closing the Opportunity Gap", states:

"Many of the obstacles which people face are deep-seated and complex. But that is not an excuse for shirking responsibility."

I am sure that that thought will be shared across the chamber. It is good to hear passion on a subject in the Parliament because, too often, our debates are anodyne, mundane and without passion. I congratulate Des McNulty on his most passionate contribution; I will return to the content of what he said later. If we cannot bring passion to the subject of the lives of ordinary people and of those with the fewest advantages in our society, we deserve opprobrium and contempt from the wider community.

The Executive's document has many words in it. I have not counted them, but I counted 28 objectives and 68 targets. I must point out, however—just to give a scale and a context—that the aggregate funding to support those targets and achieve those objectives over three years is less than the aggregate shortfall in spending in the Scottish Executive's budget over the past three years. That puts in context our preparedness to tackle the opportunity gap in our society.

Let us make some other comparisons that might illuminate today's debate. In 1979, the Labour party had been in power in the United Kingdom for five years, so let us ask some questions about then and now. In 1979, was there a dental health service in Scotland? Today, do poor people and others across Scotland have effective access to dental health on the NHS? In 1979, could the poorer families in our society afford for their children to go into higher education? Would those children end up educated and able to take their place in the world unburdened by debts? In 1979, yes; now, no.

Maureen Macmillan: Perhaps Stewart Stevenson will tell us how many people could access higher education in those days compared with now.

Stewart Stevenson: Of course we have made progress. The number of people in higher education has risen but, in opening up access to more people, we have disadvantaged those from poorer families by burdening them with a lifetime

of debt after they have achieved their tertiary education qualification.

Johann Lamont is obviously intent on joining the select group of members who have returned from the summer break with injuries of one sort or another. She chose to shoot herself in the foot in a very cavalier fashion when she said that, if anyone knew how to persuade a child to take a free school meal, she would like to hear from them. Her Executive colleagues appear to think that they can do so. Their document states that they will

“By 2006 ... increase take-up, especially among pupils eligible for a free school meal.”

I hope that the Executive is right—

Johann Lamont *rose*—

Stewart Stevenson: Yes, come on, Johann. Put them up; I will knock them down.

Johann Lamont: The issue is complex. There is a difference between making somebody eligible for a nutritious meal and making them eat it. Improving nutrition is more complex than simply providing it free. If somebody could get my daughter to eat a nutritious meal, for a start I would bless them, but I could afford to pay for that meal. The free school meal might help her nutrition, but it would necessarily trap resources that could help children who are in poorer circumstances than my daughter's. The only point that I was making is that the issue is complex and not as simple as is sometimes suggested.

Stewart Stevenson: I agree with every word that Johann Lamont has said, but I return to the Executive's claim that it will

“increase take-up, especially among pupils eligible for a free school meal.”

The Executive seems to have the answer, but I share Johann Lamont's scepticism.

Des McNulty talked about the 1920s and how we have overcome absolute poverty according to its 1920s definition. The interesting thing about that is that absolute poverty obviously has a different definition today. We can play around with numbers—Mr Monteith made a bold attempt to do so—but the bottom line is that, when the Executive came to power in 1999, it used absolute poverty, as then defined, as one of its measures for success. The Executive has clearly failed on that measure.

Des McNulty criticised John Swinney for focusing on economics in yesterday's debate and not mentioning poverty—

Dr Murray *rose*—

Stewart Stevenson: I do not have time.

However, Des McNulty went on to talk about a laudable Clydeside project, which is an economic

and social project. That is an important point, as it illustrates the complexities and difficulties of the subject of today's debate.

The minister got very aerated when the word “fraud” appeared in the debate in connection with SIPs. When *The Scotsman* used that word on 19 May in its report on SIPs, I am afraid that that was the word that seemed to meet the need. The Chamber's dictionary that we have in the chamber gives “deceit” as its first definition of fraud.

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Mrs Mary Mulligan) *rose*—

Stewart Stevenson: I really do not have time. The minister will have time in her summing up.

As I said, the first definition of fraud is deceit. We are deceiving people as to what the SIPs can achieve. I think that it was Gerry Hassan who said that SIPS

“are seen as the champions of the people and the down-trodden, but are really looking after their own interests”.

Indeed, the core of the debate is the question of the way in which the Scottish Parliament behaves and how others at Westminster have behaved. Would the Scottish Parliament have chosen, as the Inland Revenue has chosen, to sell off its physical assets to a tax haven, thereby reducing the money available for this and many other subjects?

It is interesting to note that we have heard not a single word in the debate about the disabled. As MSPs, we featherbed ourselves. If an MSP is, or becomes, disabled, support is provided for as long as that MSP is a member of the Parliament. In the wider world, support is provided for three years. We have heard something about pensions today. As MSPs, we earn one fiftieth of our salary each year for our pension. Out there, teachers get an eightieth and in the wider community, few people get anything at all.

The poverty that contains the poor is many faceted. One of the things over which the Scottish Parliament has no power is the high marginal tax rate of those in benefit. As MSPs, we pay a 40 per cent marginal tax rate on our earnings, but the poor often pay between 90 and 95 per cent. Examples such as that illustrate the poverty of ambition to take on the real powers of a normal country and of a normal Parliament and to start to solve our problems and deliver for the poor in Scotland.

12:22

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Mrs Mary Mulligan): I am pleased to bring this interesting debate to a close. I agree with Johann Lamont's view that the debate is about not only the facts and figures but the effects of the

opportunity gap on people's living standards.

Part of the debate today has taken place around the issue of absolute or relative poverty. Whereas that debate might be interesting to MSPs, people out there do not want to argue about such things. Although those measures are useful in showing the effect of our policies, we should keep such debate in perspective. However, we have managed to realise that we need to use both sets of figures in the debate.

Tackling poverty and closing the opportunity gap are part of the Executive's approach to social justice. Earlier this morning, the Minister for Communities outlined the range of measures that the Executive has put in place to achieve those goals—they are only the tip of the iceberg.

We heard that tackling poverty and disadvantage is one of the main aims of the Executive and that social justice is a core principle of the partnership agreement. Social justice is not simply a matter for the communities portfolio; many of the policies and programmes in health, education, transport and other areas have a direct impact on poverty in Scotland.

Johann Lamont: Will the minister give way?

Mrs Mulligan: I will finish the point.

Some of those policies were referred to in the debate, and I will return to them when I address some of the points that members have raised.

Johann Lamont: On the issue of joined-up working, the minister might be aware of a University of London report that pointed out how successful integrated community schools are in supporting vulnerable young people in mainstream education. Will the minister indicate what work her department is undertaking with the Scottish Executive Education Department to build on the community school model? I am thinking of the opt-in initiative in my constituency, which keeps young people in mainstream education, thereby maximising their chances of benefiting from that education.

Mrs Mulligan: I recognise the value of community schools, and we are meeting Scottish Executive Education Department officials to progress that matter.

Fiona Hyslop mentioned the cycle of poverty that people get into. We need to take early intervention measures to ensure that we break into that cycle. I will return to that point when I reply to some other points that Fiona Hyslop made.

Growing Scotland's economy is crucial to our anti-poverty agenda. However, as our economy grows, we must take steps to ensure that the benefits of that growth are shared by all of Scotland's communities.

Delivering excellent public services will make a considerable impact in deprived communities, where people often depend on public services more heavily. We want to ensure that those people get a quality service that they want and deserve.

Moreover, supporting stronger, safer communities will reap rewards. We are working to end child poverty and are supporting vulnerable children. The claims that we do not have a target in that respect are not true. Although it might not be mentioned in the partnership agreement, we are continuing towards the target that we had already set of eliminating child poverty within a generation. That aim has not changed, and even Shona Robison said in her opening speech that many of those policies will need to be carried out on a long-term basis. That is just what we are aiming to do.

We are working to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour, and are regenerating our communities by funding such initiatives as neighbourhood wardens and improving the social housing stock.

We are developing a confident, democratic Scotland where, with the community's participation, local services are more effective and responsive. We are also working to ensure that people from all communities are able to participate in the community planning process. However, we also want people to have confidence in themselves and to have aspirations to succeed.

Tommy Sheridan: On the issue of intervention in community planning and regeneration, the minister visited the Pollok Credit Union yesterday. Does she agree that the regeneration of Pollok town centre is absolutely vital to the community and does she support its earliest possible reconstruction?

Mrs Mulligan: Mr Sheridan knows that the Executive is totally committed to regeneration within communities, as our work through Communities Scotland shows. As the minister responsible for planning, I cannot comment on individual applications that are at a certain stage in the process.

I want to turn to points that members have raised in the debate. Shona Robison mentioned a matter involving SIPs, and Stewart Stevenson referred to it again in his closing speech. I am very disappointed by how they have raised that issue. It is important to point out that SIPs have played a large part in offering locally focused assistance within our communities, although we should recognise that sometimes certain things might not work.

We must encourage new and innovative ideas. Indeed, we constantly observe the lack of such ideas from the SNP. However, I really take great—

Christine Grahame: Exception.

Mrs Mulligan: Thank you.

I really take great exception to any suggestion of fraud in the SIPs and it was wrong of Stewart Stevenson to make such a claim. There have been a number of investigations into SIPs. However, I think that such a situation is quite healthy, because it shows that we are willing to investigate complaints when they are raised. Not one of those complaints has been proven to be based in fact, and those particular members should withdraw their earlier comments.

During the summer, I visited several SIPs, including the excellent Dundee employment and aftercare project, which is working with people to get them back into work. It is wholly inappropriate for the SNP to use the debating chamber to criticise SIPs that are carrying out such excellent work in our communities.

Mr McFee: I am very interested to hear that the Executive is willing to look at cases. It was certainly not so willing in the case of the Paisley Partnership, whose chief executive left after moneys were spent without the authority of the SIP board. The Executive was prepared to look at neither that case nor the non-disclosure agreements that were signed with the chief executive and that camouflaged the reason for his departure.

Ms Curran: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I want to counsel the SNP on the way that it is conducting these debates. [*Interruption.*] Please bear with me. These matters are of great substance and great accusations are flying round the chamber. I will take up the matter with John Swinney, because we really need to clarify both the facts as far as SIPs are concerned and the unfounded allegations that are being thrown around the chamber. It is not acceptable.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Although that is not a point of order, I must point out to members that they should be very careful and concise about what they are saying.

Mrs Mulligan: As I have said, complaints about SIPs have been investigated and, as far as I am aware, none of them has been found to be true.

Tommy Sheridan asked how we determine relative low income. The headline measure for relative poverty is 60 per cent below the Great Britain median income, after housing costs have been paid. We will continue to use that definition. That brings me back to the point that I made earlier—we can quote figures at each other as much as we want, but will that make a difference?

Mr Sheridan talked about making a difference, particularly to pensioners, by abolishing the council tax and introducing a Scottish service tax.

However, his proposal would undermine councils' accountability to their electorates, which I am sure Mr Sheridan would not want to do, given that he is such a supporter of local government. Further, a report by the Local Government Committee rejected Mr Sheridan's proposal. The present package of income tax, value-added tax on purchases and a property tax is satisfactory and allows us to tax people on each feature of their living circumstances. We should continue to use that package.

I wonder about Mr Sheridan's claims on pensioner poverty. We are seeking to address that issue through pensioner credits and minimum income guarantees. The Executive has also introduced a number of other schemes such as free bus passes and the warm deal, which will assist pensioners and, I hope, address some of the poverty issues.

The Tories continue to major on the opt-out; they dress up opted-out schools and health services as choice. They have nothing new to offer and have returned to their past policies, which did not reduce poverty and which the electorate rejected. On the other hand, SSP members talk about the introduction of free school meals and the reduction of poverty in Scotland, but they do not say where they would get the money to fund those measures.

SNP members continue to argue that, although they support our measures, only independence will remove poverty. For them, today's debate was more about the problems in their party than about addressing poverty. The Parliament has powers to raise taxes, but the SNP is not prepared to say that it would do that, nor is it prepared to say what it would do if the Parliament had fiscal independence. The SNP does not produce proposals because it lacks ideas and does not know what it would do with fiscal independence. The Executive will continue to introduce measures to tackle poverty.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As the business motion will be taken this afternoon, I now suspend this meeting of Parliament.

12:33

Meeting suspended until 14:30.

14:30

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Tourism

1. Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to support the tourism industry. (S2O-334)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mr Frank McAveety): We are supporting Scotland's tourism industry in a number of ways. For example, improvements in VisitScotland's marketing contributed to an increase of 8 per cent in tourism spend last year compared with 2001. We have also improved the sector in the past four months. Spend is up 5 per cent on last year and the number of visitors from Europe in particular is up 37 per cent on last year.

We have established an ad hoc ministerial group on tourism, chaired by the Deputy First Minister, which will take a strategic look at how the various support agencies integrate their activities and investment in tourism. The group will report to the Cabinet in the autumn. I hope that from that we will develop further strategies for the development of Scottish tourism.

Irene Oldfather: The minister will be aware that Prestwick airport has increased passenger numbers by 13 per cent. Will he work with the local tourism industry to attract visitors from destination airports and regions back into Scotland, thereby stimulating the Ayrshire economy?

Mr McAveety: We appreciate that contribution. We recognise the work that all our airports do in attracting tourists not just from Europe and the USA but from within the UK. We will work with tour operators and airlines to ensure that through our route development investment, which has already borne fruit in direct flights to Scotland and in the Rosyth to Zeebrugge ferry route, our strategy will continue the good work that has been announced for Scottish tourism in the past quarter.

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): I concur with the minister's comments on the success of the tourism industry this season. I suggest that we should reward success rather than punish it. Why is funding for VisitScotland down 18 per cent this year and why will it be down 12 per cent next year? Should we not support and fund our tourist board rather than leave it underfunded?

Mr McAveety: I thank Kenny MacAskill for his useful cheerful contribution after the recess. Underlying investment in Scottish tourism through our commitment on marketing and our grant in aid shows an upward curve. Unless Kenny MacAskill is reading the figures upside down, I cannot see how he has reached the conclusion that he has.

We had to make additional investment, particularly for the difficult year of 2001, following the foot-and-mouth outbreak. There has been recovery in the two affected areas and figures are back to what they were prior to the foot-and-mouth experience. The combination of the hard work of many of our public agencies to ensure that we work in partnership and the work done by VisitScotland through its developing website will result in much more progress than we have had even in the past few months.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): Will the minister confirm that when he meets MSPs to discuss post-foot-and-mouth funding for tourism in Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders, he will have an open mind on the issue and, more important, financial flexibility to resolve it?

Mr McAveety: We have made a commitment to ask VisitScotland to work with the areas that were most affected by foot-and-mouth disease and which have recovered through partnership with VisitScotland. One of the key messages that we stress is that the challenge is to increase the overall number of visitors to Scotland through a much more aggressive and focused marketing strategy that will increase the opportunity for areas such as Dumfries and Galloway. Many of us value the work done by the local tourist boards and major agencies to ensure that the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway recover from the traumatic year 2001.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Will the minister confirm that when the ministerial group finally reports in the autumn it will end the period of uncertainty, which has been far too long, over the future of the area tourist board network? Is he aware how strong the feeling is on the ground that the number of ATBs should not be reduced further? The four ATBs in my region of Mid Scotland and Fife all perform extremely well and help to boost the local tourism industry.

Mr McAveety: We are discussing that and many other issues in Scottish tourism. It is right and proper that that discussion takes place in the context of the much broader debate. There are many different views about the relationship of ATBs to the wider network in terms of the development of Scottish tourism. I have listened to those views during my summer tour and that will influence much of the debate that will take place with my ministerial colleagues.

Police (Shoot-to-stop Policy)

2. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will review police policy in respect of shoot to stop. (S2O-312)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): Decisions to deploy armed police officers and the tactics used by armed police officers are operational matters for chief constables in accordance with strict guidelines. Instances where such officers are required to open fire against a person are extremely rare.

Alex Neil: I draw the minister's attention to a recent incident involving a woman in the Lothians. Will the minister discuss whether taking a more flexible approach is more appropriate in such difficult operational situations for the police, as has been indicated by a number of senior police officers in Scotland and south of the border?

Cathy Jamieson: As the member no doubt is aware, I will not comment on the particular incident, because it is currently subject to an inquiry, as per the guidelines, to ensure that the correct procedures were followed. However, I reassure members that the number of incidents where firearms are discharged by the police is small. From 1998-99 to 2002-03 there were 28 such incidents, and I am advised that, without exception, all of them involved the destruction of animals. Obviously, we want to keep the situation under review. Members will be aware that trials of other options are going on south of the border, and I want to learn from them.

Social Services (Resources)

3. Campbell Martin (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether local authorities have sufficient funding and resources to meet the challenges and targets set by it in respect of the provision of social services. (S2O-321)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson): Funding provided to local authorities for social services is mainly provided through unhypothecated revenue grant, and it is up to each local authority how it allocates those resources to meet local needs and priorities. All local authorities received an above-inflation increase to their revenue grant in the last spending review.

Campbell Martin: I take it that that was a yes. Could the minister tell me why, if he thinks that they have enough resources, front-line social services workers in North Ayrshire are telling me that they do not and that they are struggling to meet the demands that are placed on them? Could he also tell me why in a letter to me, a copy of which I am happy to let him have, the chief

executive of North Ayrshire Council, Mr Bernard Devine, stated:

"the price of failure to meet the targets and the challenges set by the Executive will be the demise of generic Social Work Departments controlled by local councils"?

Euan Robson: I am aware that there has been discussion in the local press about the situation in North Ayrshire. It is primarily a matter for the local authority as to how it allocates its resources. In general, in the past 10 years, expenditure on social work services has doubled in real terms. In fact, gross expenditure rose from £881 million in 1991-92 to £1.794 billion in 2001-02. If the member cares to pass me a copy of the letter, I will look at it for him.

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): Does the minister agree that one of the major difficulties facing local authorities in providing a sufficient level of social services is the recruitment and retention of qualified social workers, in particular in the challenging area of child and family work? Can he give a commitment to examine that as a priority, and will he involve not only local employers but professional organisations such as the Association of Directors of Social Work, Unison and the British Association of Social Workers?

Euan Robson: I am more than happy to make that commitment. In fact, as the member may know, we recently launched the Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education, which is looking to draw together best practice and to develop a degree course for social work. That will inform much of the direction of policy in the next few months. We have also taken steps to increase the number of fast-track social work qualification places for graduates. In addition, in certain circumstances we have paid off student loans to a ceiling of £9,000 to ensure that there is some incentive for people to go into particular crisis areas, such as the area that the member mentioned.

Traffic (Speed Reduction)

4. Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what impact the "twenty's plenty" schemes are having in reducing traffic speed in built-up areas. (S2O-353)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): In 2001, the Executive published an evaluation of pilot advisory 20mph schemes in residential areas. The study found that average speeds fell at 60 per cent of the pilot sites, with a significant drop in the number of serious accidents across all those sites.

Mr Macintosh: That is good news. I congratulate the minister on that scheme as well as on the speed kills campaign. Is he aware of the

situation in East Renfrewshire, which has one of the highest rates of car ownership in Scotland? That area is getting used to the idea of ever-increasing numbers of cars using side roads that are ill suited to through traffic. However, does he agree that although in the long term we have to change the attitudes of car drivers, so that they respect residential streets, in the short term we must make continued investment in traffic engineering, road humps, chicanes and other measures that are designed to tackle the dangers facing our communities now?

Nicol Stephen: I agree. It is particularly important to implement those measures outside schools and that is why the Executive has an objective of extending 20mph zones to all Scotland's schools. I hope to make an announcement about relevant funding proposals shortly. Linked to that is the issue that the member raises—safe routes to schools and safe areas around people's homes. Home zones, as they are called, are another area where I would like to make additional investment. Both those schemes will have the support of the Executive in coming years.

Detention (Children)

5. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): To ask the Scottish Executive what its policy is on the detention of children. (S2O-311)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): Executive policy is that children in Scotland can be detained only in accordance with the law.

Dennis Canavan: Will the Executive take action to stop the barbaric practice of using Dungavel detention centre to imprison innocent children whose parents have sought refuge in this country? What possible justification can there be for punishing a mother for feeding her children? Instead of simply passing the buck to David Blunkett, will the Executive face up to its responsibilities for the health and education of those children whose human rights are being violated by a regime that brings shame on Scotland?

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Although health and education are devolved, there are policy matters here that are reserved, Mr Peacock.

Peter Peacock: Mr Canavan invites me to comment on matters that are for our UK ministers, who are accountable to our UK members of Parliament in our UK Parliament. It is for UK ministers to comment on the matters relating to Dungavel.

The Presiding Officer: I will give you a supplementary if you are specific on that point, Mr Canavan.

Dennis Canavan: Does the minister care to comment on the Executive's responsibilities regarding the health and education of those children in Dungavel? Those are responsibilities of this Parliament and the Scottish Executive.

Peter Peacock: The operation of Dungavel, including the welfare and education of children, is the responsibility of the Home Office.

Antisocial Behaviour (Quad Bikes)

6. Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures are being taken to tackle the antisocial use of quad bikes in public areas. (S2O-317)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran): The police are responsible for the enforcement of road traffic law, which includes provision on use of vehicles such as quad bikes on land of any description not forming part of a road. Section 34(1) of the Road Traffic Act 1988 makes it an offence to drive a mechanically propelled vehicle on

"common land, moorland or land of any other description not ... forming part of a road",

or

"on any road being a footpath or bridleway"

or restricted byway. That would include quad bikes and we would encourage the police to enforce that provision where quad bikes are used irresponsibly.

Paul Martin: I advise the minister that the police are not enforcing that legislation uniformly. I ask her to write to every chief constable in Scotland to advise them of their requirement to enforce that legislation along with many other measures on antisocial behaviour that are not being enforced by our police and other authorities.

Ms Curran: I am happy to give the assurance to Paul Martin that we need to pursue the measure. Everyone is aware of the Executive's deep commitment to tackling antisocial behaviour in Scotland. I am happy to discuss those matters with the Minister for Justice to ensure that appropriate action is taken.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I ask the minister to confirm that the wardens employed under the "Securing safer communities" scheme, which is being piloted in Hamilton, Blantyre, East Kilbride and other parts of South Lanarkshire, have no powers to tackle antisocial behaviour. Therefore, the funding that the Scottish Executive has ploughed into the scheme should have been used to employ more police who have the powers to tackle the wide range of vexing behaviour that is termed antisocial.

Ms Curran: I am quite happy to go to the communities in which the wardens are deployed—

in which, as the member says, we have recently extended our funding of the scheme—and tell them that the Tories' position is that they cannot have those community wardens. I am also quite happy to go to the police, who agree with us, when people say that the only answer to antisocial behaviour is to give the police full responsibility for tackling it. I am happy to point out to the police that the Tories disagree with the community wardens scheme. The Tories think that the only response to antisocial behaviour is to employ more police officers, but a cursory examination of antisocial behaviour shows that it demands a range of agencies to tackle it and that resources must be used appropriately.

There is much evidence to show that community wardens help us to tackle both the causes and the practice of antisocial behaviour and that the scheme is a good use of money by the Executive. I ask the member to read the consultation document on our proposals. She will see that we are asking for opinions on the use of community wardens and she can submit her views as part of that consultation.

Licensing (Nicholson Committee Report)

7. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will take forward consultation and legislation on the Nicholson committee report on liquor licensing law. (S2O-339)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): When the report was launched on 19 August, I confirmed that the Executive was keen to have the views of all those with an interest. The report is, therefore, out for consultation until 19 December. We will give high priority to new legislation.

Donald Gorrie: That is encouraging. I hope that that excellent report, which has widespread general support, will trigger the Executive into taking action and putting the issue high on its agenda for legislation in the coming year.

Cathy Jamieson: I have given the member an assurance that I will prioritise legislation. We will take account of the views that emerge in the consultation process and I will want to include those when we formulate the legislation. I am not going to set a deadline for the legislation, but I assure the member that I have taken his comments on board.

Civil Partnerships

8. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will address the issue of civil partnership registration as part of its commitment to family law reform. (S2O-345)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): Scottish ministers have noted the UK

Government's consultation on civil partnership registration for same-sex couples. We are presently considering how to proceed on that matter.

Patrick Harvie: Does the minister agree that the continuing discrimination in law against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people—and others whose needs are not met by marriage—is unacceptable and that the Executive has a significant opportunity to address it?

Cathy Jamieson: This is a very complex issue, which will provoke strong views on all sides of the argument. That is why it is important for the Executive to consider the matter carefully, listen to all the interest groups and take appropriate action at the right time.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): When the minister gives the matter due consideration will she consider that, because of the nature of the legislation on civil partnerships—the fact that it crosses the boundary between devolved and reserved matters—special attention should be given to the nature and scale of the consultation and, most important, to how the Parliament might be involved? We know that there are complex issues in different areas of law, such as the law of succession and property rights law.

Cathy Jamieson: Pauline McNeill raises a significant point. I am keen to ensure that we take account of different views and treat the matter seriously. Members will be aware that the consultation paper that has been issued south of the border has been circulated for comment, as have the relevant parts of legislation that is reserved to Westminster. I will want to proceed with the appropriate consultation in Scotland in due course.

Licensing (Nicholson Committee Report)

9. Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will respond to the recommendation of the report of the Nicholson committee on liquor licensing law. (S2O-355)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): As the member will be aware, a consultation exercise is currently underway. I am keen to hear views from all those with an interest, including MSPs who may wish to make representations on behalf of their constituents.

Sarah Boyack: I welcome that response and the response to question 7. In taking forward the Nicholson committee's recommendations and in modernising our outdated licensing system, will the minister give a commitment to give full weight to the needs of local communities, such as my constituents in the Cowgate and the Grassmarket? They have suffered from an outmoded system that

does not take into account the cumulative impact of large-scale licensed premises that have been ineffectively monitored over the years. Will she give a commitment to ensuring a modernised and more accountable system?

Cathy Jamieson: I am happy to give such a commitment. Indeed, I think that the thrust of all the recommendations in the Nicholson committee's report points in that direction. I am conscious of the impact that the prevalence of licensed premises has in particular areas and of the impact that the prevalence of off-licences has in other areas. That is why we have given a commitment this week to do further work to review the situation regarding off-licences to ensure that they do not continue to be hot spots for the kind of antisocial behaviour that we heard so much about during the consultation over the summer.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Can the minister tell members how she hopes to reply to the Nicholson committee's inability to give a conclusive recommendation on the possible sale of alcohol at all-seated stadia?

Cathy Jamieson: I am aware that that matter was raised with the minister who is responsible for culture and sport, Mr Frank McAveety, and obviously I will have discussions with him. However, the decision to stop the sale of alcohol at various stadia was taken to ensure public order and the safety of the public. Any decision to change that situation would have to take full account of those concerns and of the views of the police and others who have to enforce the current laws. The loss of potential revenue income from the sale of alcohol would not be, in itself, the only factor in any decision.

The Presiding Officer: Question 10 has been withdrawn.

Ferry Services (Contract Conditions)

11. George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to require companies bidding for the Clyde and Hebrides lifeline ferry service contracts to have long-term pay deals in place. (S20-310)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): Complex and contractual European Union issues are involved in that matter. I acknowledge the potential benefits of stable, long-term pay deals and I am prepared to investigate the issue further.

George Lyon: I thank the minister for his answer, but he will be aware of the damage that was done to island economies in my constituency by the uncertainty that was created by the protracted and occasionally bizarre recent pay negotiations between Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd and the RMT union. It is vital that the threat of annual strike action is removed from the island

communities. Therefore, I ask him to do everything in his power to ensure that a long-term pay deal is in place between the RMT and the ferry operator who wins the contract for the island routes.

Nicol Stephen: I do not think that it would serve any constructive purpose for me to reflect on the events of the past few weeks, except to say that I am pleased that a deal is currently before the employees of CalMac. I am hopeful of a positive outcome, which will involve a pay and conditions settlement that will run through to 2005. I believe that that is good news.

A number of MSPs have written to me about the tendering of the new contract and the current situation with CalMac. I have responded to indicate that I will take up their suggestions with CalMac. Once I have a report back on the matter, I will consider what further steps might be appropriate.

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): Does the minister agree that it is essential that a modernised and improved negotiation system is put in place? Is he aware that local, regional RMT negotiators in Scotland are keen to meet with his officials and him and with CalMac management to discuss how a modernised system can be put in place?

Nicol Stephen: I think that members want all the organisations with which we are closely involved to have modern and efficient pay and condition negotiations and a modern pay and conditions environment. Such arrangements are particularly important for lifeline ferry services, because the issue is not simply whether strike action occurs, as the threat of strike action can have an adverse impact on the tourism industry and on the communities involved.

If appropriate, I would be prepared to become involved. However, I want advice from CalMac and further advice on the complex EU issues that are involved in the tendering process, as I am sure all members will appreciate.

Terrestrial Trunked Radio

12. Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it will take in response to any public concerns over the roll-out of the terrestrial trunked radio system. (S20-346)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): Scottish ministers have a common interest with the UK Government in the new police communications system, which uses the TETRA standard and which is being supplied to police forces in Scotland, England and Wales by Airwave O2. In the light of independent expert advice, an extensive research programme has been established. It includes a health monitoring study

of police users, a study by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory on possible biological effects, and independent monitoring of emissions. All the results so far confirm that the equipment is safe.

Mr Ruskell: Does the minister agree that the main worry of many of our constituents is that TETRA emits a pulsed radiation that is similar in frequency to that of human brainwaves, and that no regulatory guidelines exist that specifically address the issue of pulsed radiation?

Hugh Henry: The report from the Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation noted that the signals from TETRA base stations are continuous and not pulsed.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): The minister will be aware that I have raised a number of concerns brought to me by my constituents about the possible health risks from TETRA masts. Is he also aware of the concerns about possible clusters of illnesses, such as motor neurone disease and Parkinson's disease, around existing TETRA masts such as that at Drumcarrow hill in North East Fife? Will he do as I have already done and raise the matter with the director of public health in Fife for investigation?

Hugh Henry: Public health in Fife is a matter for those who are responsible in the Fife area. There is no evidence to suggest that any illnesses or clusters are associated with TETRA masts. We will keep an eye on any reports that show evidence of illness associated with such activity, but to date there is no such evidence.

Building Schools (City of Edinburgh)

13. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to meet City of Edinburgh Council to discuss its public-private partnership for building new schools. (S2O-344)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): There are regular meetings at various levels between Executive officials and ministers and local authorities that are involved in school PPP projects. Indeed, I met Ewan Aitken, the City of Edinburgh Council's executive member for education, as recently as Tuesday this week, and we touched on the issue of the council's PPP proposals.

Mike Pringle: Given the problems that the City of Edinburgh Council has been having with its PPP for the refurbishment of schools, including St Peter's Primary School in my constituency, what is the Executive doing to support councils that face problems with contractors? Does it plan to issue guidelines to help councils with such contractual problems?

Peter Peacock: As I indicated, there is a lot of dialogue between councils and Executive officials and ministers on those issues, and whenever we can offer helpful advice and support we try to do so. As I am sure Mr Pringle knows, the City of Edinburgh Council announced today that it has now resolved its recent difficulties. That opens up progress not just at the school that he mentioned but at other schools where work could have been held back. That is extremely welcome news. The City of Edinburgh Council, along with many other local authorities, is getting unprecedented investment in its schools estate, for the betterment of the whole education system.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Is the minister aware that the City of Edinburgh Council's problem was that it had only one developer for the overall project, which meant that bargaining power for individual projects was reduced? PPPs were meant to provide competition for best value. Rather than continue to use that flawed and expensive form of funding, will he accelerate the use of normal borrowing and the alternative of not-for-profit trusts?

Peter Peacock: The Executive is expanding funding not only through PPP but through a whole variety of other routes. The system of section 94 consents given to local authorities will be reformed to create much more freedom for local authorities to make their own investment decisions. The key to PPP is that it produces value for money. If it did not, the investments would not take place. A worthwhile set of schemes has been developed across Scotland, with some £2 billion being invested in our schools estate. That is quite unprecedented.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Can the minister assure us that the schools concerned will be built on time?

Peter Peacock: I am not aware of all the detailed matters that the City of Edinburgh Council has resolved today, as that announcement has only just been made. As far as I am aware, however, that resolution should allow the schemes to go ahead according to a reasonable time scale so that the council can meet its objectives.

Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP): Does the minister accept that the relationship between the Edinburgh Schools Partnership and the City of Edinburgh Council and the delays and disputes highlight the real dangers to public services of PPPs? Is it not preferable for schools in Edinburgh to remain in public ownership?

Peter Peacock: PPPs are proving successful throughout Scotland in ways that I have indicated—they are delivering, which is important. New facilities are being delivered for children, who have welcomed them as they return to school.

PPPs are modernising an estate that was badly neglected for the last part of the previous century. People ought to recognise that huge progress is being made in Scotland.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): In the normal flow of meetings between the minister and the council, will he look in particular at the effects on special needs schools that are replaced in the larger education campuses, such as that in Midlothian? Parents in Dalkeith who had anticipated a better deal for their special needs children when their school was closed and incorporated in the big new campus have told me that they are beginning to find that their children and the facilities of the special needs school are being squeezed. As one of the schools in Edinburgh—Graysmill School—is to experience the same renovation, I am concerned that it too will find itself squeezed as part of the PPP.

Peter Peacock: There is absolutely no reason in principle why that should happen. As I have tried to indicate, the purpose of PPP investment is to improve the school estate. Specifying what the local authorities concerned want is a matter for those local authorities. The contractors should then provide what they want within the specification. If there are particular difficulties, I would be happy to hear from Margo MacDonald about them.

National Health Service (Violence against Staff)

14. Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is protecting NHS staff against violent attacks. (S2O-341)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Tom McCabe): Providing staff with an improved and safe working environment is a key entitlement under the NHS staff governance standard. Locally, NHS employers have a duty under health and safety legislation to ensure that staff have a safe working environment.

Rhona Brankin: I welcome the pilot projects that were set up in June. Is the minister aware of the recent System 3 survey in which 99 per cent of those who were questioned agreed that violent attacks on public service workers should be treated as serious assault? Will he take steps to ensure consistency in how NHS trusts throughout Scotland deal with serious incidents? Will he also ensure that staff who are affected by violence receive maximum support from their employers?

Mr McCabe: I am aware of the survey that the member mentioned. The public is right to be appalled by such outrageous behaviour. In Scotland, we have a commitment to reducing incidents by 25 per cent by 2006. We have published the "Managing Health at Work"

partnership information network guidelines, which produced model policies to protect against aggression and violence. The guidelines ask all NHS organisations to assess risk and introduce appropriate and thorough training programmes. The guidance further states that all NHS organisations should have staff counselling and support systems in place.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Is the minister prepared to lift his ambition for NHS staff safety above that encompassed in the consultation document for patient safety, in which the Executive says that

"solutions' should be initiated in NHSScotland at the same time as they are in England and Wales"?

Will he go further and agree with Professor Rhona Flin, who has said:

"There would appear to be a unique opportunity to establish an international Centre of Excellence on Patient Safety Research in Scotland"?

Mr McCabe: We already have high ambitions for the NHS and for the people who ably provide that service to members of the public. We have funded projects to the value of £327,000, all of which are aimed at reducing aggression and violence. We have established an occupational health and safety minimum data set and we will publish the first results from that in November. We are aware of the actions that have been taken down south. The Scottish Parliament was set up to address Scottish problems with Scottish solutions, which is exactly what we are doing.

National Health Service (Vacancies)

15. Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how many nurse and consultant vacancies there are in the NHS. (S2O-357)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): At 31 March 2003, the number of qualified nursing and midwifery staff vacancies totalled 1,516 whole-time equivalent posts. The latest data on consultant vacancies were collated on 30 September 2002, when there were 202 vacant consultant posts within NHS Scotland.

Shona Robison: Is the minister aware that the figures show that since 1999 nurse vacancies have gone up by 52 per cent and consultant vacancies have gone up by 50 per cent? In the case of nurse vacancies will he now consider implementing a Scottish recruitment premium to attract staff to come and work in Scotland, as is allowed under the "Agenda for Change" deal?

Malcolm Chisholm: The nursing figures that came out last week were extremely interesting. I accept that there was a marginal increase in the

overall number of vacancies, but of far more significance was that over a six-month period there was an increase of 928 in the number of qualified nurses and midwives working in NHS Scotland. As far as I know, that is an unprecedented increase over such a period. As the number of qualified nurses expands rapidly and, simultaneously, the number of posts expands rapidly to increase the capacity of the service, it is not surprising that there is a marginal increase in the overall number of vacancies, but not in the percentage of vacancies.

On the point about pay, it is time that the truth was told about the "Agenda for Change" offer that is being given to nurses, as it is widely misrepresented. What is on offer is 3.25 per cent this year, 3.25 per cent in April and then in October 2004 a further significant increase, which varies from nurse to nurse but is, for example, 6 per cent for nurses in their first year. That is an increase of more than 10 per cent for many nurses in the next 12 months or so. It is time that the nurses of Scotland and the people of Scotland were told the truth about that.

Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind): Is the minister aware that many doctors and nurses in the health service think that health boards are deliberately saving money by not advertising consultants' and nurses' posts that become vacant soon enough to enable them to be filled? As a result, many consultants end up having to do locum work rather than retiring after the long and hard years that they have spent working in the health service.

Malcolm Chisholm: If Jean Turner has evidence of that I would like her to draw it to my attention. My comments about nurses in my previous answer also apply to consultants. We have already seen a significant increase in the number of consultants and we are committed to accelerating further that increase as part of the partnership agreement. We have been putting the building blocks in place by creating extra specialist registrar posts, from which consultants are recruited. A rapid expansion of the consultant work force is taking place. As I said in relation to nurses, as that expansion takes place, the service expands simultaneously, and the overall number of vacancies may go up marginally, but the percentage of vacancies is declining.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Is the minister aware that, as a result of the European working time directive and the reduction in junior doctors' working hours, Argyll and Clyde NHS Board needs to recruit 25 consultants and a similar number of junior doctors? Does he accept that those issues must be understood in order to address recruitment and retention in the health service?

Malcolm Chisholm: Duncan McNeil makes an important point. The issue of working time regulations and, in particular, junior doctors' hours is important in understanding some of the issues and pressures in the health service. In a sense it is a good development for doctors and patients because doctors used to work hours that were far too long, which explains one of the difficulties that we have to cope with in making progress. That is why it is important to have extra consultants, extra nurses and extra junior doctors, but equally important is the redesign of services, about which we will say more in the forthcoming cancer debate.

Fish Farming (Area Management Agreements)

16. John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will undertake a survey of the success of area management agreements for marine fish farms in delivering their predicted environmental benefits. (S2O-343)

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): The Executive-chaired tripartite working group regularly reviews the area management agreement—AMA—process and progress on individual agreements is closely monitored by the national development officer and through the activities of local area management groups.

John Farquhar Munro: I am sure that the minister will agree that the idea behind the AMAs is excellent and that in areas where they are in operation they have proved successful in reducing chemical use and in controlling sea lice. However, because the agreements are voluntary, they are ignored all too often. Would the Scottish Executive address that problem by making AMAs statutory?

Allan Wilson: I suppose that the short answer to that question would be, "Yes", and the slightly longer answer would be, "Not quite at present." We support AMAs, of which seven are in place at the moment. We intend to double that number, almost, to 13 in 2006. Only then, if there is a failure in the voluntary process—a process that the member acknowledges has been successful—would we consider consulting on regulations for the proposed aquaculture bill.

First Minister's Question Time

15:10

Prime Minister (Meetings)

1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues he intends to raise. (S2F-157)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I plan to meet the Prime Minister again later this month. When I meet him, I will be pleased to note and welcome our agreement to provide payments to those who contracted hepatitis C from faulty blood products.

Mr Swinney: I welcome the announcement that was made during the summer and I ask the First Minister to look sympathetically on extending compensation to cover people who, sadly, lost loved ones before compensation could be paid.

Last September, the First Minister launched the "One Scotland. Many Cultures" campaign. At that time, he said:

"We must ... ensure that Scotland is a welcoming place for people of all cultures, nationalities, and backgrounds."

Why does that statement not extend to the children who are imprisoned at Dungavel?

The First Minister: The "One Scotland. Many Cultures" campaign, and all the related activities that backed it up, have been widely hailed in Scotland as a success, and rightly so. We want to ensure—not only for those who currently live in Scotland but for those who will visit Scotland and come to live and work here legally in future—that we have a country that is welcoming, that celebrates diversity and that recognises the massive contribution that diversity can make to the education and development of young people in particular.

This group of ministers and this devolved Government in Scotland have an excellent record in supporting the refugees and asylum seekers who live in our communities. The investments that we have made in recent years are exactly in tune with the aims and objectives of the "One Scotland. Many Cultures" campaign.

Mr Swinney: In that long answer, the First Minister did not condemn the imprisoning of children at Dungavel. Since Parliament last met, the churches, the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the Scottish Refugee Council have all condemned the practice of locking up children at Dungavel. HM inspectorate of prisons in England has condemned the practice of locking up children at Dungavel, as has HM Inspectorate of Education in England. Why will not the First Minister of

Scotland condemn the practice of imprisoning children at Dungavel?

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): We are beginning to stray into reserved areas of policy.

The First Minister: I have no intention of doing that, as the Presiding Officer will be pleased to hear. However, I will make one very simple point. If a United Kingdom Government minister went to Mr Stewart Stevenson's constituency, had a look at the current conditions at Peterhead prison and, despite the changes and improvements that we are trying to make there, announced that the UK Government would like the prison to be closed, we would—despite the fact that some people on the SNP benches might occasionally agree with that minister—be rightly angry.

UK Government ministers should treat this Parliament and this devolved Government with respect and this devolved Government should treat them with respect. They have a legal responsibility for the operation of the Dungavel centre and they have a legal responsibility for dealing with people who are due to leave this country. It is right and proper that they should make those decisions.

I know that Mr Swinney supports it, but I do not support the implementation of a separate Scottish immigration policy and I do not support the creation of border and passport controls at Scottish borders with the rest of the UK. The Scottish National Party may laugh at that comment, but it reflects the theme that that party took up yesterday. SNP members should be honest and say that it is not their objective to look after children at Dungavel, but to create a separate Scottish immigration policy.

Mr Swinney: I point out to the First Minister that Dungavel is not in the south of England; it is in our own country and he is the First Minister of that country.

The First Minister said that the matter is nothing to do with him. I remind him of an answer that Malcolm Chisholm gave when he was Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care, in which he stated:

"the Scottish Parliament has a responsibility for a wide range of issues to ensure that the children of asylum seekers and refugees are treated in exactly the same way as any other children."—[*Official Report*, 14 December 2000; Vol 9, c 1057.]

Unless the First Minister has a proposal to lock up the children of Scotland, I do not think that the children of asylum seekers are being treated the same as the rest of the children in our country. Thirty-six children have been detained at Dungavel for longer than six weeks in the past year. How many more children will have to be

locked up at Dungavel before the First Minister breaks his shameful silence on that disgraceful issue?

The First Minister: Not only has the Executive—the devolved Government in Scotland—provided more support to those in Scotland who have been granted refugee status than most other parts of the United Kingdom, but we have a proud record at the moment of turning round areas such as Sighthill in Glasgow, where there were serious community tensions. Others may have been there two years ago, but they soon departed when the matter went out of the headlines.

We have continued to deliver not only housing, but quality education, quality health services, child care and training for the adults concerned to ensure that not only refugees who have come to this country, but those who seek asylum—all those people, who live in Glasgow and throughout Scotland—have access to those services and have an opportunity to be welcomed in Scotland and to contribute to the community. The record of the devolved Government in Scotland in supporting and delivering services to asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland is one of which I am now, and will always remain, very proud.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues he intends to raise. (S2F-158)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Mr McLetchie will be delighted, I am sure, to hear that I met the Secretary of State for Scotland earlier this week in Edinburgh at the first meeting of the Scottish euro preparations committee, and discussed a number of issues of importance including the planning and preparation that are under way in Scotland for future adoption of the single European currency.

David McLetchie: I can conceive of no greater waste of time and money than the First Minister and the Secretary of State for Scotland sitting in a euro preparations committee to abolish the pound and give the people of Scotland a currency that they do not want. There will be a time for the euro later.

I will reflect on the appalling stories that we read this morning about the rape of a baby girl and the sentence that was handed down in the court. I am sure that everyone in Scotland welcomes the fact that the Lord Advocate is considering an appeal against the lenient sentence that was delivered in that case. Does the First Minister agree that the public's anger and incomprehension at that sentence will be compounded by the fact that, as a

result of the operation of automatic remission, the offender will be back on our streets two and a half years from now? Does the First Minister think that that is acceptable? Will he give a commitment to end automatic release and restore honesty to sentencing in our courts?

The First Minister: It would obviously be inappropriate for me to comment or imply comment on that individual case, particularly as the Lord Advocate has agreed to review the sentence with a view to deciding whether it is unduly lenient. That said, I am in no doubt whatever that people throughout Scotland want to see the sentence fit the crime—in particular in any case where the crime is evil and despicable—and that the sentence should mean more than it does at the moment, especially for offenders who have not been rehabilitated in our prisons. That means that we need to review not only the guidelines that should exist for sentencing in Scotland, but the way in which remission operates in our system.

That is why we have established a sentencing commission that will be led judicially, by Lord MacLean. The commission will be led by those who are primarily responsible for sentencing in this country, but it will include other interests. It will review not only remission and sentencing guidelines, but the application of bail.

As I have said before, in this country there is a crisis of confidence in the operation of our courts because of a relatively small number of cases that appear to be totally removed from public opinion and the administration of proper justice. I am determined to ensure that our courts apply the law consistently and that they deal properly with offenders. Our prisons should rehabilitate people, but our sentences should punish them and deter others from offending.

David McLetchie: All of us look forward to the recommendations of the sentencing commission, to which the First Minister referred and which will be chaired by Lord MacLean. Of course, those recommendations will not be with us for some time.

With regard to automatic early release, the First Minister confuses two issues. Although the responsibility for determining sentences rightly lies with our judges, the responsibility for ensuring that those sentences are served should lie with the Scottish Executive and the Government in Scotland. People in Scotland are sick and tired of criminals getting out of jail early and want something to be done about that now. Why must we wait for a sentencing commission to report before we take action on the scandal of early release? Is not it the case that the commission could sit for years before it considers that issue?

The First Minister: I accept the rhetoric at the beginning of Mr McLetchie's question, but the key point was at the end of it. I have no doubt that dealing with remission from sentences in our prisons will be a first priority of the sentencing commission. The commission will need to deal with that issue and to make recommendations to ministers. Ministers will then make decisions to adapt the policy accordingly.

The current policy does not provide an incentive for those who serve short sentences and receive automatic remission. However, to change that policy and to make it work in practice requires a degree of sense and consistency across the system, which can be provided by the recommendations of an objective sentencing commission. The commission's remit will be clear and when it produces its recommendations, we will implement them very quickly.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): When the First Minister next meets the Secretary of State for Scotland, will he take the opportunity to relay to him the anxiety of people in the north-east about the rumours relating to the future of the Highlanders regiment? Does he share my concern that targeting our local regiment yet again would be entirely wrong, especially given the impact of such a measure on recruitment and its knock-on economic effects on our local communities?

The First Minister: I was wondering when the member was going to reach the devolved issue. Clearly, we will want to consider any employment matters that have an impact on local areas in Scotland. There are currently many rumours about this and many other subjects. I am sure that in due course, when the facts are known, Mike Rumbles and the many other constituency MSPs who have genuine concerns about the matter will have an opportunity to raise them.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-150)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Next week the Cabinet will discuss further progress on the delivery of the partnership agreement.

Robin Harper: The First Minister and the Cabinet will no doubt be aware of the advances that Scotland's wave-power industry is making. However, this week it was revealed that one company may sell its first commercial machines in Portugal, rather than Scotland, because the market tariffs that the Portuguese Government offers for wave-power projects are worth more than two to three times those that are available

here under the more general renewables obligation (Scotland). Is the First Minister willing to examine that situation and to investigate how to make Scotland a more competitive market for products such as these, which are proving themselves and moving towards commercial application? It would be a scandal if Scotland were to miss out on reaping the environmental and employment rewards of this locally developed expertise.

The First Minister: I would be happy to take that issue up and to consider it further. I would also like to relay to the chamber my experience of a week ago in Aberdeen, where I launched the pilot study into the world's first—not just Scotland's first—offshore wind farm. The potential in the Beatrice field in the Moray firth to create enough renewable energy to provide for the needs of the city of Aberdeen is a significant development that will help not only to improve our environment and create jobs and investment in the north-east and north of Scotland, but to ensure that our Scottish economy can benefit from the application of that technology in the years to come. I want that to happen in relation to wave power in the same way as it should happen in relation to wind power.

Police Powers (Young People)

4. Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Executive's position is on the comments of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland that there would be limited benefit in increasing police powers to disperse young people. (S2F-162)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We firmly believe there are gaps in current laws that mean that the police cannot deal effectively with gangs of young people. I am convinced that experiences at local level will be reflected in the outcome of our consultation.

Rhona Brankin: I welcome the priority that is being accorded to combating antisocial behaviour. Does the First Minister expect curfews to be introduced as part of the antisocial behaviour measures?

The First Minister: Although the more general curfew that was implemented in the Hamilton area in recent years was resource intensive, the experience was positive. We need to find a solution to the problem that allows the police to move on groups of youths who are intimidating people and which also allows us to tackle the ringleaders of those groups rather than penalise all young people. In the action that we take against antisocial behaviour, youth crime and disorder, it is important to ensure that the vast majority of young people who are decent and law abiding and want to get on with their social lives in their communities have the opportunity to do so.

I believe that options such as electronic tagging, on which people are being consulted, would be more targeted and more likely to deal with the most serious offenders than a wider curfew, which would be resource intensive and might adversely impact on the social lives of a wider group of young people who might be extremely law abiding.

Scottish National Theatre (Funding)

5. Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive will announce a long-term funding commitment to help establish a national theatre. (S2F-165)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We want a vibrant theatre sector in Scotland. That is why we have focused on strengthening regional theatres in the past year. We are committed to supporting a national theatre and the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport will take that forward.

Mr Monteith: In the past, the Executive has budgeted for funding a national theatre company, only to renege subsequently on its promise. Will the First Minister accept that long-term funding requires long-term budgets and not end-of-year funding? Will he give a commitment to hold to long-term budgets?

The First Minister: The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport will outline our commitment to the national theatre when we have finalised our proposals and decisions. It is important that we have a national theatre in Scotland, but I also think that we were right, this time last year, to invest the extra resource in the sustainability of our regional theatres. It would have been entirely pointless to create a national theatre infrastructure in Scotland at the same time as regional theatres were on the verge of closure. Securing the future of our regional theatres was vital at this time last year, which is why we made the decision to use the resources to that end. However, our decision at that time allows us now to reflect on the future provision of a national theatre.

It is important that members of Parliament are consistent in their policies and in the way in which they put them across. It is easy to make a slogan out of the call for a national theatre, but it is strange to do so if one does not support the provision of Government support for the arts. As recently as 2001, Mr Monteith said that cultural excellence develops best in an open society, free from the dead hand of the state and that

“the Government can no more pick winners than it can put the Bay City Rollers back at the top of the charts.”—[*Official Report*, 2 September 1999; Vol 2, c 155.]

Mr Monteith might want to see the Bay City Rollers back at the top of the charts and he might want no Government funding for the arts; however, I want

Government funding for the arts and a national theatre in Scotland. We will make an announcement in due course.

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I must declare an interest in the matter.

Is the First Minister aware of the discrepancy between the shortfall in funding for the Scottish regional theatres compared with funding for regional theatres in England? Furthermore, in relation to planning for the national theatre, is he aware that what the creative artists of Scotland need is more investment in people? They do not need more consultancies or even more buildings; they need to receive directly more money to create.

The First Minister: The member's final point is a good one: we need to invest in the creativity of Scotland's theatres rather than in, as Mr Ballance put it, more buildings or consultancies. However, it is important that we record the significant investment in theatre provision that takes place in Scotland. I understand that public expenditure on theatre provision in Scotland is about 30 per cent higher than it is in England. Therefore, it is not surprising that any increase in England will appear to have a more radical effect than it appears to have in Scotland. Theatre provision is another area in which Scottish public spending is higher. We invest well in the provision of theatres throughout Scotland and we will continue to do so.

Cancer Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-292, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on investment and change in cancer services, to which there are two amendments. I invite those members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

15:33

The Minister for Health and Community Care

(Malcolm Chisholm): Scotland's cancer plan, "Cancer in Scotland: Action for Change", is two years old. I want to use today's debate to report on progress and, more important, to map out some of the further developments that are required.

From the outset, two key features of the strategy have been the involvement of front-line staff in decisions about investment priorities and ring fencing of the additional investment, which built up to £25 million a year, to avoid the kind of leakage that happened with the English cancer plan. I am pleased to announce that the additional investment will be ring fenced within board allocations for at least the next two years, so that the targeted investment can continue and the progress can be monitored.

I do not have time to list all the investments that have been planned or that have come on stream, but I refer members to the bi-annual reports on progress, the most recent of which was published on 11 August. There are many striking examples of progress. For example, the use of £561,000-worth of new video endoscopy equipment in more than 2,600 procedures in Highland has improved safety and quality and has enabled patients to be seen locally. The provision of £175,000-worth of additional equipment and clinical nurse specialists will allow an extra 400 patients to receive chemotherapy locally in Fife. The investment of £458,000 in an additional haematologist and nursing support in Argyll and Clyde means that a no-wait policy for investigation and treatment of haematological cancers has been achieved.

However, there is much more to do. The objectives are equity of access, more rapid diagnosis and treatment and making a real difference to the quality of care. Above all that, there has been a £33 million investment programme for radiotherapy equipment and, on 1 March, I announced a further £5 million to support the introduction of positron emission tomography.

Today, I will concentrate on the changes that must accompany the investment, particularly in relation to staffing, patient focus and the redesign of care through managed clinical networks.

"Cancer Scenarios: An aid to planning cancer services in Scotland in the next decade", which underpins the cancer plan, is an innovative piece of work that is recognised across the world, as I discovered when I spoke at an international cancer conference in Milan earlier this summer. The focus in "Cancer Scenarios" is on prevention and mortality rates in Scotland over the next few years, and it is now time to consider broadening its scope to include morbidity and the implications of living with cancer for patients and services. I have therefore asked my officials to work with the health service information and statistics division and others on an exploratory scoping exercise to establish the best way of acting on that. That should include the specific implications for the work force that are already being implemented more generally by our new integrated approach to work-force planning and development at local, regional and national levels.

Through the recent cancer investment, more than 300 additional staff are now in place, including 20 new consultants, 140 nurses and 30 radiographers. That includes 100 extra staff at the Beatson oncology centre, and I was pleased to hear yesterday from Professor Alan Rodger of recent successes in recruiting radiographers and his quiet optimism about recruiting oncologists. That will be bolstered by the fastest possible progress on plans for the new Beatson oncology centre.

As members know, work-force planning was seriously deficient in the past and there is a great deal of catching up to do in some areas. That is why, for example, 24 more training places have been created in radiology during the past two years.

A framework for cancer nursing is also being developed, in two parts. First, there is the strategic framework and secondly, there is a competency-based clinical framework that will ensure consistency of nursing practice throughout Scotland. Undoubtedly there is untapped potential in cancer nursing to improve patient outcomes, but there, as elsewhere, it is all about the patient and what we need to do to deliver the best care for patients.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Malcolm Chisholm: I will if I have time, but I think that I have only three minutes left.

Turning to patient focus and cancer care more generally, there is a dedicated patient involvement worker with the south-east Scotland regional cancer advisory group and additional Scottish Executive funding will see another such worker in the west of Scotland quite soon. Moreover, patient involvement will be a key component in the cancer

service improvement programme that is being run by the centre for change and innovation. In that area, as I said at the voluntary sector cancer coalition launch yesterday, I place particular importance on collaborating with the voluntary sector.

However, it is widely recognised that more work remains to be done in the systematic exploration of patient experience and that was a major feature of my speech in the debate on 18 June. As I said then:

“It is only by exploring the experiences of patients that we can develop services that are responsive to patients’ needs.”

I went on to say:

“we need a systematic and comprehensive understanding of patients’ experiences ... we have some further work to do within the patient focus and public involvement agenda in order to achieve that objective.”—
[*Official Report*, 18 June 2003; c805-806.]

A key resource for that will be the new cancer care research centre at the University of Stirling, which I am delighted to be opening on 6 October. Its director, Professor Nora Kearney, is an international leader in the field and members might wish to hear her speak about the centre at the cross-party group on cancer on 17 September.

Turning to redesign and managed clinical networks, recently I had the pleasure of meeting some of the members of the west of Scotland colorectal cancer network. They showed me audit evidence of their success in driving up standards of care and the major progress that they have made in complying with NHS Quality Improvement Scotland standards. They also described a redesign pilot in south Glasgow that resulted in a mean waiting time for diagnosis of 21 days in comparison with waits of several months before. One of the advantages of networks is that best practice can be shared, helped by the redesign facilitators whom we have recently appointed to work in the networks.

I reiterate our commitment to introduce a national colorectal screening programme. We acknowledge the challenge that that represents, and it will take some time to develop, but we are determined to build on the success of our major Scottish pilot in that area.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): Will the minister take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is in his final minute.

Malcolm Chisholm: The problem with short speeches is that interventions get squeezed.

My time is up, and I apologise for not dealing with the major health improvement issues that relate to cancer, but the wind-up speech might

touch on them and we hope to have a major debate on health improvement soon.

It remains only to say that we reject the amendments—the seductive Scottish National Party one because it has a hidden agenda of breaking up United Kingdom pay arrangements, and the brass-neck Conservative one because of the Conservatives’ record in government on all the issues that we have discussed today.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the progress made and the remaining challenges in implementing the cancer strategy; recognises that the £60 million investment is leading to many improvements to patient care; welcomes the development of managed clinical networks and the redesign of cancer services under way across the three regional cancer networks; supports an increased focus on patient experience and patient involvement, and looks forward to continuing change and innovation in order to reduce waiting times and improve the quality of care.

15:40

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): I do not think that I have ever lodged a seductive amendment before. It is unfortunate that this is such a short debate to try to address such a big subject. Cancer is Scotland’s biggest killer and our cancer record is the worst in Europe. Although the focus of the debate is on cancer services, we need to do more to prevent cancer in the first place, by taking further action to reduce tobacco and alcohol consumption, tackle poverty and deprivation, and encourage more Scots to improve their diet.

We have done a lot to reduce smoking levels, including the efforts of my predecessor towards banning tobacco advertising, but we need to do more. We must tackle childhood smoking, especially among young girls. It is still far too easy for children to purchase cigarettes, and we should consider using test purchasing to expose those who still sell cigarettes to children. I look forward to the forthcoming debate on smoking in public places, which I hope will take that issue forward.

As the minister laid out, cancer screening is an important preventive measure. The breast and cervical screening programmes have been very successful. I, too, look forward to the roll-out of the colorectal screening programme, which I hope will be equally successful. However, we must ensure that the services are in place to back up the demand for services that will follow the screening, so that there is no delay in treatment. We welcome the investment in cancer services and the redesigning of services to improve the life of the patient. As highlighted by the minister, the development of managed clinical networks is an important way forward for services.

The latest monitoring report on the cancer strategy reveals that the only real way to improve

cancer services is to invest in staff and equipment. I know that that is happening. Although progress has been made, there are still some key deficiencies and major challenges that the Executive must tackle. More has to be done to recruit staff and invest in equipment to ensure that cancer services change for the better. Technology is not always available, or there is not enough equipment or access to equipment to meet demand. There is a lack of out-of-hours services for cancer patients, particularly chemotherapy.

Staffing is the key problem in oncology generally, with low numbers of specialists, consultants and nurses in the field. Given that we know that survival rates improve when patients are treated by those who specialise in oncology, and in the particular cancer that the patient has, it is necessary that such shortages are addressed. While the news about the vacancies at the Beatson is good, there are still too many vacancies for consultant clinical and medical oncologists. Many posts have remained unfilled for more than six months. In order to help to tackle those staffing problems, I lodged the seductive amendment. We must consider the enhancement of pay and conditions for oncology consultants and specialist nurses in order to get those scarce professionals to come and work in Scotland.

Access to services is not consistent throughout Scotland, and the problem of postcode prescribing continues, with some people being denied access to cancer drugs depending on where they live. We must address that. Similarly, people from rural and remote areas must receive the services and support that they require. With that in mind, I support the call by the Scottish cancer coalition that, where there would otherwise be no access to treatment or palliative care services, patients and carers should be offered reimbursement of their travel costs. I hope that the minister will respond to that when he winds up.

We should remember that it is not only the health service that provides cancer services; crucially, the voluntary sector provides much-needed support and care, education and research. Like the minister, I was pleased to attend the launch of the Scottish cancer coalition and its manifesto and calls for action last night. Between them, the bodies involved provide a staggering £40 million each year towards care, education and cancer research. Without those resources, our services and treatments would be a lot poorer.

Cancer charities have been the key provider of resources for research for many years. I support their call for the Executive to provide more funding to institutions and trusts for specific cancer research projects. It is only through research that outcomes for patients with cancer will improve. We have an excellent reputation for research, with

more than 13 per cent of the UK's biomedical scientists being based in Scotland. I am lucky to have in my constituency the star of them, Professor Sir David Lane, of Cyclacel, which is based in Dundee. His excellent work is known throughout the world.

A concern that was raised by the Scottish cancer coalition, to which I hope that the minister will respond, concerns the European Union directive on clinical trials, which is to be implemented by 2004. What representations were made to Europe? What representations will be made to Westminster about the directive's implementation? I look forward to supporting the important developments that will take place, in the hope that the next generation will not have the reputation of having the worst cancer rates in Europe.

I move amendment S2M-292.2, to insert at end:

"but recognises that further action is required to tackle staffing shortages in the oncology field in Scotland, including consideration of enhanced terms and conditions."

15:45

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, agree that the subject is far too important to be crammed into an hour and a bit. It is too vital to be discussed in that short time.

I thank the minister for plugging the cross-party group on cancer, of which Ken Macintosh and I are co-conveners. He described an opportunity for the Parliament to listen to an important speaker at first hand.

The last three lines of my amendment refer to

"unacceptably long waiting times, staff shortages, postcode prescribing and the inequalities in accessing clinical assessment throughout Scotland."

Those are facts. We want the minister to tell us what will happen. I agree with him that it is unfortunate that he did not have time to say more and I look forward to hearing what he says later.

The minister's speech was encouraging, because it recognised that there is a lot to be done. We must establish the problems with the current state of the service and with access to it. Problems are created through health care knowledge about health and cancer not being transmitted through schools to young mothers and families in general.

In Europe, people's chances of recovery are higher because of earlier intervention. However, I accept that early screening programmes—lovely as they might be—will require increased treatment capacity, in parallel with resourcing for research. Sir David Lane and others say that the advancement in spending on research, which is separate from that of the UK because of the

funding systems, and the fact that we do not become involved in some of the UK-based cancer programmes, are holding Scotland back. I ask the minister to examine better implementation.

I am aware of the other people who attended the Scottish cancer coalition's launch last night and I congratulate the coalition on working together, which is the way forward. The voluntary sector is vital and picks up what the state often cannot do.

I confirm that the voluntary sector is concerned about health education. We should look to producing local education campaigns that involve general practitioners, health boards and—importantly—education authorities. People are not aware of their opportunities for care, but equal difficulties are involved in implementing early assessment procedures throughout Scotland, particularly in rural and remote areas. For example, access and successful care are easier to obtain in Grampian than in Ayrshire. In the Conservatives' amendment, I refer to those regional anomalies and I would like the minister to accept that they exist.

The Parliament needs to move forward collectively, using the best ideas—wherever they come from and regardless of political ideology. I hope that the Health Committee will become involved in the exercise, because we as parliamentarians have a role in going into the knowledge base. We should examine the drivers for improving care for cancer patients and for identifying and treating cancer early. That must be paralleled by a foundation of decent research and development and a guarantee of no regional divides to accessing care.

We must focus on what the professionals tell us is the best way forward. Those professionals are not only cancer experts; they are involved in counselling and other aspects of care. We need to ensure that GPs have the power to commission early access to assessment when cancer is suspected.

I was recently in Dundee with Nanette Milne, where we saw the colorectal cancer screening programme. I will be delighted if the minister rolls out that project across Scotland, because that would be a start. However, he must acknowledge not only that that programme will be available, but that the capacity exists to deal with immediate interventions and that there are follow-up procedures for those who are indicated to be at risk.

I welcome the debate but deplore the fact that it is so short.

I move amendment S2M-292.1, to leave out from "acknowledges" to end and insert:

"welcomes the improvement in survival rates for the majority of cancers, thanks to scientific advances, and

praises those in the health service who work to combat this disease, but notes with grave concern that the delivery of health care in Scotland has fallen short of the standards that people expect and deserve, with patients' chances of survival under threat due to unacceptably long waiting times, staff shortages, postcode prescribing and the inequalities in accessing clinical assessment throughout Scotland."

15:49

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): It is clear that tackling cancer is one of the top priorities for the Scottish Executive and for our national health service. That is the reason for the debate, although it is too short.

The Executive is committed to providing better and faster diagnosis, treatment and care in this field and it aims to promote better health in Scotland's population to tackle the scourge of cancer. I was pleased to hear from the minister that we will have a proper debate on health improvement at a later date.

The most recent statistics show that cancer survival rates are improving dramatically. Cancer touches almost everyone at some time in their life. I am sure that practically everyone here knows someone who has had or is suffering from cancer. Each year, in Scotland, 26,000 people are diagnosed with cancer and 15,000 people die from it.

The good news is that more people are surviving for longer with cancer. According to recent figures the five-year survival rates for nine out of 10 of the most common male and female cancers diagnosed between 1995 and 1999 have increased. In men, the biggest increase was for prostate cancer as the survival rate increased from 45 to 70 per cent—a dramatic improvement by any standards. For women, there have been large increases in survival rates for cancer of the rectum from 33 to 53 per cent and for breast cancer from 64 to nearly 80 per cent.

The motion before us highlights the fact that the Executive is investing additional funds, leading to those improvements in patient care. It welcomes the development of managed clinical networks and the redesign of cancer services that is under way. It also looks forward to continuing change and innovation in order to reduce waiting times, which of course are far too long, and improve patient care.

I was at the launch of the cancer coalition last night, along with many colleagues. I heard calls for even more to be done to tackle cancer in Scotland. I also heard commendations for the Executive for the work that it has done so far and what it is planning to do in the future. That is why I must comment on the rather unfortunate negative contribution that the Conservative amendment

makes. Unlike the SNP's amendment, it can hardly be called seductive. The Tories are so used to negative politics that even when they welcome the improvements in survival rates for the majority of cancers, as they do in their amendment, they say that they are "thanks to scientific advances." They have nothing at all to do with anybody else's efforts, such as the efforts of the Executive, the extra work or money that is going in or the voluntary sector's cancer campaigns. That is negative politics at its worst and it is typical of the approach that the Conservatives in this Parliament take on almost every subject.

Mr Davidson: I realise that time is short, but I want to reply. In the amendment, I talked about those in the health service and got on to talking about those outside it. We are talking here about what the Executive does, not what other people are doing.

Mike Rumbles: That is not what Mr Davidson says in his amendment. I do not have the time to list all the examples of negativity in it, but there are at least a dozen. I have no hesitation in indicating that the Liberal Democrats reject the Tory amendment completely.

I turn to the SNP's so-called seductive amendment. The Liberal Democrats have no difficulty acknowledging that

"further action is required to tackle staffing shortages in the oncology field in Scotland".

I am certain that that is true. However, although locally enhanced terms and conditions will be necessary to improve the service, our agreeing to the SNP amendment might send the wrong message that the Executive and Parliament see that applying right across the board.

The Liberal Democrats hope that the Parliament will support the motion before us. I recommend that members reject both the Tory and SNP amendments for the reasons that I have outlined.

15:53

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): We all agree that cancer services are extremely important. Scotland's appalling health record is nowhere more evident than in our high rates of cancer. However, devolution affords the opportunity to make a co-ordinated effort to tackle cancer in Scotland and I believe that we must begin, and are beginning, to grab that opportunity with both hands.

It is interesting to note the comments of Susan Munroe of Marie Curie Cancer Care, who said recently:

"My feeling is that the government in Scotland is more involved in cancer care and more aware of what is going on at grassroots level than in England. My sense is that the

money is being spent in the right ways. The people who are doing the work and know what the problems are, are making the decisions."

By increasing investment, improving access to diagnosis and improving treatment and care, we can make a real difference. I welcome the minister's comments about investment at the Beatson. It is, unfortunately, an inevitable feature of an aging population that cancer care will continue to command a significant percentage of NHS spending.

Shona Robison's amendment highlights the need to recruit more staff, so I am sure that she will welcome the 300 new members of staff who have been recruited. Yes, there is still a shortage of specialists, and the minister alluded to that, but the £60 million investment in cancer services, coupled with the reform of cancer care—because it is all about service delivery—is making a positive difference.

But what good are statistics to those who need help at grass-roots level? Promises are only worth while if they deliver on the ground. I will give members an example of where I think that is happening. At Hairmyres hospital in East Kilbride, where many of my constituents attend, three new one-stop clinics have been set up to deal with breast and colorectal cancers and medical oncology. If one compares the new system with what was available previously, the contrast is stark. Prior to spring last year, a general practitioner referral for suspected breast cancer would necessitate a wait for an appointment to see a consultant surgeon; a wait for another appointment for a mammogram or an ultrasound; a wait for a third appointment for a biopsy, if necessary; and a wait for another appointment to receive the results of those tests.

Last spring, Hairmyres established a one-stop facility, where the scenario is that a clinic is held once a week on a Monday. GP referrals that are marked "urgent" are seen at the next clinic, which often is just a few days away. Typically, 40 patients are seen per week. They are examined by a consultant surgeon and seen by a specialist breast care nurse. They can have a mammogram and/or an ultrasound on the day. Fine needle aspiration can be performed, if necessary, following the mammogram and, if necessary, a biopsy can be performed on the day.

Ninety per cent of patients receive some or all of the above, and receive the results on the same day they are seen, which often is just a few days from the GP referral. The 10 per cent of patients who need the biopsy return on the Thursday or Friday of the same week to receive the results. That demonstrates extremely well how we have improved cancer care. Around 1,500 women benefited from that facility in the past year, which

is many more than would have been seen at the same time under the old system.

It is all about service delivery. That example disproves the assertion in David Davidson's amendment that patients are

"under threat due to unacceptably long waiting times".

Hairmyres provides an example where waiting times are all but being abolished in cancer care. I know that that one good example is being replicated elsewhere, and that it will continue to be improved on in other centres.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss cancer services. The debate is short, but we are on the right road. I support the minister's motion.

15:57

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I welcome the fact that the Parliament is debating cancer, as many of us remember times when the word was whispered behind the hand, and heads were shaken sadly, because it was seen as an automatic death sentence. We have progressed so far. We must pay tribute to all the people who have worked in health care and cancer services, because they have changed attitudes. The fact that we can all now talk openly about cancer is progress. The fear when somebody was diagnosed with cancer, to which I referred, has changed, but the terror is still there. There is nothing more frightening than to be told by one's consultant or breast cancer nurse, "Yes, you have been diagnosed with cancer." I am sure that the same applies for all forms of cancer—the terror remains.

One aspect that I want to stress in this short contribution to a short debate is the fact that although early diagnosis is very important, the time scale for progress from diagnosis to treatment and aftercare is vital to people. I say from personal experience that the fortnight of waiting to know what was going to happen and whether I would need further surgery was probably the worst fortnight I have ever experienced. The same will be true for people here who have had similar experiences or who have gone through similar experiences with their families. It is a case of the early bird getting the worm. I want the period from diagnosis to aftercare to be as speedy as possible, to remove the horrendous psychological burden that people face when they are waiting to find out what is going to happen.

That leads me on to support services, which are vital. Like the minister and others, I attended the Scottish cancer coalition meeting last night. In hospital, it is not only the professionals who count, although we rely on them for their expertise and knowledge. I was often as cheered by the cleaner

who came in from Fife and told me about the exigencies of trying to get from Fife to the Western general hospital to do her job. She also told me a great deal about her family. I was also cheered by people from the Women's Royal Voluntary Service, who never thought anything was too much trouble. When we talk about a seamless service, let us remember the people who work in a variety of ways in the oncology service and who do so much for patients at a time when the simplest gesture means so much.

I refer to the Maggie's centres, on which no one has touched. They are absolutely terrific. They are so friendly and open that it is like walking into a bar bistro. One has a cup of coffee and a blether with people who have gone through similar experiences. One can ask advice on a variety of matters and sometimes ask the questions that one does not ask the consultant because one thinks he is too busy or the question sounds really stupid. The people at the centres are wonderful. We already have two Maggie's centres in Scotland—in Edinburgh and Glasgow—and we hope that the Inverness one at Raigmore will be complete by May. Funding is important for all aspects of the voluntary sector. I hope that the minister will talk about the possibility of matching funding for those services at the very least.

I prefer to talk about palliative care rather than hospices. There is a struggle to ensure that we have palliative care centres. Eight years ago in Moray, I met a group of determined ladies—the only people I have ever interviewed in my dressing gown, apart from my husband. It took them eight years to have the Oaks day-care centre built in Elgin.

I find this a difficult speech to make because of personal experience. I say to my colleagues in all parties that although we may have our political differences, we do not have a magic wand to destroy the distress of cancer. Sadly, cancer will continue despite all that we might try to achieve through preventive measures. We must have the political and personal will as a Parliament and as individuals to build on the strategy that already exists.

When members cast their votes, I want them to remember the phrase from the National Lottery, "It could be you." None of us ever knows when cancer will strike us, our families or our nearest and dearest.

16:03

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): One privilege of being an MSP is the opportunity we are offered to share in people's lives. I am sure that colleagues would agree that, occasionally, at some surgeries, it is a privilege that we would like to decline, but it is a privilege nevertheless.

As MSPs, we are asked to help individuals and families who are often at their most vulnerable and in the most moving and touching of circumstances. In my experience, rarely is anything more moving or touching than the contrast between the dignity of those diagnosed with cancer and the indignity of the disease. Unfortunately, the indignity is often compounded by the inadequacy of the services that are on offer to help.

That is what provoked my interest in the Scottish Parliament in cancer and I believe that it is a motivation that is shared by the minister and many other colleagues in the chamber. Today's debate gives us an opportunity to assess what progress we have made. As much as I was delighted by the improvements and initiatives that the minister announced, I am sure that he will understand that he is likely to hear not congratulations but appeals for more of the same.

One of the messages that I have heard repeatedly during the past year is about the success of ring-fenced funding. I greatly welcome the minister's announcement in his opening remarks. That compares with the situation south of the border, to which he referred, where, with no links made between additional funding and outputs or improvements in cancer services, the extra millions in the NHS appear to have disappeared. Here, especially in the west of Scotland—an area with which I am familiar—we can see the difference that the money is making through the employment of more radiologists and cancer nurse specialists and the buying of new machinery and equipment for endoscopy and imaging services. More than that, we can see the difference that the money is making to people's lives.

I am pleased that the minister highlighted the pilot project in my constituency that was set up to tackle unacceptable delays in dealing with colorectal cancer and which has had tremendous results. The initiative was set up by a GP, Dr George Barlow, in conjunction with a consultant radiologist, Paul Duffy, and a surgeon, Graham Sunderland. It has dramatically reduced the mean waiting time between the initial appointment with a GP and diagnosis by a cancer specialist from up to nine months to 21 days. That ensures not only an improvement in quality of life, but a reduction in the horrible waiting time to which Margaret Ewing referred when someone is waiting to hear whether something terrible is wrong. In cancer cases, that can mean the difference between life and death.

The same principles and practices that have made such a difference in the diagnosis of colorectal cancer in south Glasgow can be applied in other areas, such as lung cancer. Shared diagnosis within a managed clinical network, coupled with targeted but not necessarily excessive levels of investment, can make a radical

difference to people's lives. In passing, I draw the minister's attention to Cancer Research UK's highlighting of the lack of investment in dealing specifically with lung cancer in this country.

As always, there is not enough time to cover all the issues. I did not catch the minister's remarks on the PET scanner, but I would push the case for a joint computerised tomography/PET scanner for the west of Scotland. I welcome the minister's remarks on work-force planning and emphasise the difference that it makes, especially at technician level. I would like to hear any comments that he has to make on improving the recruitment and training of laboratory assistants and other technicians.

Today's debate has been about improving cancer services—and rightly so, given the situation that we inherited. However, I know that the minister is also aware of the need to invest in research and prevention. I hope that he will not mind if I draw his attention to a proposed member's bill on the subject of licensing sunbeds. The increase in the incidence of skin cancer in this country over recent years is one of the most alarming but preventable trends in public health. The bill emerged from the work of the cross-party group on cancer and enjoys substantial support, including that of the MSP with the best tan in the Parliament: my colleague, Janis Hughes. Much as I believe that the proposed sunbed licensing bill has every chance of success, I urge the minister to consider whether such a measure would be best proposed by the Executive.

I look forward to hearing the minister's response and I urge members to support the motion.

16:07

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): The debate is far too short, as an awful lot more needs to be said. However, I absolve the minister from blame, as his time was restricted.

The entire argument seems to be encapsulated by the wider argument in the national health service in general. Over the past few years, 18 per cent more has been spent on the health service in Scotland than in England, yet we still have a much bigger problem with cancer. Overall cancer levels in Scotland are almost a fifth higher than levels in England, so the issue is clearly an evocative one for Scotland. Let us consider the five-year survival rate. In Scotland, it is 33.7 per cent; in England it is 37 per cent—significantly higher. Let us compare that with the rate in the countries of our continental neighbours. In Sweden, it is 52 per cent; in France it is 45 per cent; and in Germany it is 44 per cent. I am the first to acknowledge that much more money has been invested in the national health service over the past few years.

Nevertheless, although a lot has been done, we must question whether the health service is performing effectively, especially in respect of cancer services. If the problem exists to such a degree, an awful lot more requires to be done.

One of the principal tasks is to ensure that there is early diagnosis of the disease. Any clinical opinion will agree that the sooner the disease is diagnosed, the more can be done. In that respect, we are falling down badly. The appointment process is still far too slow to ensure that people who have contracted cancer can get a diagnosis immediately and receive therapy as a matter of extreme urgency. We must also consider the situation throughout Scotland, as there are inconsistencies between the different regions. For example, the waiting times for lung cancer therapy in Grampian are less than half of those in Tayside, greater Glasgow or Fife. I have no wish whatever to impinge on the services that are available in north-east Scotland, but we must examine the situation in Glasgow, where cancer is a particular problem, to consider how it can be improved.

Mike Rumbles: The statistical information that I have from the information and statistics division is different from Mr Aitken's. The five-year survival rate has risen from 25 to 38 per cent for men and from 37 to 48 per cent for women. Those are dramatic increases in survival rates, are they not?

Bill Aitken: That is indeed the case, but if we examine the reasons for those increases in survival rates—which we all welcome—we will find that they are based on advances in science rather than on the success of treatment. That is the crux of the matter.

I will be slightly parochial now and talk about the Beatson oncology centre in Glasgow, which has been the subject of great concern over recent years. Let me be the first to acknowledge that something like £3.2 million has been invested in a programme of modernisation. However, the Beatson's problems are far from being behind it. There are still far too many unfilled vacancies. In addition, bearing in mind the importance of the centre not only to Glasgow but to west central Scotland in general, it is essential that the Beatson offers a quick, effective and efficient service. Sadly, that has not been the case up to now. We must ensure that the outstanding vacancies, of which there are a considerable number in the radiology field, are filled. That would ensure that the Beatson and many people in the west of Scotland are filled with a great deal more hope than they are now.

16:11

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): The investment in the development of cancer services throughout Scotland is welcome. During the

debate there has been much agreement around the chamber about that. My party and I also particularly welcome the shift in emphasis to a more patient-centred approach.

The exact causes of cancer are complex and are not fully understood. Not all cancers are preventable. However, we know that much can be done to reduce the risks of people contracting cancer. For example, action to tackle smoking and promote a healthy lifestyle, including having a good diet and taking sufficient exercise, is crucial in reducing the risks. I hope that the minister will continue to assure members that the Executive, while focusing on treatment, will not lose sight of preventive medicine and actions.

Meanwhile, what is happening on the ground in cancer services? I would like to draw to the minister's attention one or two issues that have been brought to my notice. Overall, there is concern about not knowing whether health trusts and boards have been spending less of their regular budgets on cancer services because of the new funding arrangements. Is the money for cancer services truly additional, or does it simply allow funds to be shifted to other areas?

Networks such as the south-east Scotland cancer network—SCAN—have been part of the plan for distributing the cancer budget according to clinical need, with a focus on making things smoother for patients. In June, a forum held by SCAN of more than 100 health professional and patient groups brought to the surface some crucial issues. Clearly, some progress is being made on the delivery of services, but there are particular concerns about the role of the managed clinical networks. Currently, their role is to develop strategy, improve quality and monitor standards, but they do not have responsibility for operational matters. That division affects the delivery of services and must be addressed to achieve a more focused approach and less duplication of effort. A more integrated approach could be developed, but there are barriers to a reallocation of responsibilities, partly because of the current funding arrangements. The Executive should look into that.

Other issues have been brought to my attention by the Royal College of Nursing. There is a view that continuing education and professional development is being hindered because many cancer care nurses find it difficult to get appropriate cover for study leave and because the remote, rural geography of Scotland makes access to education difficult for many nurses. The Royal College of Nursing asks for better and more accessible education for specialist cancer nurses, via distance learning and e-learning. The RCN also asks for the provision of generic cancer training for all student nurses and for non-

specialised nurses who have already qualified, an evaluation of nursing leadership in cancer services and the establishment of a framework for children's cancer nursing.

I pay tribute to the work done by the voluntary sector. I am glad to see the development of the cancer coalition, and I hope that it continues to take full advantage of all the savings that can be made by working together and focusing funds more efficiently on the purposes for which they have been gathered.

For five years, I shared an office with a wonderful teacher called Rosie Watson while she was slowly dying of cancer. The whole school knew and we addressed the issue. In tune with what Margaret Ewing was saying, the situation was perfectly open, everybody knew about it and all the staff were engaged. I pay tribute to St Columba's Hospice in Edinburgh and all the other support services for the work that they did to support her. I welcome any progress that will come from the contribution that the Executive is making to cancer services.

16:16

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I have always taken a special interest in the Beatson oncology centre, as it started life in my constituency, not in the Western infirmary, as members might think, but in Hill Street in Garnethill, near Glasgow city centre. Sir George Beatson, who was the appointed consultant at the new cancer centre—in 1893, believe it or not—applied his knowledge to the search for better diagnosis and treatment and led the way in improving the care of those who were suffering from incurable conditions.

Now the Beatson is the second-largest cancer centre in the UK and it is developing at a huge rate. I believe that, in future, it will be one of the leading centres in Europe—far from the slum that it was once accused of being. I put on record the fact that I welcome the appointment of Professor Alan Rodger, who will now be responsible for continuing to recruit consultant oncologists and radiographers.

We have almost reached our targets, although I do not deny Bill Aitken's point that there is a lot more work to do. I ask the minister to consider the question that will be before Greater Glasgow NHS Board in the weeks to come—whether the time is right for the Beatson to revert back to North Glasgow University Hospitals NHS Trust and what impact that might have on the board. I am not totally convinced that it should revert back.

There can be no doubt about the Government's commitment, which is demonstrated by the investment that it has put into cancer care

services. However, the main difficulties for any Administration are generally the practical ones. Recruiting the right kind of staff and getting the management structures right to make things happen are the difficult parts of government. An area such as oncology does not easily attract consultant specialists. Although outcomes are now dramatically better, they are still lower than in other disciplines, so it is not always possible to recruit staff as and when they are wanted.

The importance of redesigning the service and managed clinical networks might sound like jargon to me and many others, but those are the key to the way forward. Managed clinical networks are a bit of a mystery to a lot of people, but it is essentially a fancy term for recognising that doctors and clinicians should share information, talk to one another about their experiences and share their outcomes. A lay person might think that doctors talk to one another anyway, and of course they do, but it must be done within a framework. If it is not done within a framework, we do not get the best information, which can act as a basis for changing and improving outcomes.

As Robin Harper said, nurses are fundamental to the redesign of the service, and the RCN made that point to us all in advance of today's debate. The waiting times that Ken Macintosh talked about have been achieved in other disciplines, with dramatic reductions from nine months to 21 days. That is because of the involvement of nurses, and we must give due consideration to how we allow the nursing profession to develop its expertise in that area. A lot is happening around the country. Margaret Ewing talked about the Maggie's centre in Glasgow, and far-reaching and important research work is being carried out at the University of Glasgow and at the Beatson research institute, which is separate from the Beatson oncology centre.

I would like to address the references in the SNP amendment to increasing pay and conditions. I am not particularly hung up about that, but we must ask whether it is the key to attracting consultants. In the west of Scotland and throughout Scotland, the key to attracting the best consultants is having the leading edge in research and development and a place in which people believe results are being achieved. If we have such things—and we are on the road to having them—the best staff from around the world will be attracted. Let us see whether that is the key ingredient.

16:20

Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP): Like other members, I welcome this debate, although I am disappointed that it will be so short. Cancer is the leading cause of premature death in

adult Scots. One in three Scots will probably contract cancer at some point during their life. It therefore affects the lives of many of our fellow Scots.

I am sure that all members agree that we need to invest in research and to encourage healthier lifestyles. Speedy diagnosis is obviously needed. There must be no delay—not some delay; no delay—in treating people who have cancer. It is essential that we do all that we can, but if we do not tackle the root causes of cancer, we will fail people. Therefore, we must tackle the major cause of cancer in Scotland, which is smoking. In most years in Scotland, 24,000 to 25,000 people are diagnosed with cancer. Of those people, approximately 8,000 will die as a result of smoking. The best investment in cancer services would be to ban smoking. There is no doubt that smoking causes cancer. It is an established fact that between 80 per cent and 90 per cent of all lung cancer cases are caused by smoking. Moreover, almost a quarter of all cancer deaths are from lung cancer.

Lung cancer is not the only cancer that is caused by smoking. Other cancers that are caused by smoking include cancer of the larynx, pharynx, oesophagus, bladder, kidney, pancreas, nasal cavities, nasal sinuses, stomach and liver. The truth is that smoking causes around a third of all cancer deaths.

Smokers are not the only people to fall victim to cancer from smoke—non-smokers suffer, too. Tobacco smoke contains 4,000 chemicals, including tar, benzene, formaldehyde and hydrogen cyanide. It contains 60 known or suspected carcinogens and has been classified as a class A carcinogen in the United States alongside substances such as asbestos and arsenic. We legislate to protect workers from such substances, so why do we not legislate to protect them from tobacco smoke?

In 1998, the United Kingdom Government's independent Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health published a report, which concluded:

"Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke is a cause of lung cancer and, in those with long term exposure, the increased risk is in the order of 20-30%."

Countries such as Ireland, Norway, New Zealand, Canada and the United States have recognised the dangers of passive smoking, understood the severity of the problem and dealt with it by banning smoking in certain circumstances. Paradoxically, Scotland, which has some of the highest rates of smoking-related deaths and illness in the world, still has no legislation in place that provides safe, smoke-free environments for its citizens. California introduced anti-smoking legislation in 1988. Between 1988 and 1996, the incidence of cancer there declined by 7 per cent.

Over the same period, cancer mortality rates declined by 13 per cent and smoking rates declined. The evidence from places where smoking has been banned is clear: banning smoking saves lives.

Like many members who are in the chamber today, last night I attended the launch of the Scottish cancer coalition. The coalition's manifesto contains a call for action. It states:

"We call on the Scottish Executive to take urgent action to ban smoking in all work places and all public places."

Does the Executive support the 14 groups that make up the Scottish cancer coalition and have made that call, or will it oppose legislation to regulate smoking?

Members will be aware that I have proposed a bill that seeks to regulate smoking. In response to that proposal, the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh has said:

"We would strongly support such legislation. Scotland suffers more than most developed countries from the effects of both primary and passive smoking. We would go so far as to suggest that this piece of legislation could be the single most effective contribution which the Scottish Parliament could make to the continued health of the Scottish people."

If the Government really wants to reduce cancer rates in Scotland, it should begin by supporting my proposal to ban smoking in enclosed premises where food is supplied and consumed.

16:25

Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP): I applaud the wonderful work that the staff—nurses, doctors and others—do in Scotland's cancer care facilities. I assure them that their work is hugely appreciated by patients and their families throughout Scotland. I am sure that all members agree on that.

I welcome the progress on cancer care and treatment that the Minister for Health and Community Care mentioned in his opening speech, but it is far too early for the Scottish Executive to be resting on its achievements. As I am sure all members will agree, there is still a long way to go. The fact that Scotland has some of the highest cancer rates in Europe and some of the lowest survival rates focuses our attention in the chamber today.

The Scottish Executive has acknowledged that there is a link between deprivation and the incidence of cancer. Some of Scotland's most deprived areas are those associated with the highest diagnosed rates of cancer and the lowest rates of survival.

Like some of my colleagues, I will focus my attention on smoking, drinking and diet. One point strikes me in relation to smoking and alcohol in

particular. Smoking is the largest preventable cause of cancer in this country. Although I welcome the £1 million that the Executive's document states will be targeted on smoking cessation services, particularly in poor areas, I am sure that we can all see that that sum is dwarfed by the billions of pounds spent by, for example, British American Tobacco on advertising and encouraging young women in particular to start up the habit. Similarly, a comparison between the resources that the Executive dedicates to alcohol education to provide information on sensible drinking and the link between alcohol abuse and cancer and the amount of money that the drinks companies spend on their advertising budgets shows that the playing field is far from even.

As the document makes clear, our notoriously poor diet is a major contributor towards Scotland's poor health record. A poor diet is not only about lifestyle and personal choices; it is about whether people can afford healthy food, whether they are encouraged to make healthier choices and whether they are fully aware of the dietary impact of the foods that they eat. Our diet reflects the industrialisation and urbanisation of Scotland. I draw the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care's attention to a letter that Professor Sam Epstein, of the American Cancer Society, wrote to Bill Clinton. He stated:

"Over the past 20 years, spending has increased nearly tenfold, yet cancer incidence rates have climbed by more than 16 per cent. This is due to exposure to industrial carcinogens, which takes place from conception to death."

He was referring to the situation in America. More research must be done on those issues.

I draw Parliament's attention to the link between anti-poverty measures and the need to address the incidence of cancer. I hope that the deputy minister will note that most health professionals agree that the introduction of healthy, nutritious meals for youngsters would work wonders in that regard.

Recent evidence from the British Oncology Pharmacy Association suggests that many cancer patients cannot afford to take necessary medicines, such as antiemetics, because of the cost of prescriptions. Their treatment is therefore compromised. The Royal College of Nursing has also raised that issue.

Malcolm Chisholm mentioned the 300 new nurses and consultants. That measure is to be welcomed, but it does not solve the problem of the shortage of staff in Scotland's cancer care facilities.

16:29

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): As a committed member of the cross-party group in the

Scottish Parliament on cancer, I apologise to my colleagues for being unable to attend the campaign launch last night. From all that I have heard, it seems that the event was very successful. However, I had a public meeting in my constituency that was attended by 100 people. When 100 people turn up to raise an issue, it is a very unwise MSP who attends another event in Edinburgh.

I have read the amendments to the minister's motion and it is worth considering the policies of the Opposition parties. The SNP has no specific policy document. Instead, it has many statements that are littered with uncosted proposals. The Tories, too—I can see only one of them in the chamber at the moment—have no policy document. They offer only the use of private health care.

Shona Robison: I find the member's tone slightly out of sync with the rest of the debate. I draw her attention to some of my remarks about our proposals to tackle smoking. I urged the Executive to consider those proposals, so I do not know quite where she is coming from.

Helen Eadie: I do not mean to cause any offence; I am simply stating some facts. I apologise to colleagues who feel that I am out of sync with them, but I think that the Tories and the SNP really need to consider the issue. Why do they not have any policy documents and why are there no costed proposals? Why do the Tories elect to concentrate on breaking up the national health service and replacing it by a private health service with a social insurance scheme that would be yet another tax? If that is out of sync, it is out of sync. However, those are the facts.

Bill Aitken: Will the member give way?

Helen Eadie: I have only four minutes, but I will come back to the member.

Labour works to reform the NHS and the Tories have worked to break it up. Robin Harper is right: we have to find ways in which to assess cancer risks. We have to ask why hundreds of millions of euros are spent on subsidising the tobacco industry. Is that not perverse when tobacco causes so many deaths?

In the short time left, I will give members a few quick examples, from Fife, of things that I discovered when I was preparing for this debate. Prostate cancer services are changing in Fife. As part of the service redesign, a urology cancer specialist nurse will now treat, in the community, patients who are receiving hormone therapy. An experienced urology nurse took up the post on 18 August and is currently actively involved with the redesign team to improve services. Much is going on in prostate cancer services. During the redesign process, it was agreed by patients and

staff alike that the redesign—including, for example, one-stop clinics—would make a significant difference.

I make one appeal to the minister—to consider the psychological effects of the rapid changes in the diagnosis of cancer. Some specialists in Fife have asked that that be further considered.

The cancer register project is an important tool in helping to improve the quality of care. In a research project, a nurse has been appointed to work part time with patients and their carers. We must also consider nursing in secondary care. To chime with some earlier comments, I would say that there is a need for appropriate cancer education and training for nurses. Nursing patients with cancer is undoubtedly a dynamic speciality.

There is a feeling among Fife people that good and significant progress is being made and I hope that I have given members a few highlights of what is happening. I am sorry that there was not more time for that, but I felt that it was important to make the points that I made at the beginning.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to wind-up speeches.

16:33

Mike Rumbles: This has been a wide-ranging debate and I would like to comment on half a dozen contributions that I thought were quite effective. Janis Hughes said that the Government in Scotland was now more involved in cancer care. That is absolutely right. Using the example of Hairmyres in East Kilbride, she highlighted practical differences such as the establishment of one-stop services. She demonstrated extremely well how we in Scotland are improving cancer care and service delivery.

As I said earlier, everyone knows someone who has had, or who is suffering from, cancer. Margaret Ewing made an effective contribution from personal experience. I thank her for that. Kenneth Macintosh referred to his member's bill. I think that he asked the Executive to adopt it. It was a good try.

On a less positive note, Bill Aitken said that survival rates were far too low. I was quite surprised. I wanted him to tell me where his statistics came from, because they do not quite chime with those that I have. I refer to the statistics that the Scottish Executive information and statistics division published in August, which show that—I reiterate this—survival rates for nine out of 10 of the most common male and female cancers diagnosed between 1995 and 1999 have improved dramatically. The percentage of people who are still alive five years after the diagnosis has risen from 25 per cent to 38 per cent in men and from

37 per cent to 47 per cent in women. Bill Aitken repeated the negative Tory line that David Davidson pursued earlier that that was simply down to scientific advances. That was bizarre.

Robin Harper: Does Mike Rumbles agree that it is unhelpful to quote a raw statistic when there are many different kinds of cancer and there is a distinct possibility that Scotland has a higher rate of non-survivable cancers than elsewhere in Europe?

Mike Rumbles: One can pick and choose statistics, but I was careful to point out that I was talking about survival rates for nine out of 10 of the most common male and female cancers. There are others, of course, and that is why I would be interested to find out where Bill Aitken's statistics came from.

Bill Aitken: Will Mike Rumbles give way?

Mike Rumbles: No, I do not have time, unfortunately.

Bill Aitken: How convenient.

Mike Rumbles: Perhaps the Tories could enlighten us in their closing speech. That would be most helpful.

Pauline McNeill talked about the effectiveness of managed clinical networks. She felt that the key to attracting the best consultants is not pay, but ensuring that we are at the leading edge of research and effective treatment. That is what we need to focus on. That is her perspective of how we need to proceed.

Stewart Maxwell felt that the most effective way of proceeding is to follow the route that he has chosen—his member's bill to tackle smoking. He says that we should ban smoking because smoking causes cancer and cancer kills. As far as he is concerned, that is the most effective way of tackling the scourge of cancer. I am looking forward to examining his interesting bill in detail if and when it comes to the Health Committee, which I am sure it will. Perhaps I should not say anything more about it until we come to examine it.

We have heard from the debate that different people have different emphases on how we can best approach tackling the scourge of cancer. The Scottish Executive is on the right line. There is much to do on that right line and so we need to support the Executive motion and reject the two amendments.

16:38

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): We have come a long way since my first house job in the thoracic unit in Aberdeen royal infirmary when, as Margaret Ewing said, cancer

was mentioned in hushed tones and it was down to the most junior member of staff—which at that time was me—to break the bad news to patients. We did that thoroughly incompetently, too.

A great deal of progress has been made in the diagnosis and treatment of many cancers. Survival rates for breast cancer are hugely improved. Leukaemias and lymphomas respond well to chemotherapy. By no means is all doom and gloom nowadays when the big C is diagnosed.

However, as several members have said, cancer in its many forms is still one of the greatest health problems facing Scotland. In the course of our lives, we are all touched by it in one way or another. Sadly, as several members have said, our success rates are lagging behind those in other western European countries. Early diagnosis is essential if cure rates are to improve and screening tests are successfully diagnosing early cervical, breast and colorectal cancer.

I was impressed with the Grampian and Tayside colorectal screening pilot that I recently saw in Dundee. I was involved in researching colorectal cancer, which is a common cancer in the north-east of Scotland, so I am delighted that something is to be done about it, as early diagnosis can make a huge difference. I hope that the screening programme will be rolled out, but, as Shona Robison said, there is no point in rolling it out if we do not have the back-up facilities. A successful colorectal screening programme will result in a huge demand for colonoscopic investigation.

Patients must have early and equal access to specialist services wherever they are available. I make no apology for saying that if those services are available in the private sector, rather than the public sector, that is where patients should be treated. Patients who have a potential diagnosis of cancer hanging over them do not really care where they get treatment. They want the best available treatment, when they need it, wherever that is provided. I hope that political ideology will never again prevent patients from receiving the best available care at the earliest opportunity.

The Executive has pledged that by 2005 for all cancers the maximum wait from urgent referral to treatment will be two months, with urgent treatment for breast cancer to begin within one month of diagnosis, where clinically appropriate. However, even that is a long time for someone to live with the threat of a potentially fatal disease hanging over them. Margaret Ewing put the issue very well. I was not given a diagnosis of cancer, but I spent two or three weeks not knowing whether I had the disease. That is a traumatic time for any patient.

Nearly all our hospitals have unacceptably long waiting times for the two biggest killers—lung

cancer and bowel cancer. Staff shortages are a major problem. Radiographers, pathologists, senior specialist nurses and oncologists are in short supply throughout the country. It is important that cancer care nurses receive appropriate study leave and cover, to facilitate their continuing education and professional development in this important field.

More people need to be recruited into the understaffed oncology specialties. That will take time, but we do not have much time, as the post-war baby boomers are reaching the age at which cancer takes its toll. There is no doubt that cancer becomes more common as people get older. Although it must be acknowledged that the Executive has invested money in cancer services and that survival rates for many cancers have improved, the problems are by no means solved. The motion smacks a little of complacency in the face of the realities. That is why I support the Conservative amendment, which gives a much more accurate assessment of standards of care in this country, even though those are improving steadily.

16:42

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): This has been a good debate, in which most speakers have contributed positively. I have some information in which Helen Eadie will be interested. During the election campaign, the SNP published many documents on health that specifically outlined initiatives on smoking and dietary issues. I will send her copies if she wishes. I am sure that I will not need her address—I will put it in her doocot and she can look forward to reading it.

Most members have raised important issues. Shona Robison talked about salaries. I know that Pauline McNeill, who is no longer in the chamber, spoke about staffing problems and the need to attract specialists. We must consider that issue carefully. The minister admitted that, although we have attracted specialists, a big gap remains in oncology, about which there is much concern. We must consider ways of encouraging specialists in that area to locate to our hospitals, rather than elsewhere. It is nice to think that, because we are providing services, specialists will come here, but deep down money matters to them, regardless of the research that is being undertaken. Shona Robison's idea of offering variable conditions and enhanced terms is a good one, which the minister should consider.

David Davidson and Ken Macintosh talked about providing information, which is an important issue. I refer not just to information about health—diet, exercise and smoking—but to access to information, if members will forgive me for saying information two or three times. That issue is raised

time and again, especially by people who do not live near outreach clinics and are unable to access information easily.

Bill Aitken said that if people can access information easily, they can find out whether they have a form of cancer. With early diagnosis, people's chances of survival are much higher. Macmillan Cancer Relief nurses and patients from areas such as Drumchapel, which I visited recently, have raised the issue of outreach information with me. Will the minister and the Executive—perhaps through the Health Education Board for Scotland—consider establishing a rolling programme of outreach information, not just on diet and prevention of cancer, but on recognition of some cancers, leading to early diagnosis? I would like to know the minister's views on how that information might be distributed, whether it be by leaflets, a television campaign or whatever. The issue is important. We do not want to scare people, but we want to ensure that cancers that can be easily treated do not spread until they reach a point at which they cannot be treated.

I am pleased that the minister has announced a continuation of ring fencing, which many members have mentioned. The Macmillan nurses whom I met in Glasgow and Edinburgh were worried about the possibility that ring fencing would not continue. I am sure that they will be pleased to hear that it will continue.

I agree with Janis Hughes that some cancer treatments are becoming swifter, but I think that we should not shy away from recognising that others are not. In the Hairmyres hospital in her constituency, people are being treated more quickly, but other people suffering from lung cancer, for example, are not.

Colin Fox—who is no longer in the chamber, unfortunately—talked about the link between deprivation and cancer. We know that people in deprived areas are more likely to get lung cancer and are three times more likely to die of it than people in other areas. As I have said before, we must consider that issue.

As the minister said, we will have a debate on health on 18 September. I look forward to that debate, when I am sure the issues that have been raised today will be raised again.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is probably worth mentioning that it is expected that members who have participated in a debate will be in the chamber for the closing speeches.

16:46

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Tom McCabe): I apologise on his behalf for the fact that the Minister for

Health and Community Care is not present. He has been called away to deal with another matter.

The thread that runs through many of the contributions made today is the general recognition of the achievements so far. Unfortunately, I do not think that that is true of the wording of the Conservative amendment but, thankfully, some of the statements that Conservative members have made today have gone some way towards ameliorating that.

It is 15 months since there was last such a debate on cancer services. Since then, considerable progress has been made. I acknowledge that it has taken time for many of the initiatives to bear fruit but, for the patients—the real focus of this debate—there have been discernible improvements. The Scottish Executive has always said that “Cancer in Scotland: Action for Change” took a systematic approach and that its aims would take consistent focus, effort and time to achieve. It is clear to me, and to many who have contributed to today's debate, that a sound start has been made, although, of course, there is no room for complacency.

I heard Mr Aitken's comments about the Beatson oncology centre in Glasgow and I refer him to a recent article in *The Scotsman*, in which patients and professionals praised the radical improvements to that facility.

The theme of today's debate has been change and modernisation, linked with targeted and sustained investment. It is generally acknowledged that ring fencing of that investment has contributed to the success so far. I believe that the chamber warmly welcomed Malcolm Chisholm's announcement that that will continue for at least the next two years. Mr Chisholm also confirmed that the Scottish Executive is determined to maintain the momentum for change.

Considerable financial investment has been made, but not everything is about additional money. The monetary investment has helped to plug the gaps and deficiencies that undoubtedly existed. Investment has ensured that the NHS Quality Improvement Scotland clinical standards for cancer services are much more uniformly met than before and that access to services, such as CT scans and magnetic resonance imaging scans has improved considerably.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): I agree 100 per cent about the improvements that the minister has mentioned. However, would he be prepared to reconsider the issue of triple assessment in relation to proper diagnosis? The minister will be aware of a number of cases of misdiagnosis in Glasgow that I have raised and I would like him to re-examine the question of whether triple assessment might give women the security that they deserve.

Mr McCabe: Of course, our minds are always open to clinical advice that we receive. If advice were received that supported Mr Sheridan's views, we would take it seriously.

Many issues have been rectified in cancer care services in Scotland by a different kind of investment—the investment of time and patience by members of the multidisciplinary cancer networks throughout the country, who have given their knowledge to help to make the necessary changes. Often, it is the small problems that feel as if they are insurmountable, but the members of the cancer networks have succeeded in surmounting those problems. By working in networks, they provide on-the-ground support to help to work through the process of cancer care and to highlight where issues that are important to patients can be acted on for everyone's benefit. That frequently results in the release of more time and clinical resources, which means that more patients can be helped. Committed and enthusiastic staff can be worth far more than a simple cheque-book approach to improving our health service.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): I want to ask about staff—in particular, GPs. The minister is aware of the million women study that reported last month, which confirmed that current and recent use of hormone replacement therapy increases a woman's chance of developing breast cancer and that the risk increases with longer use. Can the minister confirm that advice and support have been given to GPs on how to work with women and on what advice to give women who are on HRT or who are considering using it?

Mr McCabe: We acknowledge the importance of that issue and I am happy to confirm that such guidance has been issued to GPs.

Yesterday's launch of the Scottish cancer coalition's manifesto has been mentioned. We welcome that launch and the collaborative approach of the voluntary sector throughout Scotland. The health improvement aspects that have been called for are in line with the published aims of the health challenge and the actions that are being taken to improve Scots' health for the future.

I note members' comments about tobacco use and alcohol abuse in Scotland and I hear what has been said about the possibility of legislation to deal with the effects of passive smoking and smoking in public places.

Sandra White was right to point out that we will have a major debate on health improvement in the near future. That will be an opportunity to discuss those issues in some detail in the Parliament; it will also give all parties the chance to put the proper emphasis on the need to improve health

and the actions that we can take to make a genuine difference to the health of people in Scotland.

The Scottish cancer coalition's manifesto also mentions the need to sustain investment and calls for additional investment when the current investment ceases. We must remind ourselves that that investment does not cease—it goes on year after year and will continue to be included in the allocations to NHS boards. It will support people with cancer through the provision of dedicated staff and equipment throughout the NHS in Scotland.

On involvement of patients and the public, I support the strong stance that Malcolm Chisholm reiterated in the debate on 18 June and again today. It is vital that we develop arrangements that ensure that NHS services are designed and developed in a manner that involves patients and carers and the wider public. Information for patients and carers is at the heart of the delivery of cancer services—we must ensure that the information reaches those who need it. I am pleased to note that the Scottish cancer group has published "Cancer in Scotland: Action for Change: A guide to securing access to information".

More important, the Scottish Executive looks forward to the day when the many forms of this terrible disease can no longer strike fear into the hearts of those who contract it, and we look forward to the day when sustained investment and continuous improvement give the people of Scotland the confidence of knowing that we are equipped to deal speedily and professionally with cancer when it strikes.

Business Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-298, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 10 September 2003

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Executive Debate on Strategic Framework for Aquaculture

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business—debate on the subject of S2M-106 Dr Sylvia Jackson: Scotland's European Pollutant Emission Register

Thursday 11 September 2003

9.30 am Scottish National Party Business

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.30 pm Question Time

3.10 pm Ministerial Statement on Delivering for Scotland – Funding the Partnership Agreement

followed by Executive Debate on Ministerial Statement

followed by Motion on Legal Deposit Libraries Bill 2003 - UK Legislation

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business—debate on the subject of S2M-145 Elaine Smith: Obesity Amongst the Scottish Population

Wednesday 17 September 2003

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Executive Debate on Review of Licensing Laws

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 18 September 2003

9.30 am Executive Debate on Health

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.30 pm Question Time

followed by Continuation of Executive Debate on Health

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

and, (b) that the Environment and Rural Development Committee reports to the Communities Committee by 26 September 2003 on the Environmental Impact Assessment (Water Management) (Scotland) Regulations 2003 (SSI 2003/341) and that the Justice 2 Committee reports to the Justice 1 Committee by 16 September 2003 on the draft Advice and Assistance (Assistance by Way of Representation) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2003 and on the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc.) (No.2) Order 2003.—[Patricia Ferguson.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As a member has indicated a desire to speak against the motion, there will be a short debate. There can be only one speaker for and one against the motion and there will be a time limit on the speeches.

16:55

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): I wish to object to the motion because an important issue of principle is involved.

Yesterday afternoon we had a debate on a Procedures Committee report about changes to the timing of First Minister's question time. There can be no doubt as to what came out of that debate. It was clear that, at one stage, the Procedures Committee was minded to recommend that First Minister's questions should be held at 2 pm on a Thursday. Strangely enough, the committee changed that view and there can be no doubt that that was done for one reason only—because it suited the Executive to change the time to 12 noon on a Thursday.

We have to ask why it suits the Executive. It suits the Executive because it can then control the media agenda for the rest of the day. It has not considered the negative effect that that change in timing would have on the rest of the Parliament. I know that the relationship between the Labour party and the BBC is somewhat fractured, but no one can deny the BBC's calculation of the viewing figures that shows that there would be less than half the number of people watching the programme at midday than would be watching at 2 pm.

Frankly, the Parliament needs a profile; it must show itself to be credible and it must be in the face of the public. That is the only way in which we are going to retain any credibility. This is a very cynical move on the Executive's part. It is anti-democratic and it is to be condemned absolutely. I underline that by objecting to the business motion.

16:56

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Patricia Ferguson): I speak in support of a Parliamentary Bureau motion that was discussed at a meeting of the bureau on Tuesday that Mr Aitken attended. Mr Aitken has obviously decided to set a great deal of store by what was a leaked, draft report to a committee. Instead of venting his ire in the way that he has, he might more sensibly vent his ire on the people who might have leaked the report. To see conspiracy theories of such a nature is perhaps to stretch a point a little too much, even for a Conservative.

Mr Aitken also said that the move is somehow anti-democratic. The only thing that is anti-democratic about the situation is that the Conservatives are speaking against the democratic will of the Parliament, as discussed yesterday. It gives me further cause for thought that if the Tories are going to come back to votes a second time every time they get beaten, we could be in for a very long session.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. There is a slight difficulty, in that I had not anticipated that the debate would end early.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am sorry that I did not give advance notice of this point of order. However, at question time, I was rather confused about a comment that the Presiding Officer made when he seemed to indicate that the First Minister should be careful of straying into reserved areas.

As a parliamentarian who speaks and writes on a range of issues, I would like that to be clarified. I understand that the Scotland Act 1998 and the Parliament's standing orders allow individual MSPs, the Scottish Parliament and the Executive to discuss, debate and take a position on reserved issues. We have had such debates in members' business and have taken positions in debates such as those on the act of settlement and the Iraq war.

It is clearly the prerogative of the Executive to choose whether it takes a position on such issues, unless the Parliament votes and instructs the Executive to do so. We cannot change the law on reserved issues, but I understand that we can seek to influence it. It is important that we should know our rights as parliamentarians in the interests of democracy in the Parliament.

Will the Presiding Officer clarify standing orders with regard to reserved issues? I do not believe that they call for our silence on reserved issues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am happy to do so. The Parliament may debate anything, but questions to ministers must be directed to issues

that fall within their competence and responsibility. That is the clear-cut difference.

There will now be a short pause while the Presiding Officer takes the chair.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The question is, that business motion S2M-298, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Members wishing to support the amendment should press their yes buttons now.

[*Interruption.*]

I am sorry; I should have said that the division is on the motion. There is no amendment. It was one of those things, because of taking the chair so quickly. Let me make it clear that those who support Patricia Ferguson's motion should vote yes.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)

Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Mr Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 88, Against 15, Abstentions 2.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 10 September 2003

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Executive Debate on Strategic Framework for Aquaculture

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business—debate on the subject of S2M-106 Dr Sylvia Jackson: Scotland's European Pollutant Emission Register

Thursday 11 September 2003

9.30 am Scottish National Party Business

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.30 pm Question Time

3.10 pm Ministerial Statement on Delivering for Scotland – Funding the Partnership Agreement

followed by Executive Debate on Ministerial Statement

followed by Motion on Legal Deposit Libraries Bill 2003 - UK Legislation

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business—debate on the subject of S2M-145 Elaine Smith: Obesity Amongst the Scottish Population

Wednesday 17 September 2003

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Executive Debate on Review of Licensing Laws

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 18 September 2003

9.30 am Executive Debate on Health

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.30 pm Question Time

followed by Continuation of Executive Debate on Health

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

and, (b) that the Environment and Rural Development Committee reports to the Communities Committee by 26 September 2003 on the Environmental Impact Assessment (Water Management) (Scotland) Regulations 2003 (SSI 2003/341) and that the Justice 2 Committee reports to the Justice 1 Committee by 16 September 2003 on the draft Advice and Assistance (Assistance by Way of Representation) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2003 and on the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc.) (No.2) Order 2003.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S2M-293.3, in the name of Shona Robison, which seeks to amend motion S2M-293, in the name of Margaret Curran, on closing the opportunity gap, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Mr Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)

Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 29, Against 79, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S2M-293.1, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S2M-293,

in the name of Margaret Curran, on closing the opportunity gap, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)

Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Mr Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 18, Against 91, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S2M-293.2, in the name of Tommy Sheridan, which seeks to amend motion S2M-293, in the name of Margaret Curran, on closing the opportunity gap, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Where are all the SSP members? The part-timers.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Where has Mr Raffan been all afternoon? Has he just

swanned in? My members are securing the release of children from Dungavel.

The Presiding Officer: Order. Mr Sheridan, a little bit of order.

FOR

Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Mr Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)

McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 6, Against 102, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-293, in the name of Margaret Curran, on closing the opportunity gap, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (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, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)

Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Mr Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 67, Against 41, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the Executive's continuing commitment to breaking down the social, educational and economic barriers that create inequality and the commitment to working to end poverty by tackling deprivation and social needs, and notes that to close the opportunity gap the Executive will deliver community regeneration to build strong, safe and attractive communities; measures to increase financial inclusion to reduce debt, measures to improve standards of housing and to tackle homelessness and measures to overcome barriers to training and employment to increase participation in the labour market.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-292.2, in the name of Shona Robison, which seeks to amend motion S2M-292, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on investment and change in cancer services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)

Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Mr Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (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, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 29, Against 63, Abstentions 17.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-292.1, in the name of David Davidson, which seeks to amend motion S2M-292, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on investment and change in cancer services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (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, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Mr Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 18, Against 66, Abstentions 25.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-292, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on investment and change in cancer services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)

Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Mr Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 93, Against 0, Abstentions 16.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament acknowledges the progress made and the remaining challenges in implementing the cancer strategy; recognises that the £60 million investment is leading to many improvements to patient care; welcomes the development of managed clinical networks and the redesign of cancer services under way across the three regional cancer networks; supports an increased focus on patient experience and patient involvement, and looks forward to continuing change and innovation in order to reduce waiting times and improve the quality of care.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. Members leaving the chamber should, as usual, do so with discretion, quickly and quietly.

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-264, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the continued speculation about the impact of the Ministry of Defence's 'End to End Review' on the future of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency (DARA) in Almondbank; is concerned about the threat to the 325 jobs at the facility; recognises the important and specialised skills of the workforce there which are significant to both Perthshire locally and Scotland as a whole; acknowledges the massive local economic impact of DARA in Almondbank as evidenced by the Mackay Consultants' report of August 2003; further notes the cross party and multi-agency Welsh campaign to defend DARA jobs in Wales, and believes that the Scottish Executive should ensure that a similar campaign is organised in Scotland in order to protect and defend the continued existence of defence jobs at DARA in Almondbank.

17:12

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): The text of the motion makes it clear why I requested the debate. The Defence Aviation Repair Agency at Almondbank is one of the most important employers in my constituency. Indeed, it also employs people from neighbouring constituencies, so the concern and interest about it go rather wider than just Perthshire. DARA Almondbank is the only DARA operation in Scotland, so it is important not just to Perthshire but to Scotland as a whole.

For those who are less than familiar with DARA, I should make it clear that it maintains, repairs and overhauls aircraft, including helicopters, for the Ministry of Defence. There are four DARA sites in the UK—St Athan in south Wales, Sealand in north Wales, Fleetlands in Portsmouth and of course Almondbank. DARA came into being in 1999, but the Almondbank plant had already been in existence under another guise for many years.

DARA as a whole is permitted to contract for non-MOD work and it does so successfully, including at Almondbank. There are a number of operational units in DARA and the components unit is based at Almondbank and services rotary-wing, hydraulic, pneumatic and fuel components along with the secondary power systems of fixed-wing aircraft and various pieces of winch equipment. Members will understand from that that the work that is carried out is specialised and technical.

DARA Almondbank employs a work force of 325 on a permanent basis and about 25 others come in on a less permanent basis. Only last month, the

Minister of State for the Armed Forces was at Almondbank for the official opening of the new hydraulic test facility. That £5 million investment was supposed to guarantee the future of the plant and its employees, but the threat remains.

DARA Almondbank's local economic impact cannot be over-emphasised. It is one of the largest employers in my constituency and the nature of its work makes it something of a rarity in the area, if not in Scotland as a whole. It is a measure of the local concern about the current situation that Perth and Kinross Council had Mackay Consultants prepare a report on the economic impact of closing DARA Almondbank.

I sent a copy of the report to the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning; I hope that he has read it and therefore understands why there is such consternation at the current threat. The loss of DARA Almondbank would lead to a reduction of £28.8 million in the annual economic output of Perth and Kinross. The nature of the skills involved means that those whose jobs disappeared would be highly unlikely to find comparable work locally.

Local earnings would be reduced significantly, and earnings in Perth and Kinross are already significantly lower than in the rest of Scotland and the UK. There are also 20 apprentices at Almondbank on engineering apprenticeships, which are in decline in Scotland, so that would be another loss for Perthshire and Scotland as a whole. It goes without saying that Perth College would suffer if those apprentice places were lost. Indeed, whole courses would be lost from that college.

When DARA was set up in 1999 as a public-private partnership, its future was, in effect, guaranteed by project red dragon, which would be based at St Athan in Wales and include the building of the aerospace industry park at St Athan and a super hangar with 47 bays to allow work on military fast jets. It was hoped that, once underpinned by the MOD contracts, civil aviation companies and other aviation businesses would use the services at St Athan. Without red dragon, the future for DARA would be very dodgy indeed, and the future of the site at Almondbank in my constituency is bound up with the future of the agency as a whole.

With that background, it should be clear why the BBC report on 18 July was greeted with such concern in all communities where DARA has a presence. The BBC reported that the MOD, in a secret review, was considering dropping the project and repairing planes at existing Royal Air Force bases. In Perthshire, the reaction was swift. Meetings took place, which included representatives of the relevant trade unions, Perth College, Perthshire Chamber of Commerce,

Scottish Enterprise Tayside, the Westminster MP Annabelle Ewing, council officials, councillors and me.

It was clear that the threat was perceived to be real and that the response had to match that threat. That is why Perth and Kinross Council commissioned the Mackay report and why I wrote to the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning urging him to recognise the dire consequences of closure. I also invited him to join the local cross-party, cross-agency campaign to persuade the Westminster Government to reject the recommendations of the end-to-end review.

In Wales, too, the response was swift, but there local campaigners were joined by the Administration in the National Assembly for Wales. Assembly members and MPs of all parties and the Wales Office were already working together to ensure the continuation of the DARA presence weeks before the minister even replied to my call for his support in Scotland. Unfortunately, when the response finally came, it did not inspire confidence that we were going to see the sort of urgency and combined determination that we have seen in Wales. The minister said in his reply that the Scottish Executive would do all that it could, but his plan of action seemed to involve little more than speaking to Adam Ingram.

I believe that Almondbank needs a great deal more than that. It is not enough to be told that DARA will be saved. That does not mean that Almondbank will be saved. It is not enough to be told that Almondbank will not be closed. That does not mean that jobs will not be lost. Tonight, I am looking for an assurance not only that the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning and his department will acknowledge the serious impact on Perthshire if jobs are lost at Almondbank—and God forbid that it should close—but that he will meet the local campaign and make the strongest possible representations to the MOD and the UK Cabinet that the jobs at DARA Almondbank must be retained for Perthshire and for Scotland.

I know that because the jobs are defence jobs this matter principally is in the hands of a Westminster department that is responsible for reserved matters, but in Wales that has not been seen as a barrier to mounting the strongest possible campaign to prevent any threat to DARA jobs that are based in Wales. We need exactly the same expressions of combined support and strong campaigning in Scotland and for Scotland, to ensure that DARA Almondbank does not fall through the net when the row over DARA ends.

17:19

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Presiding Officer, thank you for calling me early in

this debate. As I intimated to you, I have to leave to go to another engagement. I apologise in advance to members and the minister for leaving the debate early. I shall read the *Official Report* with great interest and study the minister's response.

I commend Roseanna Cunningham for her motion and for securing this debate even in her presently handicapped circumstances. We wish her a speedy recovery.

I had the pleasure of visiting DARA Almondbank about two weeks ago, when the Minister of State for the Armed Forces was there. I had the opportunity to tour the facilities and to meet members of the work force. I was impressed by their dedication and the quality of the skills that was apparent.

The work that is carried out by DARA at Almondbank is unique. It has the only test rig for Chinook helicopters outside Philadelphia. If DARA were to close, heaven forbid, it would be almost impossible for the MOD to have the work carried out elsewhere.

Almondbank might seem a strange place to have a defence aviation repair facility. Originally, all the facilities were based in Coventry. I understand that the reason why the facility moved to Almondbank was that, during the second world war, Coventry was subject to such bombing by the axis powers that the facilities were outsourced to different parts of the UK. The reason why Almondbank was chosen was that it was felt that, tucked away in a quiet corner of Perthshire, it would be safe from German bombers. The Perthshire economy has benefited considerably.

As we have heard, DARA is now a vital part of the Perth and Kinross economy and it employs 325 people. It is not only the headline figures that are important because many of the jobs at DARA are highly skilled engineering positions. If those jobs were lost to the Perthshire economy, they would be difficult to replace. The quality of those jobs is particularly important given the dependence of the Perthshire economy on the service sector, with its low-paid jobs in tourism and hospitality, for example. There is no doubt that the closure of DARA would have a devastating impact on the Perthshire economy. There would be a loss of some £28.8 million per year, as the Mackay Consultants report showed. According to the same report, if one were to multiply the loss of jobs by a standard multiplier of 1.6, 521 jobs would be lost in total, which would mean an increase in unemployment in Perth and Kinross by a third. That is a substantial figure.

When I was at DARA, I heard the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, Adam Ingram, speak to the work force. He was full of praise for the work

force, who welcomed his warm words. However, warm words are not enough; there must be a firm commitment from the MOD to retain the jobs at DARA. The members of the work force to whom I spoke felt reassured by the minister's remarks. They were aware that, to an extent, the future lay in their hands. They were confident that, given the quality of the work done at Almondbank, on no objective assessment was there any argument for taking that work away.

However, politicians are funny creatures, as we know. We need the Scottish Executive to make the point that the jobs must be retained in the Perthshire economy. We know that defence is a reserved matter but, as Roseanna Cunningham said, this is an economic issue. Economic and enterprise powers are in the hands of the Scottish Parliament, so it is a matter for the Scottish Executive to address with the Ministry of Defence.

I welcome Roseanna Cunningham's motion and I look forward to reading the minister's response.

17:23

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I recognise that members will be wondering what I am doing in the chamber, given that the subject of the debate is not a constituency issue. Indeed, I could argue that it is not a policy area over which we have responsibility. I have no problem with the terms of Roseanna Cunningham's motion. It is sensible to seek to protect and defend defence jobs and, equally, to recognise the specialist skills of the work force.

Roseanna Cunningham is right that defence is a critically important industry for Scotland. It generates thousands of jobs and millions of pounds are invested in our economy as a consequence. It matters to us.

Whether it is the MOD in Glasgow, DARA at Almondbank or indeed Her Majesty's naval base Clyde at Faslane, it is important to Scotland. Faslane is important to the Scottish economy and I make no apology for mentioning it. Some 7,000 people are employed at Faslane, 4,000 of whom are civilians. There are 3,700 indirect jobs as a result of supplier linkages and income multipliers. It is one of the largest single-site employers in Scotland and by far the largest source of jobs in the local economy of West Dunbartonshire—one of the most disadvantaged areas of Scotland. I make no apology for talking about economic impact because it is recognised in Roseanna Cunningham's comments and in her motion. Nonetheless, I hope that Roseanna Cunningham will convey the message to the SNP that a consistent approach is required. SNP members cannot argue one defence policy as local MSPs and another one entirely when they put on their party hat.

I confess that I am unclear about the SNP's current defence policy—whether it is for us to be in or out of NATO—and what its position is on Faslane, a matter that we have debated in the Parliament. One SNP MSP said, “Don't worry. When we scrap Faslane, we will base the Scottish navy there, so things will be fine.” That was interesting because, at the same time, Alex Salmond was saying, “Don't worry. It will be based at Rosyth, not at Faslane.” Does the SNP have one policy for the west and another policy for the east, or is it a case of the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing? Just for the record, when asked about the size of the Scottish navy, the SNP member said that it was going to be seven frigates. That would involve 100 jobs. There was no mention of the 10,600 remaining employees who would become unemployed.

Roseanna Cunningham: As long as we are in the UK and part of the UK structure, Scotland should get some of the economic benefit from the share of our taxes that go to defence spending. That is what the debate is about.

Jackie Baillie: We receive a huge benefit through defence spending in Scotland. For example, there is Faslane, which is the nuclear deterrent base for the whole of the UK—never mind the establishments at Almondbank, Rosyth and elsewhere, and jobs that are protected in Govan and on the Clyde. It is not a question of defence spending; it is a question of consistency in SNP policy.

I have a great deal of sympathy with the proposition in Roseanna Cunningham's motion. We should all do everything that we can to support the staff at Almondbank. However, SNP members should come clean. On the one hand, they campaign for the closure of Faslane, which would remove 10,600 defence jobs; on the other hand, when the matter is close to home, they sing from a very different hymn sheet. In similar vein, where were the SNP members when British Energy recently shed around 300 posts in East Kilbride? Did they say anything about that? Not a peep. Perhaps that was because those posts were concerned with nuclear power.

I welcome what I hope is a conversion of the SNP to protecting defence jobs in Scotland. In seeking to protect jobs at Almondbank, Roseanna Cunningham must also recognise the positive news of the £5 million investment in the new facility there, which came on top of an earlier investment of £11 million. I am happy to support the workers at Almondbank, but I ask for some consistency of approach from the SNP.

17:28

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Jackie Baillie is being disingenuous. She knows perfectly well that the Scottish defence forces in an independent Scotland would retain roughly the same number of employees as are currently employed—some 25,000 people. My colleague, John Swinney, will say more about that in his speech. I shall focus on some of the defence facilities in Scotland and the costs to wider Scotland of the country's being used for defence.

One third of lower air space in Scotland is reserved for military flying. That is good. We have the opportunity to provide that facility to other NATO countries, such as the United States and Germany, whose aircraft are regularly seen flying around the treetops in constituencies in the North of Scotland. However, the price for that is paid by the local people who live in those areas—a price that is paid also in military flying areas in the Borders—and there is no concomitant benefit in jobs on the ground from that activity. Nevertheless, the major facilities at Lossie, Kinloss and Leuchars bring tremendous economic benefit to the local communities. Those communities understand the price that they pay in noise and disruption and recognise the local benefits that they acquire.

It is not just my colleague Roseanna Cunningham's constituency that is being affected by closures. Jobs have been lost in the constituency of the Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services, with the recent closure of radar facilities at RAF Saxa Vord. Therefore, I hope that he will show an understanding of Roseanna Cunningham's position.

Strange things have happened, such as the aerodrome at West Freugh in south-west Scotland being closed with less than 24 hours' notice, which meant that three civilian planes found themselves locked behind the gates and were unable to get out for a week. Therefore, I think that we are right to be concerned about the jobs at Almondbank and to act pre-emptively to defend them.

We lost military contracts at Rosyth but recently gained some on the Clyde, which is good news. However, at Tain, to the north of Inverness, live munitions are dropped within sight and sound of the local community. Aircraft come from Germany to do that, but they do not stop in Scotland to refuel, nor do they bring any other benefits. Many of the costs that are borne by communities throughout Scotland to support the military are not matched by concomitant benefits. It is on that basis that I am happy to make a brief speech in defence of the facilities in Roseanna Cunningham's constituency.

We need our fair share. One of the things that the unionists always tell us is that there are benefits from being in the union, but there are also disbenefits, if we are not getting our fair share. I hope that the minister will be able to reassure us that his Executive and members throughout Parliament will be able to unite in a vigorous campaign to ensure that we retain the important jobs at Almondbank.

17:31

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

I join colleagues in congratulating Roseanna Cunningham on obtaining this important debate. DARA seems to follow me around. DARA Sealand is but a few miles outside the Westminster constituency that I represented in north Wales—perhaps I follow DARA around, to be more precise.

The loss of the jobs at DARA Almondbank would be a serious blow to the local economy not only of Perth and Kinross, but of Mid Scotland and Fife. However, it is important that I say at the beginning that no decisions have been made. I emphasise that not only because of the cross-party consensus that exists over Almondbank, but because of the tremendously unsettling effect, given the prevailing uncertainty, that media reports have had on those employed at Almondbank.

One cannot overstate the importance of DARA Almondbank to Perth and Kinross and its local economy. As Roseanna Cunningham said, we are talking about 325 permanent full-time jobs, 200 of which are highly skilled. The fact that Almondbank is involved in the repair and overhaul of 15,000 components of 470 different types is a measure of just how highly skilled those jobs are. Almondbank is a world-class centre of engineering skills.

Over the past five years there has been an investment of £15 million in Almondbank that culminated, as Ms Cunningham rightly said, in the opening of the new hydraulics test facility just two weeks ago by the UK Government minister at the centre of the debate, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, Adam Ingram. If Almondbank were to be closed, there would be a multiplier effect on the local economy that would mean the loss of a further 200 jobs and a reduction in local income and thus spending in local shops and on local services of £12 million.

With Perth College and its subsidiary, Air Service Training (Engineering), DARA Almondbank has developed and become a market leader in the education and training of aircraft engineers, particularly helicopter engineers. That has meant a growing connection with the oil business through North sea helicopter operators in Aberdeen. I believe that we all want that

connection to be enhanced and developed. Reference was made earlier to the 20 apprenticeships at Almondbank, which are very important. The number might seem small but, in the context of a declining number of engineering apprenticeships in Scotland, those 20 apprenticeships are very important.

I pray that the closure of Almondbank does not happen, but should it do so it would mean the loss of an immensely important, highly skilled centre that is unlike many of the plants and new jobs that we have attracted to Scotland in recent years. I am afraid that I am not a great devotee of call centres. They may provide a lot of jobs, but they tend to be the kind of operation that is closed first in a recession. What I want to see is the development of far more world-class centres such as DARA Almondbank.

I mentioned the reduction in local spending, and Roseanna Cunningham mentioned the devastating impact that closure would have, with the loss of £28.8 million to the local economy and unemployment locally rising by a third. We are talking about the loss of highly skilled engineering jobs and the loss of apprenticeships and training opportunities for the young, resulting in a reduction in local income and in spending in local shops and services.

I understand that the MOD end-to-end review, which I have never before heard described as secret, has been completed and that the report has gone to the minister. We now await a decision. I am glad that the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning has made strong representations to the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, and I am glad that Scottish Executive officials are in daily contact with their counterparts in the MOD. I hope that the Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services will confirm that in winding up. The message that must go out from this debate is that there is cross-party unity. We are all singing from the same hymn sheet and are all agreed that DARA Almondbank must not be closed. This is not a party-political issue; we all want that plant to be developed further.

I am sure that all political parties will work together with Perth and Kinross Council and with our Westminster colleagues to put additional pressure on the MOD. That pressure must be not just for the right decision but for an early decision. As Jim Wallace himself has said, it is essential that we have a speedy resolution to the issue, as it is having a very unsettling effect on the work force at Almondbank and causing a great deal of uncertainty. I hope that he will continue to put pressure on the Minister of State for the Armed Forces for an early decision, by which I mean a decision before the end of this month.

17:37

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Having listened to Mr Raffan saying that there is cross-party unity and to the comments made by Jackie Baillie, I wonder whether I have been listening to the same debate.

Jackie Baillie: Will Mr Swinney give way?

Mr Swinney: I think that I shall hold off for a second before accepting interventions. I shall get started on Jackie Baillie later in my speech, and I shall allow her to intervene then.

I begin by congratulating Roseanna Cunningham, the representative of a neighbouring constituency to mine, on securing this evening's debate. Roseanna is not the first person whom I would accuse of seeking and securing consensus across the political parties, but she has certainly been active in working with all parties in Perth and Kinross Council, where a wind of change is bringing about cross-party co-operation on this important issue. I welcome the initiatives that have been taken by Perth and Kinross Council in that respect.

I contribute to the debate primarily from a local perspective, as I am the member of the Scottish Parliament for the neighbouring constituency of North Tayside, where many of the DARA employees are resident. I had the privilege of campaigning in the Almondbank area until 1997, when the village was taken out of the North Tayside constituency and placed in the Perth constituency. I would like to think that all my door knocking over the years contributed to the handsome result that my deputy achieved there.

The local impact of a closure should not be underestimated, and such an impact would not affect the Perth constituency alone but also the neighbouring constituencies. The type of skilled employment that is created at Almondbank is of such significance that it is worthy of the description that Mr Raffan awarded to it—a world-class centre of engineering skills. That type of employment is very difficult to replace if it is jeopardised. If there were to be a much-regretted closure of DARA in Almondbank, that would lead to the loss of highly skilled personnel from the local community, and in turn to the loss of their families, as they sought employment elsewhere. I know constituents who have previously been employed at DARA. The nature of their skills is such that they are in a labour market that takes them around most of western Europe on a fairly regular basis. Having worked at DARA in the past, a former Perth and Kinross Council colleague now has to work in Coventry on other highly skilled engineering projects.

The skills are fundamental to the local economy, and the economic significance of the plant cannot

be understated. It contributes enormously to the local economy and any erosion of that contribution would be to the detriment of the economy of Perth and Kinross.

One of the assumptions that is made about the Perth and Kinross area—I read it all the time in profiles of my constituency and of Roseanna Cunningham's—is that it is an affluent area of Scotland. Of course, there is indigenous and inherent wealth within it, but the city of Perth has taken a number of serious economic knocks in the past few years. The employment situation has deteriorated due to what happened at General Accident and Norwich Union, and there have been many takeovers and employment losses at Diageo. The Perthshire economy has been affected by serious issues and we should mount a vigorous effort to safeguard employment at DARA.

In that respect, I heartily endorse the final part of Roseanna Cunningham's motion, which encourages the Executive to play a critical role in agitating and arguing from a Scottish perspective for the maintenance of the employment in question, notwithstanding the fact that the jobs are defence jobs. The Scottish Executive needs to be as vigorously involved in protecting the economic interests of DARA in Perthshire as the Welsh Executive and the National Assembly for Wales are involved in the process in Wales.

Finally, I want to discuss defence spending. If it is possible for Jackie Baillie to deliver the speech that she delivered and not be thrown out of the chamber for being out of order, it will be safe for me to say what I am about to say, albeit that Presiding Officers can always reinterpret rules in debates as they go along.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Swinney: I might as well hear all that the member has to say before I continue.

Jackie Baillie: Absolutely—I am giving the member ample opportunity to respond.

The member will acknowledge that I gave my absolute support to the 325 DARA employees and to Roseanna Cunningham's motion. Is the SNP going to have a consistent approach? Will the member give the same commitment that he has given to DARA to the 11,000 people who rely on Faslane for employment?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: John Swinney has two minutes.

Mr Swinney: I thank the Presiding Officer for giving me those two minutes.

Stewart Stevenson said that the SNP's defence policy has always been predicated on the presumption that when Scotland becomes an

independent country, we would sustain the same level of employment within the defence industries—that is a cardinal commitment of our defence policy. I will not stand here and say that the jobs in question will be entirely the same jobs, servicing the same parts of the defence industries. A fundamental and well-established part of my party's attitude towards defence is that we do not support the nuclear deterrent—we never have done—so there would have to be a reconfiguration of the defence industries.

What Jackie Baillie said was almost predicated on the assumption that in the lovely and beautiful United Kingdom in which we live, we have never lost a defence job. However, we have lost thousands of defence jobs. When Murdo Fraser's party was in power and when Jackie Baillie's party has been in power, we have lost defence jobs. We have lost defence jobs in the United Kingdom, so no member should say that defence jobs would somehow be jeopardised only by independence.

I return to what Roseanna Cunningham said. Scotland has 8.6 per cent of the UK population. We contribute more to the UK than we get back. The last time I examined the calculations, the estimates showed that Scotland receives around 4 per cent of defence expenditure in the UK. Whichever way the economics are totted up, there is a one-way street in which Scotland is losing out.

I do not want to sour the debate by responding to Jackie Baillie's vigorous challenges, but simply want to say that I welcome the debate that Roseanna Cunningham has initiated. I welcome the Conservatives', Liberal Democrats' and Labour party's endorsement of what has been said, which reflects the all-party support for efforts by Perth and Kinross Council and in Perthshire to safeguard the employment in question. I hope that in closing the debate, the minister will give us the reassurance that we seek that the Executive is right behind the campaign in Perthshire to safeguard the jobs for the future of the constituents that Roseanna Cunningham and I have the privilege to represent.

17:44

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services (Tavish Scott): I do not always learn something new in debates in the chamber, but I have been genuinely interested by Roseanna Cunningham's persuasive case and the cases that other members have made. Even the debate on defence policy that Jackie Baillie initiated was interesting; however, Roseanna Cunningham will probably forgive me for not going into defence policy on this occasion.

I pay tribute to Roseanna Cunningham for bringing the matter to the Parliament. Defence

matters are reserved to Westminster, but it is important that the Parliament understands the facts. Roseanna Cunningham has rightly described the serious issues that confront her constituency.

Jackie Baillie referred to the fact that Scotland makes a real contribution to the defence of the United Kingdom—in people, resources and commitment. Scotland also benefits from defence financially—through employment and in less tangible ways. Although defence is reserved, the MOD recognises that the Scottish Parliament, the Executive and local authorities, such as the local authority to which Roseanna Cunningham referred, have a vital role to play.

The Scottish Parliament and the Executive have a role in helping to ensure that Scottish interests are taken into account when UK defence policy is framed and implemented and when the MOD carries out its reserved responsibilities, particularly when the decisions directly affect both the MOD and the many thousands of MOD personnel who live and work in Scotland.

Almondbank has been the subject of widespread speculation as a result of the MOD's end-to-end review. The review has examined the provision of UK-wide—as Roseanna Cunningham rightly said—logistic support across defence. I want to say at the outset that this devolved Government is doing all it can to safeguard any Scottish jobs that may be under threat as a result of the review.

As I understand it, the review aims to deliver more effective and efficient support to the front line. I am sure that members will support that objective. The review addresses the full scope of logistic support to land and air forces, from industry to the battlefield. As such, it looks much wider than Almondbank—and, indeed, wider than DARA.

Mr Raffan: I am glad that the minister has given an assurance that the Executive will campaign vigorously to preserve those jobs. Ms Cunningham and Mr Swinney rightly drew attention to what the Welsh—my former colleagues in Wales—are doing. They are launching a feisty and formidable campaign to preserve the jobs at Sealand and St Athans. It is important that the Scottish Executive does not appear to be following weakly in their wake, but is up there with them making just as strong a case for Scottish jobs and the jobs at Almondbank.

Tavish Scott: I take Mr Raffan's point. I will address that issue shortly.

The Executive has been assured by the MOD that there is no secret agenda in the end-to-end review about the future of DARA Almondbank. We fully understand that the MOD will want to achieve solutions that provide best value for money while preserving operational effectiveness.

Executive ministers have been reassured that, in accordance with the MOD's commitment to the trade unions, there will be a level playing field in considering in-house and external solutions. I can report to Parliament that the Scottish ministers and officials have, as Keith Raffan and Roseanna Cunningham mentioned, been keeping in close touch with the MOD about the developments.

The Scottish Executive understands the importance of DARA to the local economy in Ms Cunningham's constituency and in the surrounding constituencies that Mr Swinney and others have mentioned.

The Executive has been reassured that the end-to-end review recommendations that have significant investment implications or which might impact on civilian jobs will be subject to full investment appraisal to establish the costs and benefits, and to full trade union consultation in the usual way. The Executive and, I am sure, Parliament would expect nothing less from the MOD.

Murdo Fraser, who has now left the chamber, Roseanna Cunningham and other members have mentioned that Adam Ingram, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, visited DARA Almondbank on 22 August. I am told that, as some members have mentioned, he gave assurances that there are no plans to close DARA Almondbank. Indeed, the recently opened £5 million hydraulic facility should put Almondbank at the forefront of mechanical component repair for the new Tornado and Typhoon work.

The Executive understands that defence ministers have felt able to refute the Transport and General Workers Union assertion that the review entails considerable job losses for Almondbank. It is important to point out that the TGWU has had full access to management and to ministers in Whitehall. I understand that it has been consistently reassured by management that there is no secret agenda as regards DARA.

Recent investments such as the new test facility at Almondbank put it in a good position to secure new work. The Scottish Executive has every reason to believe that the skills and competitiveness of the work force and management at Almondbank will ensure its long-term future. I recognise those points, which other members have also made.

Roseanna Cunningham: I thank the minister for his remarks.

The difficulty is that the proposals that are apparently contained within the end-to-end review would effectively remove something like a third of the current work that is pledged to DARA. If that is removed from DARA as a whole, there is an undoubted threat to jobs throughout DARA; that is

obviously why the Welsh are campaigning so strongly, because they have the lion's share of the jobs.

If the end-to-end review is implemented, the likes of Almondbank may fall off the end of the table. That is why I want the minister to promise a visible and vocal campaign to defend jobs there. We have not really had that so far.

Tavish Scott: I take Roseanna Cunningham's points. We seek to do things in different ways. Sometimes the public presentation may not be as formidable as some would like. It is important to recognise that there are different mechanisms for getting points across. At times we have to work through existing systems in order to make our case. However, I assure Roseanna Cunningham that the case that we are making, and continue to make, will be very strong.

The agency carries out work not only for the MOD but, increasingly, for private companies, including a number of companies in the civil aviation sector. That work is important. The MOD is aware of the local authority assessment that Roseanna Cunningham mentioned and it is considering the economic impact. As Ms Cunningham would expect, officials from the Scottish Executive Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department are also involved.

I will conclude by dealing with Roseanna Cunningham's two challenges. The Scottish Executive understands local concern about Almondbank and is doing all it can to safeguard any Scottish jobs that may be under threat. We acknowledge the critical role that Almondbank plays—in terms of its professional capabilities and in terms of its wider social and economic impact. I know that Ms Cunningham has asked for a meeting with the Deputy First Minister. I have spoken to the Deputy First Minister and he is minded to arrange that meeting as soon as is practically possible. I therefore hope that the two points that Ms Cunningham raised in her final remarks have been dealt with.

Meeting closed at 17:52.

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