

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Thursday 30 October 2003

Session 2

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## Scottish Parliament

Thursday 30 October 2003

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

### Integrated Rural Development

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Good morning. The first item of business is a committee debate on motion S2M-477, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on the Rural Development Committee's report on integrated rural development.

09:30

**Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** I kick off by thanking the Rural Development Committee of the previous session and the clerks who worked on the report. I also want to thank all the people who gave evidence to the committee in its deliberations—that kind of consultation and involvement is vital to the success of our work. It is therefore appropriate that the present Environment and Rural Development Committee is able to have its first debate on the previous committee's report.

This debate is unusual. The report was completed by the previous committee before the election; we now have new committee members and, indeed, a new committee that combines environment and rural development work. However, members of the new Environment and Rural Development Committee considered that our predecessors' report should be presented formally to Parliament and ministers because that would enable the report's conclusions and recommendations to be aired and discussed. We also felt that presenting the report would enable members to reflect on the recommendations and to add new issues that have come to the fore since the report was completed.

I want to highlight some key areas of the report and then to outline some major challenges that the Environment and Rural Development Committee is working on. I fully expect colleagues in the chamber who were involved in drafting the report to discuss the issues that they regarded as being of the utmost importance. I am sure that my colleagues on the new committee will wish to share their thoughts, too. The debate is therefore unusual, but we felt that it is important to have cross-fertilisation of ideas.

In its inquiry, the Rural Development Committee was presented with a wide range of evidence. If members look through the report, they will see that the committee covered a large number of issues, including farming, forestry, the rural economy in

the round, the need for affordable housing and rural transport, renewable energy and ways of improving the planning system. In general, the committee found a lack of effective integration between the policies of the statutory development agencies and it felt that there was a tendency for each organisation to pursue its own agenda. That has led to a piecemeal approach to rural development. I am sure that that theme will run through colleagues' comments on the different policy areas.

The committee identified pressing issues for rural Scotland. On farming, the committee believed that more small farmers and crofters should benefit from the rural stewardship scheme. The minister has already agreed to some developments on that issue; however, the effectiveness of the changes needs to be kept continually under review by Parliament and by our committee.

Personally, I want extension of agri-environment schemes, with more effective support for farmers and with financial payments that will enable more integrated local approaches. The Executive has already signalled to us the potential use of land management contracts. That could provide a new basis of support for farming in line with the wider public interest.

The committee recommended that the Scottish Executive implement a single marketing and labelling scheme for Scottish farm produce in order to promote greater traceability and consumer confidence in Scottish farm products. On labelling and consumer confidence, the committee considered that there needs to be more support for niche markets that are based on high quality and high environmental standards.

Since the committee's report was produced, we have had the Executive's "Organic Action Plan", which addresses issues such as marketing, quality of production and financial support. It also considers issues such as better distribution mechanisms—farmers' markets, for example—which would enable a more direct relationship between producers and consumers, with clearly labelled produce, high quality and high-value choices for consumers and opportunities for farmers. An expansion of organic or more environmentally responsible farming could also have spin-offs in other areas—for example, improved water quality and a reduction in costs for farmers. That point was made during the Environment and Rural Development Committee's visit to Perthshire this week.

The previous committee recommended that the Scottish Executive develop a comprehensive forestry policy. That committee identified some particular issues, including the need to develop existing and new markets, such as biomass

energy and the use of wood in construction, and the need to develop a more sympathetic procurement policy so that the use of local products is encouraged. In addition, the committee had a strong sense that policies should work in an integrated way in order to gain the maximum value from the forestry industry.

A particular issue that the committee highlighted was the relationship between forestry and local transport infrastructure. I know that some members in the chamber are concerned about that. During our committee's visit this week, wider issues arose, such as wildlife management and access to tourism. Those issues have to be considered in the management and development of forestry.

Some of the most interesting recommendations in the previous committee's report were on the rural economy and rural housing. Those two issues are inextricably linked. The committee recommended that, in the short term, the Scottish Executive examine a rural rates-relief scheme for rural businesses. In the longer term, the committee wanted a review of the valuation system for assessing rural business premises. The committee acknowledged the difficulties faced by anyone wishing to create a new business in a rural area. However, it highlighted that unemployment was not the key issue. The key issue was getting suitable labour and finding accommodation to enable continuity of employment for people in rural industries. Those difficulties are increased by problems in obtaining land, connecting to services and obtaining financial support.

The previous committee saw evidence of the present barriers to integrated rural development and felt that such issues should be highlighted and tackled. In taking evidence on the Executive's budget this year, one of the issues that the present committee explored with the minister was the costs of connection to water and sewerage services. Some of the issues that the previous committee identified are now being picked up by the present committee in its scrutiny work.

A key issue that comes across loud and clear in the report is the lack of affordable rural housing. The committee said that that affects not only local populations but the ability of rural areas to attract more workers to provide labour for rural industries. The cost of housing in many rural areas creates difficulties for young people who are not able even to get on to the housing ladder. The committee believed that assistance should be targeted towards people with connections to areas, such as those who live and work or have family in the area. However, the committee acknowledged that that might be difficult to define in legislative terms. In relation to this issue, a lot of work has been done in planning. Parliament could usefully revisit some

of the legislative and planning issues. The committee felt that in order to overcome the substantial gap in available and affordable rural housing, radical and ambitious policies were required.

The committee made a number of recommendations that Parliament should consider. More areas should be zoned as suitable for rural housing that is appropriate to the needs and characteristics of areas. That should come through in every local authority's development plans. The areas that are most urgently in need of social housing should be identified and the Executive and local authorities should look towards increasing housing grants in those areas.

The committee also suggested that the Scottish Executive explore the possibility of payments' being given to local trusts and housing associations to assist them in developing affordable rural housing for those who have a connection with the area. The Executive should also prioritise access to services for new developments in rural areas.

I will not be able to go into every recommendation of the previous committee in depth. However, there are perhaps three other issues in the report that should be on our agenda—rural transport, renewable energy and planning. On rural transport, the committee raised a number of particular concerns surrounding public transport in rural areas. The committee identified lack of transport as causing difficulties in accessing employment, education and health services. Concerns were expressed about the cost of fuel, the poor state of some roads and the need to develop a more integrated public transport service for rural Scotland. All those issues were seen by the committee as substantial barriers to population mobility and economic development in rural areas. After the past four years, those issues will not be new to anyone in the chamber. We have debated them extensively.

On renewable energy, the committee recommended that the Scottish Executive take urgent steps to implement a strategy on the location of renewable energy generation structures.

The committee considered that the Executive should consult on and prepare an energy strategy for Scotland in order to co-ordinate and drive forward action on demand reduction and energy efficiency, to maximise the opportunities for renewable energy and to prevent ad hoc development in areas that require protection. This is perhaps an opportunity for members to speak personally about their dependence on former polluting technologies such as coal, oil, gas and nuclear power, and about moving to a combination

of energy efficiency with targets and reduced consumption with targets.

We can consider renewable energy from a wide range of sources and technologies. The cross-party renewable energy group is considering encouraging local energy generation and supply. A massive challenge for our Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning is to ensure that our huge offshore untapped potential can be unleashed and linked to manufacturing in Scotland—that is something that has begun to happen with wind energy.

The committee felt that the strategy should relate clearly to other government strategies, which should seek to reduce overall energy consumption, in particular in transport and waste. The Environment and Rural Development Committee has been taking evidence over the past couple of months on implementation of the national waste plan, and we have been giving particular consideration to the implications of the plan for rural areas and the challenges for waste management and reduction in such areas.

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** It is difficult to cover all the recommendations—there are about 33—but an important one is the committee's recommendation that the enterprise companies be directed to identify mechanisms through which core funding can be strategically directed to local community development companies. Those local development companies are the bedrock of community involvement in rural Scotland, but the Executive's response to that recommendation has been rather negative. Would the convener of the new committee recognise that and take it on?

**Sarah Boyack:** As I made clear at the start, the Environment and Rural Development Committee has not been through all the recommendations. We wanted to ensure that the report was discussed in Parliament. I am interested to hear the views of all members on matters that they think the Environment and Rural Development Committee should consider further. I am sure that other committee members would be interested to hear those views.

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

**Sarah Boyack:** No, I would like to get on.

The Rural Development Committee covered planning. What comes through loud and clear in its report is the feeling that is widespread throughout rural Scotland that many planning procedures are too tightly controlled and inflexible. There are recommendations on planning that could usefully be considered in the light of the new planning bill that is being considered by the Executive. A particular issue that was highlighted by the

committee was the regulations on the conversion to other uses of existing rural buildings. A number of recommendations related to planning for affordable housing.

There are a huge number of issues—Mike Rumbles raised one that I have not covered. There are many recommendations that I have been unable to mention, but I have tried to give members a sense of the wealth of key issues that were identified in the report.

There are new challenges. The Environment and Rural Development Committee is conscious that agendas are moving on. The committee is picking up new rural issues and, given its remit, considering them from the perspective of the environment. One of the key issues that has come to the fore since the committee concluded its report is the debate on the current problems of the fishing industry in relation to white fish. It is an issue that the new committee will consider over the coming months and I am sure that it is one that we will debate with the minister in relation to his negotiations on the common fisheries policy.

The other key challenge of which the new committee is very conscious and that it is trying to prepare for is the mid-term review of the common agricultural policy. The minister has published a document for consultation, which the committee will have to consider over the coming months. CAP reform is a big opportunity for the committee to be visionary—we must make the most out of what will be a difficult challenge for rural Scotland. The committee will have to work with our farming and rural communities to ensure that their views are properly plugged into the approach that we take in Scotland.

We must consider the opportunities in rural development that we could maximise. In the past, there have been opportunities for matched funding from the UK Treasury, which may mean more money for rural development. Rather than consider farming in isolation, we should consider its contribution to wider rural development and we should pick up on some of the integrated approaches that the previous committee raised in its report.

A big challenge for us all is to consider diversification in our rural communities and reflect on what flexibilities might be available to involve rural communities in a more integrated approach to countryside stewardship in the public interest. The Environment and Rural Development Committee will be returning to that issue, which is one in which the minister is currently engaged. The new committee, with new energy and the new job of considering environment and rural development, has been given the opportunity and the challenge to consider an integrated approach to rural development. We should engage in that.

I am clear from the work of the previous committee that it wanted to ensure that rural and remote communities have their distinct needs reflected across the range of Government policy and initiatives. That means practical support for innovation and enterprise in our rural communities and it means working with local authorities to protect and develop rural services. It is about maintaining strong, prosperous and growing communities in rural Scotland. That is a challenge not only for the Environment and Rural Development Committee but for all members. It should cut across the work of the Parliament and the Executive.

I would be particularly interested to know when the review of the rural development plan will be published. I know that its publication is close, but I wonder whether the minister will mention it this morning. There is a big issue about how we involve people in rural Scotland—the key stakeholders in the next rural development plan. There has been some criticism of the options that have been presented and it has been suggested that we need a wider and more visionary approach. There is a big challenge for us all in scrutinising the Executive and in considering how a more integrated approach to rural development can be taken throughout the Executive. It is fair to say that the Environment and Rural Development Committee is at the early stages of getting to grips with that; it is on our agenda for the coming session of Parliament.

As a committee convener, it is a bit unusual for me to be reflecting on the work of a previous committee, but there is much in the report that we should be debating in the chamber. I hope that I have added one or two thoughts about the direction that the Environment and Rural Development Committee will take in the future. Let us have a good debate this morning and let us thank the previous committee for its work. The new committee is keen that a bit of space should be created for members to have a debate, to develop the issue of integrated rural development and to allow members to put issues on the agenda not only of the Environment and Rural Development Committee, but of the Executive.

I will conclude now. I do not know how many minutes I had, but perhaps we will get an extra speaker in if I stop now.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the recommendations contained in the Rural Development Committee's 1st Report 2003 (Session 1): *Inquiry into Integrated Rural Development* (SP Paper 735).

09:47

**Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP):** I represent a constituency that has a considerable

rural interest, but I am also a member of the successor committee to the Rural Development Committee, which carried out the inquiry in the previous session. I commend the members of that committee for carrying out a detailed and in-depth inquiry. It is fair to say that there is enough material in the report for at least half a dozen debates in the chamber; we may well have them over the next few months. I wish in particular to associate myself with Sarah Boyack's comments, especially regarding affordable housing, which is an issue that bedevils most parts of rural Scotland, including Perthshire. It is a huge problem, which needs to be addressed in the near future. What Sarah had to say about that was very important.

The subject matter of the report is very broad. I cannot hope in the course of this speech to cover all the committee's findings and the Executive's responses to them, so I will concentrate on three specific areas: alternative energy, transport and rural businesses. The recommendation with regard to fisheries would normally be dealt with by my colleague Richard Lochhead, who it was originally intended would be summing up for the Scottish National Party at the end of today's debate. However Richard has other—perhaps more immediately important—matters to deal with at present. I am sure that all members will join me in congratulating him and his wife and in welcoming the safe arrival of their baby boy. *[Applause.]* I think that he is taking only a week's paternity leave and will be back next week.

I have long been a supporter of renewable energy and believe that Scotland has the potential to become a world leader in renewables, as well as the potential—if we get it right—eventually to produce all of our energy needs from renewable sources, and quickly to meet and surpass any emission targets that might be set. Investment in alternative energy technologies can have a direct benefit for the rural and national economy of Scotland, as well as a direct benefit for the rural, national and global environment.

However, the appalling way in which the present development of wind farms is being handled represents a potential threat to the whole future of public confidence in the benefits of alternative energies. The committee makes three specific recommendations, all of which are reflected in motion S2M-487, which I have lodged with the chamber office. I have added some further recommendations and urge members to support the motion.

Onshore wind energy is in effect the only new renewable source that is currently commercially viable—wave and tidal energy are still approximately eight to 12 years away from viability, as I understand it. Meanwhile, the energy companies are required by the Government to



reach renewable targets, and they fear financial sanctions if they fail.

That is the background to the huge number of wind farm applications that are being made the length and breadth of Scotland. Not all those applications will be successful. I am told that, at present, the success rate appears to be one in eight, although I am unable to verify that information, and other sources suggest that it could be lower. That is an issue that must be addressed. In truth, the developers themselves seem to be no more satisfied with the process than are local communities. Both sides want a clearer indication of designated areas where wind farms would be considered appropriate and a far more strategic approach to the whole business. More clarity is needed. To be frank, it is time for the Scottish Executive to heed the concerns that are being expressed, not just in the Rural Development Committee's report but across the board by developers and communities alike, and to provide a more transparent and flexible process than is available at present.

The committee recommended the implementation of

"a strategy on the location of renewable energy generation structures";

that the Executive and local authorities work together to identify specific

"potential development zones ... in local structure and development plans",

and

"that local communities should have access to advice on proposed alternative energy developments independent of that of the proposal's developers. This should include the provision of advice on setting up of ... community funds".

I support all those recommendations and would go further in recommending that the Executive actively promote and assist community-led renewable energy projects. That is what made wind power development in Denmark easier for communities to take on board and what made it the huge success that it is today.

Those recommendations were published in January 2003. Since then, our postbags have started to bulge with letters from constituents about wind farms. If the Executive had acted on the advice of the committee at the time, it would have gone a long way to addressing many of the concerns that exercise so many of my constituents and, no doubt, people the length and breadth of the country.

I would like to refer briefly to the Scottish Executive's response to the report. Its reaction was to say that

"the issue of such guidance would not be a productive step at this time."

I have to say that I cannot begin to imagine anything less productive than the situation that we have at present. The response continues:

"The Executive believes that there are dangers in such an approach; these include concentrating developments within particular areas".

Well, developments are being concentrated within particular areas under the present system, and the whole issue must be addressed if we are not entirely to lose public confidence and public support for renewable energy in the future.

I turn now to transport, which is another huge preoccupation of mine. I am not surprised that transport was found to be of great concern in every area that the committee visited. People in towns and cities may have complaints about the way in which public transport in their areas operates, but they pretty much take it for granted that it will be there. People in rural areas have no such security, and I cannot begin to describe the effect that that has.

Nor should it be assumed that everyone in rural areas has a car. In my constituency, there are some wards where more than 50 per cent of households are without a car, while in others the figure is less than 10 per cent. In Crieff, where I live and which is 20 miles west of Perth, there are two council wards—one where nearly one household in three has no car and another where the figure is almost one in four.

I do my best to travel around my constituency using public transport as much as possible, so I know how hard it is to do so. For people to try to commute daily by public transport must be almost impossible. We need a rural public transport system that meets the needs of people who have no access to a car and which also encourages those who are dependent on their cars to leave them at home. I am extremely supportive of campaigns by a number of communities in my constituency—mirrored, I suspect, in other constituencies—to open or re-open local train stations. That is something that the Executive really needs to get behind.

When it comes to rural businesses, improved transport links would be a huge boost to the rural economy: it needs a huge boost. Walking the main streets of towns and villages in Perthshire and elsewhere brings that home with a vengeance. I see businesses closing down, "To Let" and "For Sale" signs sprouting everywhere and empty shops in the high streets of villages and rural towns.

The committee recommended that the Executive "examine a rural rates relief scheme for rural businesses", as a short-term measure. In the longer term, it recommended

“a review of the valuation system for assessing rural business premises.”

Rural businesses provide the jobs and services that keep rural communities alive. They must be supported and encouraged and the Executive must remember that the term “rural business” covers far more than simply a village shop, a petrol station or a hotel. Those forms of enterprise are extremely valuable, but the rural economy needs a much broader base than that, and it does not currently have such a base.

In its response to those and to many of the committee’s other recommendations, the Executive tries to claim that it is, in some way, already doing what the committee is calling for. The members of the committee were not stupid; they were taking evidence from people who said, “These are the problems we are currently experiencing.” Nor were the people stupid who gave the believable evidence that led to those recommendations’ being made. In many instances, the committee did not believe that what was being done was happening well enough, fast enough or widely enough.

I am confident that the Parliament will indeed pass the motion noting the recommendations that are contained in the then Rural Development Committee’s report. More to the point, I want to see the Executive actually taking the recommendations on board and making some of the changes that rural communities so badly need.

09:56

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):**

It is strange to find ourselves debating a report for which most of the work was done almost a year ago, but this is perhaps our first opportunity to consider a committee report after a little time lapse to see exactly how accurate some of what it said was. It is a tribute to the members of the Rural Development Committee that so much of what they put in their report has come to fruition.

The Parliament and the Executive took the whole area of integrated rural development to their hearts at an early stage. The establishment of a cross-cutting Cabinet committee is an example of how seriously the matter is taken. However, we have to be careful about exactly what we mean by integrated rural development and how we apply that to policy across the board.

We could take a general view and examine the problems associated with the underfunding of health services in some rural areas; I continually get my ear bent by Grampian NHS Board, for example. We could also look at the nature of funding for local government; Aberdeenshire Council regularly invites members of the Scottish Parliament from all parties to meetings at which it

explains how extremely underfunded it is. I recognise that Aberdeenshire Council and other local authorities find themselves at a disadvantage in terms of funding. However, if a committee is to report on integrated rural development, it must be a little more specific and look at the important areas on which the Minister for Environment and Rural Development and other ministers with joint responsibility have a direct impact.

I have therefore picked out a cross-section of subjects, much as Roseanna Cunningham did. One subject that she mentioned, and which I would like to raise in the initial moments of my speech, is wind farms. Much has been said about what was in the report—in fact, I have the recommendations and the Executive response in front of me now. It is no surprise to discover that, all this time after the Government responded negatively to the committee’s recommendations on the strategy for wind farms, both my colleague Murdo Fraser and Roseanna Cunningham have lodged motions that clearly reflect the committee’s recommendation

“that the Scottish Executive take urgent steps to implement a strategy on the location of renewable energy generation structures in the landscape.”

We are all disturbed about the number of letters that we receive on the issue. I have taken the opportunity to visit a number of sites and I can understand why people are concerned. Scotland’s landscape is an important part of our attraction to many tourists. Given that tourism is an important resource in Scotland, we must consider the impact that wind farms may have on the attitudes of those who choose to visit rural Scotland. However, as the subject has already been covered, I offer Roseanna Cunningham my full backing. I shall sign her motion when I have the opportunity to do so later today.

Housing is extensively covered in the report and a number of recommendations are made. I will give my views on the recommendations because I believe that we must not make the mistake of not seeing all the possibilities that exist.

As Sarah Boyack said, on Tuesday the Environment and Rural Development Committee went to a number of Highland areas to carry out research on our stage 1 report for a forthcoming bill. The people whom we meet when we go on such visits never miss the opportunity to bend our ears on a whole list of subjects. When we visited Braemar, I was taken aside and told clearly about housing problems in the area, which relate to the great interest in tourism there. Many houses that come on to the market end up in the hands of people who want holiday homes.

We must address those issues carefully. In places such as Braemar, there is an opportunity for adequate support to be given to enable the

private rented sector to deliver in a way that it cannot in other areas. Large estates in the Braemar area are particularly keen to ensure that there are opportunities for local people to find affordable accommodation. Perhaps that is the means by which development can best be focused.

**Mr Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Did the people who took the member aside say whether estate owners were prepared to release land so that affordable housing could be built?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** I call Alex Fergusson. I am sorry—I meant Alex Johnstone.

**Alex Johnstone:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. It is rare for the Presiding Officer to have to apologise to a member—usually, a member has to apologise to the Presiding Officer. I refer to my record as well as to that of other members.

It is important to realise that estate owners and landowners in areas such as Braemar make significant inputs. Rob Gibson is right to say that the need to release land is a key issue—indeed, that issue is highlighted in the report. There is an opportunity through providing limited support to the private rented sector to create housing for local people, which is the intention of many estates.

**Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP):** The people who took the member aside must have been extreme heavyweights. On affordable rural housing, what is the Conservative party's view about tied accommodation, which is a major issue in rural areas? Are the Conservatives for it or agin it?

**Alex Johnstone:** I am not a party spokesman on that issue and consequently cannot speak for the party. However, I can give my own opinion. I believe that tied housing might be necessary in specific instances and that there will always be such instances. In general, however, tied housing is an anachronism from which we should look for ways to escape. I hope that the member will accept that that is my personal opinion, which I will put forward in policy discussions when opportunities arise.

Before I leave the subject of housing—and I had better leave the subject quickly—I will just say that we must recognise the importance of owner occupation, which is not easy to provide in areas such as Aberdeenshire, where I live. In Aberdeenshire, when houses are put up for sale, they tend to make huge amounts of money, which consequently excludes ordinary people from getting a first foot on the housing ladder. We must never forget that encouraging ownership of property among all young people is extremely

important—young people should have the opportunity to get a first foot on the housing ladder. That cannot be achieved in many areas of Scotland, but we should ensure that people have opportunities to get on to the property ladder.

On general planning, I will highlight what the report said about changing the use of buildings, although not specifically for housing purposes. Unfortunately, proposals relating to the many opportunities that have arisen in rural Scotland for disused farm steadings to be used as industrial bases have not been approved by many local authorities. Many small farms are being amalgamated—we might regret that, but it is inevitable, given current trends in farming. We must ensure that buildings can be utilised. In many areas, there are opportunities for jobs to be created through industrial development as well as through conversion of buildings to houses.

Rural public transport has been mentioned many times and I agree with much of what has been said. However, I will talk briefly about the importance of road maintenance and the development of roads in rural areas. I am well aware of the experience of Angus Council, which has made an enormous commitment to the development of the A92 and the replacement of the Montrose bridge. That commitment has vastly depleted its roads budget. As a consequence, it is now in a position where deprivation is beginning to affect its roads.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** And you are now in a position of summing up, I hope.

**Alex Johnstone:** Indeed. I thank the Presiding Officer for her consideration. I commend the report to the Parliament.

10:06

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** I was not a member of the Rural Development Committee in the previous session, so I do not feel constrained in heaping praise on its modus operandi for gathering evidence for the report.

As the constituency MSP, I was involved in the committee's visit to Huntly, where it was clear that local people were delighted and well satisfied by the opportunities that were afforded to them to share their experience and knowledge with committee members. The reception that was held in the evening before the formal committee session was particularly useful in giving a great many more people access to committee members than could have been managed in the formal session. Furthermore, the feedback that I received from people who were involved in giving formal evidence was that they felt much more relaxed about giving evidence—they had already met the committee members and so nerves did not inhibit

them in getting across the information that they had to offer.

The report is wide ranging and based on evidence from a' the airts and pairts of Scotland, but it is striking how the barriers to rural development that have emerged in each area are so similar. There are small-scale and expensive barriers. Distances, poor roads, high fuel costs and poor or no public transport make travel and communications difficult and therefore expensive. There are staff-recruitment limitations for incoming or developing businesses, which are partly or largely due to a lack of housing—never mind a lack of affordable housing—or to a lack of transport for potential staff to get to job opportunities.

Mitigation of the effects of such barriers requires two things—recognition that such barriers exist, with an acceptance that they should be compensated for, and willingness to compensate for them. Perhaps realistic quantification of the added costs of living in, operating in and delivering services to a scattered population is a third requirement. The report and the Executive's response to it demonstrate that things are beginning to move in the right direction, but there is still a long way to go.

I will briefly discuss a number of the committee's recommendations. I see where the committee is coming from in relation to an overall strategy for siting alternative energy developments and I have a deal of sympathy with that concept, but we must take care not to impinge on the planning responsibilities of democratically elected, locally accountable councils.

I heartily endorse the committee's recommendations on support for local communities that find themselves negotiating how they can benefit from developments that affect them without the resources or access to expertise that is available to developers. Recently, I was invited to a meeting in Keith by a group of people from the area around Drummuir. They have made extremely creditable progress in preparing for the possibility that they will have a community fund derived from a proposed wind farm development. However, they wanted to impress on their MP and MSP how difficult they had found the process, how much they had had to learn and how isolated and unsupported they had felt. They are now faced with the prospect of negotiating the level of contribution that the wind farm developer ought to make to the community and how that should be made. Why should people have to start from scratch every time?

**Mrs Ewing:** Nora Radcliffe and I share an interest in what is happening at Drummuir. Does she agree that any community funding should not

be a one-off payment but should be placed in a trust for future generations?

**Nora Radcliffe:** That is the solution that the people in the area have arrived at after starting from first principles and putting in an awful lot of work.

Information, advice, guidance and the resources to buy in the necessary expertise ought to be made available to communities in such situations. That could be done through community councils—I concur with the report that more responsibility could usefully be devolved to community councils. The funding could come either from the revenues that will accrue to local authorities from the developments or from central Government.

Communities should derive benefits from developments that will affect them. I liked the succinct comment of a councillor from the northern isles who did not think that Shetlanders would be prepared to accommodate wind farm developments on the basis of doing urban Britain a favour. He is quite right.

The committee made a recommendation on labelling for Scottish farm produce. In the Liberal Democrat manifesto, we advocated local accreditation schemes for locally produced food, to encourage greater links between producer and consumer, to cut food miles and to give people who want to buy local produce the reassurance that they are genuinely supporting local producers. We also said that agreement should be negotiated with supermarket chains and the farming industry on a code of practice for sourcing and labelling local food items alongside those produced by organic and sustainable methods—again, that would facilitate consumer choice.

**Tommy Sheridan:** I am glad that the member has raised that point, as I wanted to raise it with Sarah Boyack earlier. How does the member respond to the Executive's opinion that there is no support for the strategy that is recommended by the committee of labelling local farm produce?

**Nora Radcliffe:** The point that I am about to make will demonstrate why I think that it would be a good idea if we made progress in that area. Asda has identified a sales opportunity for local products that it values at £160 million. That would be a significant injection of cash into local economies.

Liberal Democrats agree with the committee that we should be exploring forestry potential, especially as Britain imports nearly 80 per cent of its wood and wood products at an annual cost of £6 billion. It would be extremely nice if even a fraction of that money could be spent closer to home.

I was a little disappointed that the report did not go further on e-connection and particularly access

to broadband. That is, perhaps, an indication that the situation has moved on in the months since the report was prepared. It seems to me that leaving the provision of broadband to the market inevitably disadvantages those communities that need it most. Even where ADSL is available, it is not adequate for many businesses that require symmetrical access because they need both to send and to receive large files—it is no good to them if fast access is available in only one direction. There should be much greater public investment in that and a bit more imagination in relation to the solutions, as that would pay dividends.

The committee's report is useful and draws together a number of issues from some excellent consultation across Scotland. I think that it will help to advance the worthwhile cause of the economic well-being of rural Scotland.

10:14

**Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab):** I am grateful to the convener of the Environment and Rural Development Committee for taking us on a tour de force of the committee's report. Sarah Boyack has led an extended moment for reflection as opposed to a debate. Our discussion this morning has been less fraught than our usual discussions on the state of the integration of the rural economy.

I will reflect on some of the recommendations from a constituency perspective. As Sarah Boyack said, one of the issues that was found to be exercising many people in the areas that the Rural Development Committee visited and that was raised by those who submitted written and oral evidence to the committee was the lack of effective integration between the policies of the statutory development agencies. It was felt that there was, sadly, a tendency for each organisation to pursue its own agenda.

I could cite many examples of that, but I will spare the blushes of the bureaucrats involved and, instead, hold up the example of the "initiative at the edge" programme, or "iomairt aig an oir", as it is better known in my constituency. The initiative is an excellent example of the way in which to deal head on with those who are not for change.

There are four iomairt aig an oir areas in my constituency and eight in total in the Highlands and Islands. Prior to the launch of iomairt aig an oir, each area in my constituency faced different challenges. However, all four regions had one thing in common, which was that their demise was being presided over by a plethora of statutory bodies, each with its own set of priorities, which were not aligned with the needs of the community that the bodies were there to serve and that they

thought that they were serving. Not only were the bodies out of sync with the community, but many of them worked in complete and absolute isolation. They never consulted one another and, despite the earnestness of their efforts, they usually had little impact locally.

The situation changed in 1998, when iomairt aig an oir was launched. One of the cornerstones of the iomairt was that public agencies should simply align their efforts in some of their more fragile communities. To their credit, many agencies responded positively but, sadly, others had to be dragged to the party. The bottom line is that the pilot has delivered in the designated areas. For example, in Uig and Bernera on Lewis, the extremely competent development officer, Sarah MacLean, can account for every penny of the money that the iomairt has helped to direct into positive action in the community. Not only has in excess of £1 million been spent in a co-ordinated manner but, through her efforts and the efforts of others, 14 jobs have been created or retained.

Change was achieved and continues to be achieved not by simply levering money into a community but by getting agencies to integrate their efforts. In the iomairt areas that I have mentioned, the job is by no means complete, but the method of doing business there can be and should be translated to other parts of rural Scotland. That will require attitudinal change; it will require funding partners sometimes to cede powers to local development groups that might be better placed to make decisions on behalf of the local community.

The committee makes recommendations in relation to giving farmers and crofters assistance with the marketing of their produce and to finding ways of ensuring that they are helped in pulling together and streamlining the management of quality assurance schemes for agricultural produce. I endorse the report's recommendation that we need to implement a simple labelling scheme for Scottish produce that will promote greater traceability and consumer confidence in our croft and farm produce. The "Orkney Gold" label is an excellent example of the sort of scheme that should be implemented; the scheme should be translated across Scotland, just as the working practices of iomairt aig an oir should be.

Everyone this morning has touched on housing. As Sarah Boyack rightly said, the issue affects not only the local population, but the ability of an area to stimulate the economy. The Western Isles are in the fortunate position of having witnessed an increase in house prices, although prices there are still low when compared to those in most parts of Scotland. That is one indicator that the economy is on the upturn. Of course, we must factor into any analysis of the housing market the great number

of people who are now rightly making a lifestyle choice to move away from the packed conurbations and to cast their lot in with those of us who reside in the Scottish islands.

I have no hesitation in applauding Margaret Curran for the way in which she has tackled the lack of affordable housing in my constituency. Ten months ago, she visited the Western Isles and brought with her some £2 million cash that is being used to build homes—

**Mrs Ewing:** Did she have it on her?

**Mr Morrison:** Yes, she brought it in her handbag.

The minister recently announced a further £10 million of funding. Sadly, although she made the announcement in Stornoway, the money will not be spent in the Western Isles, although it will be spent in other parts of Scotland.

Alex Johnstone and Roseanna Cunningham mentioned renewable energy and wind farm developments. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the details of the issue that Roseanna Cunningham raised but, on the broad issue, I believe that it would be irresponsible for the Parliament to embrace the suggestion of, I think, Murdo Fraser and Christine Grahame of the SNP, who called for a moratorium on wind farm developments. That suggestion would create a moratorium on jobs and investment, for which many thousands of people in rural Scotland would not thank us and would never forgive us.

10:20

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Integrated rural development is probably as unobtainable as the holy grail, although it is clearly a desirable objective. I suspect that achieving integrated urban development is just as impractical, although the problems might be rather easier to solve in the urban situation simply because of the shorter distances involved. However, the objective is worth aiming at, even if we do not achieve it.

As paragraph 12 of the Rural Development Committee's report points out, the problem is not helped by the plethora of organisations involved, which serves

"to obstruct, rather than assist, local decision-making."

I could not agree more with that. A further problem is that the number of bodies is increasing. The point is not party political, because I suspect that an Executive of any composition would be subject to the problem. Every Executive initiative, no matter how welcome, seems to spawn yet another body, which means that people must continually deal with new agencies and their local offices.

To make a parochial point, I emphasise that rural does not equate to the Highlands and Islands. The Rural Development Committee did not make that error in its inquiry, during which it visited places throughout Scotland, but the error is often made by others, particularly Government and its agencies, when they roll out initiatives. Paragraph 8 of the report mentions various pilot programmes, but apart from the LEADER programmes, which are Scotland-wide, the four examples that the committee found were in the Western Isles, Shetland, Argyll and Sutherland. No programmes from elsewhere in rural Scotland were mentioned. Although the highest degree of rurality and the problems caused by it exist in the Highlands and Islands, some areas in the south-west and the Borders are much more rural and remote than parts of the Highlands and Islands.

I will pick up on some of the issues raised in the report, but, in doing so, I suspect that I will be no more integrated than rural development is. The debate will probably involve some repetition and we might find out at the end of it that we all agree on what the problems are. I have always thought that e-commerce, e-learning, e-etc provide a great chance to remove the disadvantages—the problems of distance and remoteness—from which rural areas have suffered for a long time. However, as paragraph 42 of the report states:

"rural communities are most in need of communications technology, but receive it last."

In some ways, the arrival of broadband on the scene in Scotland and the United Kingdom is exacerbating the disadvantages of rural areas when compared to urban areas. I do not criticise BT, which is the main provider of broadband and which rightly operates on a commercial basis. However, I find it strange that, in Northern Ireland, there is a contract to upgrade all the exchanges to be suitable for broadband. I also find it strange that 5 per cent of the population of Finland, which is much more rural than Scotland, has access to a digital subscriber line, whereas in the UK only 3.9 per cent of the population has access to broadband. If Finland, with all its problems of vastness and remoteness, can achieve a higher figure than the UK, what is it doing right that we are getting wrong?

Housing is a major problem; it is the single biggest issue in members' constituency mailbags. Aside from the occasional campaigns on fox hunting or wind farms, the most consistently raised issue is that of people's inability to get a house. The well-known scenario of decreasing public housing stock in an area and increasing demand from outside means that prices increase and the ability of locals—who are often on much lower wages than people who come from outside the area—to buy or rent housing decreases. That

scenario has a negative effect on the working population. The matter touches on another issue that the committee referred to, which is the increasing skills shortage in certain parts of the rural economy. That problem is exacerbated if people who want to stay and who could have a useful and well-paid job cannot find somewhere to stay.

Housing is a clear example of an issue on which integration has not taken place. One problem is with the planning regulations, which seem to create a presumption against development, although the countryside is by no means full. Even when people receive planning permission, the chances of their being connected to Scottish Water's water or sewerage system is remote.

The environment and culture committee will launch a major inquiry into renewable energy at the beginning of January.

**Sarah Boyack:** I take it that Alasdair Morgan is referring to the Enterprise and Culture Committee.

**Alasdair Morgan:** Sorry, that was a slip of the tongue. I meant the Enterprise and Culture Committee—it has so many things in its remit that it is no wonder that I sometimes get the title mixed up.

I suspect that the localisation of wind farm and hydroelectric developments is one way in which we can overcome objections, because it will mean that areas generate their own power. However, the problem is that, no matter how local the power source, people need a back-up, especially on cold days in the winter, for times when there is no wind. Some areas must host the power stations that will enable people to turn on the lights when it gets dark.

The report refers to the future of local learning. I confess that I was not clear for which local learning centres the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council is being invited to provide funding. I did not have the chance to read the evidence, but I know that the Crichton campus in Dumfries and Galloway and the UHI Millennium Institute—which are excellent examples of higher education being taken to rural areas, thereby enabling people to stay there—have problems with the funding mechanism. Under the funding mechanism for the University of Glasgow and the University of Paisley, which have outposts at the Crichton campus, the funding for posts at the campus is treated as part of the funding for the University of Glasgow or the University of Paisley as a whole. Therefore, the increased costs of setting up in an area such as Dumfries and Galloway and coping with the greater distances involved are not reflected in the funding. We must consider that issue.

Next week, we will debate the reform of the

common agricultural policy. We should remember that the CAP market support budget is £340 million and that the rural development budget is £135 million—the biggest single element of that is for less favoured area support and most of the rest goes to agriculture. Those huge amounts are the biggest single input into the rural economy. Irrespective of whether members are sticking up for their constituents or for their party's policy, we must ask ourselves whether we are using that money in the best way. As the funding source declines as a percentage of the total, we must ask whether, during the years in which the CAP has existed, we have improved rural Scotland. I suspect that, if we are honest, we will say that the answer is no. We must examine how to use the money to the best advantage of all rural Scotland.

10:29

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands (Con):** I was a member of the Rural Development Committee when it undertook its inquiry into integrated rural development. I enjoyed working on the inquiry and I am relieved that the Parliament is eventually debating this important report.

We Scottish Conservatives want to see a thriving countryside, because we know that a nation is secure only if the peripheral areas prosper and the rural barns are full. It is no good depending on the central belt to deliver prosperity that will somehow drip down to rural areas. We need sustainable jobs and good housing, health and education to encourage people to live in rural areas and to be proud of living there. Rural areas require continuity of families and family businesses, which means that they require confidence in the future.

That will not be achieved if rural communities feel deprived, forgotten and ignored, like the people whom we visited on the distant and beautiful island of Colonsay—a paradise indeed, but a paradise that is restricted by very limited ferry options, as are many of the islands in the inner and outer Hebrides as well as Orkney and Shetland. Fare structures, prices and routes on inter-island ferry services play a significant role for all island businesses, and unless there can be a fairer system, those businesses will always be fighting a chronic disadvantage.

Last Friday, I was privileged to attend the Scottish Thistle awards for tourism, where I was delighted by the number of winners from the Highlands and Islands. I was especially pleased by the Isle of Coll Hotel's win in the flavour of Scotland category. I have often eaten in that famous establishment, and its award is richly deserved. However, the owner of the hotel telephoned me yesterday to express his horror at next season's ferry timetable for the island of Coll.

Last year, ferries left Oban at 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning, which allowed for day trips to the island with passengers returning on the vessel on its way back to Oban from Tiree. That ferry service encouraged day trips. Next year, passengers will have to leave Oban at 6 o'clock in the morning and will be able to return only two days a week. Already, people are cancelling reservations at the hotel.

If anything is a good example of a blow against integrated development, surely that is. I urge the Minister for Transport to ensure that islands such as Coll are not ignored when it comes to supplying ferry services and that cost reductions for businesses are instigated for all island transport services. The Scottish Executive must ensure that its subsidised ferry operators—such as Caledonian MacBrayne and NorthLink—provide a service that encourages entrepreneurs to succeed in the islands. If that can be done in Norway, it can surely be done in Scotland.

The report identified the importance of crofting and farming, and one of the committee's key recommendations was that farmers and crofters should benefit from the rural stewardship scheme. I am glad that access to that scheme has recently been improved, but the future for farming looks bleak if the clawback taxes of modulation and degression take away the income that agri-environmental schemes may bring. Perhaps the Minister for Environment and Rural Development will tell me why his UK counterpart, Margaret Beckett, is so determined to implement European-led taxes on farming that would disadvantage rural communities. The rest of Europe is turning its back on those measures which, if implemented, will mean that there will be virtually no help for UK farmers and crofters within 10 years. That policy goes directly against the recommendations in the committee's report.

What has the Executive done to introduce a single marketing and labelling scheme for Scottish farm produce? That is another recommendation. What is the Executive doing to resume normal exporting of our beef to Europe? Will it put a stop to the proposal for the double tagging of sheep? Those ideas, coupled with honesty in labelling and meaningful import controls, are straightforward ways in which the Scottish Executive could help to achieve integrated rural development by helping farmers and crofters. The Executive could also help by standing up for the interests of the Scottish fishermen and by improving conditions for the aquaculture industry so that it will thrive and not be disadvantaged by bureaucratic rules and red tape.

Good biodiversity is a key issue. That means making the most of the assets that exist in an area for the benefit of the population and not ruining those assets for future generations. There are

thousands of acres of forestry, but the industry is not contributing enough in terms of income or jobs. New markets are needed, as is the development of a more sympathetic procurement policy to encourage the use of local products.

Rural areas need good roads and reasonable fuel costs, but we have high fuel costs and roads that are full of potholes. Those are further barriers to integrated rural development.

The Conservatives are committed to the rolling out of broadband technology to rural areas and small telephone exchanges to increase income potential for rural people.

**Alasdair Morgan:** On the issue of broadband, precisely how would the Conservatives achieve the roll-out to which Jamie McGrigor says that they are committed?

**Mr McGrigor:** We would pay for it out of the Scottish Enterprise budget.

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** Fantastic.

**Mr McGrigor:** Well, that is what we would do.

The committee identified rural housing as an area that requires improvement and recommended a rural rates relief scheme. However, we know that businesses in Scotland pay more in rates than businesses in the rest of the UK. That is another barrier. Conservative policy on rural housing would be to relax planning guidelines to allow the building of affordable homes for sale and rent in rural communities. Farmers would benefit from the capital injection and housing associations would be able to purchase land at reasonable prices, all of which would enhance the viability of rural communities.

The people who live at the edge have amassed much practical knowledge about what works in their environment and what does not. I therefore ask Scottish Natural Heritage to consult local people better in areas that it intends to designate as special areas of conservation. Often, it is the traditional livelihoods and pastimes of rural people that provide the protection for rare species of flora and fauna that still exist in those areas.

10:35

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** I declare an interest, as a member of the Birse Community Trust—membership of which applies to all residents of the parish of Birse.

I shall concentrate on just one of the committee's 33 recommendations:

"The Committee recommends that the Enterprise companies be directed to identify mechanisms through which core funding could be strategically directed to local community development companies."



That recommendation resulted from evidence sessions that we undertook throughout Scotland; however, the evidence that we took in Huntly, in the north-east, on 7 June last year, was particularly important. Peter Argyle, a representative of Mid Deeside Ltd, a community economic development company that was set up to serve the people of Aboyne and the surrounding area, gave a very effective presentation to the committee on exactly why such core funding is essential to effective and integrated rural development. He said that, although he was sure that the Executive was committed to the principle of community economic development organisations, he felt that there was a need for the Executive to ensure that at least a base of continuing core funding for those community organisations was made available. Mr Argyle went on to say:

“Mid Deeside Ltd forms part of a network that includes the rural development department, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise Grampian, Aberdeenshire Council and the local enterprise trusts. All those bodies have a role to play in delivering the Executive’s vision for community economic development and they are all essential. However, only the community economic development organisations do not receive core funding.”—[*Official Report, Rural Development Committee, 7 June 2002; c.3196.*]

Core funding is a major issue for all community economic development organisations. As members will be aware, much time is spent—often by voluntary staff—in chasing revenue when it should be spent on developing new projects or building on what has been achieved. If we really believe in an integrated approach to rural development, I cannot understand why the Executive is so reluctant to put communities at the centre of the decision-making process. Community economic development is important and has a direct positive impact on our rural communities. That should be recognised at the highest level, and the necessary but modest funding must be put in place to enable that to happen. The solution is to direct the enterprise companies to be forthcoming with that modest level of support.

In response to the committee’s recommendation, the Scottish Executive stated that it did not believe that a decision on core funding should be the automatic responsibility of any one agency. That point was raised earlier by Alasdair Morrison, who spoke about organisations doing their own thing separately, with everybody having their brief but nobody wanting to provide the money. The Executive went on to state that the enterprise network’s role is to tailor its funding to the specific needs of individual communities. That sounds good, but it is not good enough.

Jennifer Craw of Scottish Enterprise Grampian confirmed in her evidence to the committee that the nub of the issue was the fact that, although the enterprise company could provide core funding—

indeed, core funding is available to community economic development companies in their first three years of operation—other funding sources were available. She said:

“Scottish Enterprise Grampian is a key player in that discussion and we have an important role to play, but we do not have the only role.”

That is the problem. I said at the time:

“The point of our inquiry is that we want people like Jennifer to come before the committee and say, “Yes. Okay, we can do it.” We want to hear why you are not helping with core funding. It seems that you are saying that you would like to do so if you had the money, but other funding sources exist and so somebody else can do it. The end result is that nobody is doing it.”—[*Official Report, Rural Development Committee, 7 June 2002; c. 3221.*]

However, I am pleased to say that time has moved on. Last week, Aberdeenshire Council and Scottish Enterprise Grampian announced that they would make available £125,000 for local economic development companies in Aberdeenshire over the next two years. That is excellent news, but the fact remains that that support is for a specified period only. The Rural Development Committee’s recommendation was about ensuring that such funding should be in place for all community companies so that funding uncertainties could be removed.

I agree with the Scottish Executive’s comment that the large number of community initiatives across the networks that have survived and prospered over the long term is indeed a testimony to

“the tenacity and commitment of the people within our communities.”

However, I cannot agree with the Executive’s other comment that that is somehow testimony to the successful application of the current ad hoc approach.

We need a consistent approach throughout the country that directs enterprise companies to support our local community development companies with modest levels of core funding. Our local community development companies would then be able to add value to their modest core funds by accessing other funds for specific projects. They would be able to do so for a very modest input, but Scotland’s economy and people would gain a major return.

What is needed is vision. However, what we have from the Executive is an acceptance of the status quo. My view, and that of the committee, is that that is not an appropriate response. I ask the ministers to reconsider, even at this late stage, their response to the committee’s specific recommendation on core funding.

10:41

**Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** The Green group of MSPs welcomes the report and acknowledges the Rural Development Committee's hard work.

I am minded to think back to the summer of this year when the First Minister, in taking forward the Executive's land reform agenda, sought to extend the pre-emptive right to buy to more rural communities in Scotland. Central to integrated rural development is the issue of how rural communities use and control resources. There are many kinds of resources: buildings; housing; wind and wave resources that power renewable energy; forestry and farming land; inland waters; the coastal environment; and the services in our rural communities. The process of communities developing control of resources can, in turn, help to develop communities' social development. The process is one of people coming together to work together, which can build interdependence and mutuality within our rural communities.

The reality in much of rural Scotland is that the wealth that is created by local resources often leaves our rural communities as soon as it is created. Renewable energy is a case in point, because in many renewable energy schemes the vast bulk of the profits leaves the communities that hosted the schemes in the first place. We often see resources leaving directly without any sort of value adding or circulation within our local economies. For example, we have fantastic seafood and agricultural produce in Scotland, but the bulk of it is exported. Some areas of Scotland have great local produce, but it does not get into the local shops or public institutions. For example, such produce is not served up in school canteens.

We must move more towards community control in Scotland, whether that is achieved through communities' directly managing resources themselves or through co-operative ventures that involve private enterprises working together—for example, farm businesses. By fostering community control we can start to plug the holes in our leaky rural economies and create virtuous economic circles within our rural communities.

An example of a community trust that has been extremely successful is Strathfillan Community Development Trust. The trust started off by looking at how it could manage a small parcel of Forestry Commission Scotland land within its community. The trust wanted to manage the land for not only its conservation value, but its amenity value. It also wanted to encourage tourists to spend more time in the Strathfillan area before heading west or north in their travels. The project was successful and gave the trust the capacity to develop other projects—for example, a playpark scheme in the village, which was equally successful. The trust

then looked at the difficult issue of social housing, which has been highlighted in the debate. It took control of some ex-railway cottages in the area, did them up and is now renting them out as a form of social housing that is controlled by the community.

It is vital that we develop the capacity of communities to take on more such projects. However, it is not easy for them to do so.

**Mr McGrigor:** Does the member agree that forestry biomass should be used as a renewable energy source?

**Mr Ruskell:** Absolutely. Companies such as Torren Energy Ltd have been at the forefront of much of that work in Scotland. I would also like more public institutions to use forestry biomass. Torren Energy has developed a biomass heating system for schools that is being used in one or two schools in the Highlands. We would like more such developments in Scotland.

It can be extremely difficult for communities to go down the route of community management. Last week I went to the village of Fintry in my region, where the community is trying to develop a form of community ownership of part of a local renewable energy wind farm scheme that is proposed by private developers. The community has had a constructive dialogue with the company involved, but it is finding it extremely difficult to access the right development support and advice to take the project forward. Nora Radcliffe referred to similar examples in Drummair. Fintry is an example of a community that is taking responsibility and which is fully engaged with the often difficult issues of renewable energy, but which is finding it extremely difficult to progress that into a full form of community ownership and management.

What messages do we have for the Executive as a result of its strategy? First, there is a need for increased development support. The Executive is keen to develop communities' right to buy, especially of land and buildings. However, we must also develop our communities' capacity of knowing how to buy and manage—that is crucial. Secondly, we must ensure that the experiences of communities that have developed their own assets, such as Fintry and Drummair, go into the front end of policy development in Scotland and that the Executive listens to the people's experience. Crucial to that is filling the gap that was left by the demise of the rural forum; it is important that we have a body in Scotland that can facilitate the involvement of rural community groups and bring to bear their experience. As a new MSP, I am very much aware that the people are the second chamber of the Parliament. It is important that we learn from them.

The third, and difficult, issue, which will be dealt with next week, is the CAP. Let us not forget that the amount of money that is spent on agricultural subsidy each year in Scotland is the equivalent of 1.5 Scottish Parliaments. We need to decouple subsidy from production and recouple it to social and environmental goals, including rural development.

10:48

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I thank the members of the Rural Development Committee, who produced the report that we are discussing today, which highlights the distinct needs of rural areas. That committee went out the most to the corners of Scotland to take evidence and see what the situation was like on the ground. We have heard examples of that in the debate.

The report highlights the fact that rural development is not limited to agriculture and fisheries, although they are crucial and are the bedrock of the rural economy. Rural development also encompasses housing, transport and enterprise. I would go further and say that rural development encompasses health care and child care, and the delivery of services to and capacity building in rural areas, from the provision of Women's Aid refuges to access to drug treatment and testing orders. People in rural areas have many of the same needs as people in urban areas. The challenge is to deliver services and to support enterprise in a much more scattered community. We must consider more flexible ways of doing that. What works to deliver services in an urban area of Scotland does not work in a rural area.

Several issues are being debated today. Like other members, I will start by focusing on the lack of affordable housing in rural areas, which remains a key issue in many rural localities in my constituency of the Highlands and Islands. The Rural Development Committee's report highlights the link between rural housing and employment. Lack of housing creates difficulties for those who wish to work in a particular area but cannot afford to get on to the property ladder. It causes difficulties for both employers and employees and is constraining economic development in some parts of the Highlands. For example, a hotel in Ullapool cannot attract a chef because it cannot find accommodation for him and his family.

As the report indicates, the housing problem is aggravated by the fact that many rural houses are purchased as retirement or second homes. There is nothing wrong with that in itself, but it is a severe difficulty if it takes away housing that local people need. Local people or those on low incomes may not have access to the capital that

those who purchase retirement or second homes have. That means that people are left on a waiting list, possibly living in caravans, while they look for their first house. Some members will be aware that recently in Plockton a three-bedroom former railwayman's house was sold for £300,000, which was absolutely outwith the pocket of local people.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I commend Maureen Macmillan for highlighting the problems that exist in the Highlands. Does she agree that there have been unprecedented levels of appreciation in house prices in Inverness, which last year went up by 25 per cent? In the city of Inverness, it is now impossible for young couples and young people on low incomes to buy their first home.

**Maureen Macmillan:** I appreciate what Mary Scanlon says. However, a report that I read a couple of days ago made the point that the price of starter flats in Inverness had not risen so much and that such flats were within the pocket of young couples setting out to buy their first home.

Since the committee's report was published, the picture for affordable rented housing in the Highlands has improved. Not long ago, Skye and Lochalsh, which includes Plockton, received money for housing. Alasdair Morrison pointed out that Margaret Curran announced an extra £10 million for housing, which will go not to the Western Isles, but to the Highland Council. That is a significant investment in the rural rented sector. In the summer, I visited the day centre for the homeless in Inverness with Mary Mulligan when she announced a significant tranche of money for tackling homelessness in the Highlands. Work is being done on that issue. The Executive and local authorities can work together to deliver affordable rented housing.

Many people in rural areas want a plot of land on which to build their house, often by their own hand. That is extremely difficult. I live in easter Ross, and at the moment plots of land in Dingwall go for up to £60,000. That situation is reflected throughout the Highlands. We need a foolproof system to supply individual building sites to local people at a reasonable price, on the basis that people cannot profiteer when they later come to sell.

There is a mechanism for doing that, which is available to the Justice Department. When the Title Conditions (Scotland) Bill was passed last year, an amendment that was made on behalf of the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust created an exemption for social housing. Under the legislation, a title condition can be placed on a piece of land to ensure that it cannot be sold on at a profit. The house, which is often built with a rural grant, must stay within the community and profiteering cannot happen. The Highlands Small

Communities Housing Trust knows about that power, but I do not know who else knows about it. This is an example of the fact that we do not know what is happening across departments. There are measures that could be applied more widely in a rural context, but people do not know about them. The power that I have described could be a tool to provide housing sites for local people where land is owned by local authorities or other bodies and where landowners can be persuaded to sell.

The difficulties in providing infrastructure for rural housing developments have been debated at length in the chamber and in the former Rural Development Committee. I note that deliberations with Scottish Water are under way to see what resources can be vired across from the budget for renewing infrastructure to projects for creating new infrastructure. I underline to the minister the seriousness of this problem and how it constrains development in housing.

Transport provision in the Highlands is improving steadily. An extra £70 million has been made available for rural roads. There are improved train services around Inverness and more flights to Inverness airport. There is a real possibility of creating an integrated Highlands and Islands air network. There are new ferries and many community transport schemes. We need to get more lorries off the road. There is good practice in Argyll, where timber is being shipped from Ardrishaig and Campbeltown rather than being hauled by road. Transport will always be a challenge in rural areas—a challenge that must be met if the aspirations of rural Scotland are to be realised. That applies both to youngsters who want an evening bus service to Inverness and to commuters to Fort William from the west who want to travel by train rather than by car. One issue close to my heart is the difficulty of getting toddlers to nursery school in remote rural areas, which is a significant problem in wester Ross.

Finally, I must mention aspirations. There must be an improvement in the delivery of justice in the Highlands. As a member of the Justice 2 Committee, I am very aware of justice matters in rural areas. We have the same problems of antisocial behaviour and alcohol and drug misuse that urban areas have. We need drug treatment and testing orders and rehabilitation facilities that remoter communities can access easily. We need a modern prison and modern courtrooms just as much as urban areas do. There is an awareness that did not exist four years ago of the justice needs of rural areas. I look forward to continuing improvement in facilities that will match the excellent work of Northern constabulary, the Procurator Fiscal Service, local authorities and voluntary organisations throughout rural communities.

10:57

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** I want to respond to one of the last points that Maureen Macmillan made. It would have been better for all of Scotland and, indeed, the whole United Kingdom if the decision to transfer postal deliveries from train to road had not been taken at national level. Maureen Macmillan is absolutely right when she says that we need to get more lorries off our roads, but such decisions put more lorries on to our roads and increase the decimation of freight transport not only in places such as Inverness and Stranraer but throughout rural Scotland.

It is important that the Rural Development Committee's report is discussed today. Its development took almost a year, during which evidence was taken from a wide range of organisations and individuals. It is not necessary constantly to reinvent the wheel, so I hope that the new Environment and Rural Development Committee, which assumes the responsibilities of the Rural Development Committee, will study seriously the 33 recommendations, some of which are absolutely vital for rural regeneration. I will concentrate on just two of them.

The first relates to housing, which a number of members have already discussed. I refer to the committee report, which stated:

"in order to overcome the substantial gap in available and affordable rural housing, radical and ambitious policies will be required."

The committee went on to list a few suggestions. Those included to

"ensure that more areas are zoned as being suitable for rural housing that is appropriate to the needs and characteristics of that area",

to

"identify the areas most urgently in need of social housing, and ... strongly consider increasing housing grants in these areas",

to

"explore the possibility of payments being given to local trusts and housing associations to assist them in developing affordable rural housing"

and to

"prioritise access to services for new developments in rural areas."

I mention those specific points because I hope that the minister in his response to the debate will indicate how many of them have been taken on board. The conference of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations a couple of weeks ago highlighted the fact that the problems in rural housing are becoming worse, not better.

We have a serious problem in relation to access to social housing in particular: people in rural areas feel that they are being neglected with regard to the replacement of houses that have been purchased. Houses that were built for society as a whole—social housing—but which have been sold off are not being replaced. I hope that today the minister will give us robust information that suggests that the “radical and ambitious policies” that the committee report seeks will be implemented.

The second issue to which I will refer relates to the point that I made to Nora Radcliffe during her speech. The committee recommended

“that the Scottish Executive implement a single marketing and labelling scheme for Scottish farm produce, to promote greater traceability and consumer confidence in Scottish farm products.”

Given the major food crises that we have had over the past few years and the decimation of large parts of the food industry as a result of the loss of confidence in farm produce, such a scheme would be overwhelmingly positive and welcome in our rural areas. However, the Executive states that it believes that there is little enthusiasm from those involved, due to admin costs, and does not feel that it is necessary.

I hope that the Environment and Rural Development Committee takes up that recommendation, because it is important that we start to identify and promote in all supermarkets throughout Scotland not just Scottish produce but produce from particular areas, whether Aberdeenshire or elsewhere. It is important that we try to promote a marketing strategy that encourages the citizens of Scotland to eat food whose source can be traced directly in order to satisfy the demand that food is healthy and to ensure that we can back that up. I hope that the minister will refer to that recommendation in his summing up and tell us that he will review the Executive’s initial decision to rule it out.

11:02

**Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP):** I apologise to Sarah Boyack for missing the first few minutes of her speech; I was held up in the office, which I am sure that all members can appreciate.

Many issues have been touched on in the debate. One is rural housing, and I certainly agree that the Parliament must act on the committee’s recommendation that rural housing be made affordable. As other members have said, affordable rural housing is essential if we are to retain young people in our rural communities the length and breadth of Scotland, not just in the Highlands and Islands. I urge that the Environment and Rural Development Committee consider the

issue of tied housing within rural communities. Many people who live in tied houses would like to purchase them and remain in them but, because of current legislation, that is not possible in many cases. Many landlords consider cases carefully and are sympathetic, but I was brought up in a tied house and I know the difficulties that my parents faced in putting themselves on a council housing list when they wanted to retire. The issue should be reviewed.

We all want a much better transport system in rural communities. Buses are few and far between and the train service leaves a great deal to be desired. Those issues must be considered seriously. Sarah Boyack talked about the cost of fuel. It is perhaps up to the Executive to speak more firmly to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the tax levies that he places on fuel in Scotland. I was at Rothes Primary School on Monday—one of the joys of being an MSP—where 25 youngsters had written their own election manifestos, with parties ranging from the eagle party to the blue party. The cost of fuel in rural areas featured in lots of the manifestos and the youngsters wanted to see a reduction in it. They were aged about 10 or 11, and it was wonderful that they were so involved in political matters and that they saw the cost of fuel as a major issue in their communities.

I turn to some of the other recommendations in the report, particularly on fisheries. I refer to what I think is page 6 of the Executive’s response, although the pages are not numbered. I very much enjoyed being a member—briefly—of the Rural Development Committee in the previous session, and I also attended the committee regularly when it was debating fisheries. As Maureen Macmillan said, fisheries are a critical aspect of our rural communities.

It is worth saying how grateful we are to the people of the Western Isles who rescued the five crew men from the Fairway, which is registered in Stewart Stevenson’s constituency and which sank last night off St Kilda. As always, we are grateful to the rescue services. We should remind ourselves of the dangers inherent in our fishing industry. Having read the Executive’s response to what was said on page 29 of the report, I have to ask the fundamental questions who, what, why, where and when. [*Interruption.*] I am glad that someone has strayed into the press gallery—it is only Rab McNeil.

The Executive says that the fishing industry has to be taken seriously as a major policy issue. Who is going to be leading for the fisheries industry in the run-up to the December council, which many members will recall is always the most difficult fisheries council? Will it be the Minister for Environment and Rural Development or will he be

playing second fiddle to Elliot Morley or whoever happens to be the Westminster minister of the moment? Elliot Morley has, quite rightly, had the chop. Why will a Scottish fisheries minister be present? Will he argue strongly for the recommendations that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation made earlier this week in response to the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea report, or will he just be there to keel over to the UK minister in the council? What will be the agenda for the Scottish fisheries minister? Will it be to pick up on the cod recovery plan, which the SFF has propounded so ably this week? Where will the discussions take place? Will they take place in the main room in Brussels or on the couch outside in the corridor? I hope for the minister's sake—if he is there—that it is not a casting couch.

We are to discuss the CAP next week in Executive time, but will it be possible to discuss, in Executive time, the common fisheries policy before critical decisions are made? I make no apology for arguing the case for the fishing industry. I would like to touch on many other aspects of rural life, but in the run-up to Christmas we are facing a major crisis in the fishing industry—it would help if the minister would pay attention to what I am saying. If we are facing the closure of the fishing industry in the North sea and the Irish sea, what are we going to do for the rural communities whose livelihoods depend on the industry?

I recommend that the committee consider coastal erosion, because that is a major issue for our coastal communities. Golf courses and houses are disappearing. As a Parliament, we have not given serious consideration to coastal erosion and it would be helpful if we were to do that.

I thank the first session's Rural Development Committee for its report and I look forward to hearing what the Executive has to say in response to the strong recommendations that have been made.

11:10

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** Although I was not a formal member of the Rural Development Committee, it often felt as if I was, particularly during the committee's consideration of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Bill. I had the benefit of attending the committee's events in Dumfries and Galloway, including the public meeting in St John's Town of Dalry. I want to put on the public record an appreciation of the perseverance of the committee's convener at that time, my colleague Alex Fergusson, in ensuring that there was public involvement in those events. As members appreciate, standing orders and other parliamentary protocols do not always facilitate such things. Most members who have

spoken have mentioned the fact that those events were extremely successful and well received.

I know that today's debate is not on energy, but I am sure that my colleagues John Home Robertson and Jamie Stone would not want me to let pass unremarked a couple of the comments that Sarah Boyack made in her opening speech. We must acknowledge on the record the enormous contribution that the nuclear industry has made to economic development in rural areas throughout Scotland, which, as we have debated many times in the Parliament, is to be compared with the contribution that is held out, but not proved, for renewable energy.

**Sarah Boyack:** If I had had more time, I would have made the point that, as with all types of energy production, there are different issues to consider. I was making the point that, although nuclear power is clean in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, there are long-term waste implications.

**David Mundell:** I welcome the setting up of the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management and the work that it will do. I am clear that the construction of a new nuclear power station on the licensed Chapelcross site is by far the most beneficial thing that we could do to encourage economic development in Dumfries and Galloway.

**Mr Ruskell:** Does the member agree that, if the Romans had had nuclear power, we would still be looking after their waste?

**David Mundell:** I certainly do not agree with that—I would not agree with the Green perspective on nuclear power, which offers a way of guaranteeing electricity and power supplies in this country. Those of us who are in favour of it should be prepared to stand up and argue for it, rather than accept that there is some sort of consensus against it; there is no such consensus.

**Tommy Sheridan:** Is the member changing his position on state support for industries? Does he agree that the nuclear power industry is bankrupt and could not survive without state intervention?

**David Mundell:** As I said at the start of my speech, the debate is not about energy, even though there are significant financial issues in that area, particularly to do with the amount of support that is given to renewable energy as well.

I will move on to the main theme of the debate—the integration of rural development. Several members have talked about housing and Scottish Water. Langholm is a case that highlights the difficulties that are faced in the south of Scotland. I know that the minister is familiar with Langholm, because of all the issues that have arisen there. Some members like to denigrate our landowners, but an innovative proposal was made to provide land for development, which had the support of the

Duke of Buccleuch. Scottish Water objected initially, but much work was done to bring the organisation on side so that that development could take place.

The development proposal is on the table and there is only one objector left—the roads department of the Scottish Executive. Even though the Executive promotes a holistic approach, its roads department has a roads-only approach. It wants to know only whether the access aspects of the development would meet its requirements; it is not concerned about the impact that the development would have on rural development and the availability of affordable housing. For the roads department, the issue is only about roads. Until we move away from that stovepipe thinking, we will not get anywhere. Ministers can trot out whatever they like but, if their colleagues object, the development will just not happen.

I think that the clock has stopped, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):** Yes, it has—it is not just that it seems as if you are going on for ever. You have just over a minute left.

**David Mundell:** I want to deal with broadband in my final minute. There is no reason why the Scottish Executive cannot follow the Northern Ireland model and invest in upgrading our most rural exchanges. There are no state-aid rules that would prevent it from doing so. Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom, which is the European Union member state. If Northern Ireland can make such investment, Scotland can do it, too.

The cost of that investment would be relatively small. I went to an event that Scottish Enterprise Dumfries and Galloway used to promote broadband. It spent £400,000 on promoting broadband, but it would have been much better if that £400,000 had been spent on upgrading small exchanges. People in the south of Scotland and other rural areas know what the benefits of broadband are; the problem is that they cannot access it. Instead of having so much talk about broadband, let us have the cash to make it happen.

Finally, I would like to concur with what Alasdair Morgan said about the Crichton campus. An innovative development is under threat, because the rules for existing developments do not help innovation on that site.

11:16

**Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** I was deeply envious of the fact that the clock stopped two minutes and nine seconds into David Mundell's speech. If he tips me off about how that is done, there will be £5 waiting for him.

**Alex Johnstone:** If anyone has that information, I would pay them £10 for giving it to me and keeping it from Mr Stevenson.

**Stewart Stevenson:** As usual, the Tories turn to the subjects of money and bribery.

It has been about a year since the Rural Development Committee did the bulk of its work for the report on integrated rural development. That brings to mind the old saying, "What a difference a day makes", which is of particular importance to the Tories today. Although an awful lot has changed in that time, my support for the report's recommendations has not changed. I congratulate the new Environment and Rural Development Committee on securing this debate on the report.

I want to challenge, firmly and substantially, a number of issues that relate to rurality and our countryside. Many members have referred to housing. Alex Johnstone's face lit up when he commended the move in the countryside away from tied housing towards ownership of housing. That is fair enough, but the trouble is that we now have a monoculture of owner-occupation, which is no more desirable in the countryside than was the monoculture of poorly managed council estates that used to exist in many Scottish cities.

Our economy is tied up in housing to an extent that inhibits our ability to invest in other activities, industries and enterprises. Developed countries throughout Europe do not have the same patterns of housing ownership. We must try to move towards greater diversity and greater availability in our housing patterns in towns and, especially, in the countryside. The fact that current patterns are a disincentive to the effective use of capital is not good for the countryside.

On education, one of the great difficulties with the increase in the number of young folks who are going on to take university and college degrees—more than 50 per cent of young people are now taking degrees, which is great—is that, to a large extent, people have to leave the countryside to do those courses. In due course, the university of the Highlands and Islands will make a contribution to offsetting that. However, that covers only one part of rural Scotland.

We have to find ways of ensuring that there are jobs in the countryside for those people, whom we train in urban settings and with urban skills, because few of them return to the countryside. There are people with get up and go in the countryside, but the problem is that they are getting up and going. However, people with get up and go are also coming into many parts of the countryside.

I live in the parish of Ord in Banffshire, which is part of the administrative area of Aberdeenshire.

Approximately half the children in our local school come from outwith the area. They bring energy and new ideas, and a welcome commitment to the community. We have to try to replicate that throughout Scotland.

Let me say a little bit about CAP reform. It is a good thing. Farmers are going to be rewarded for stewardship of the countryside. We are moving away from unreasonable reliance on production in farming. However, we have not yet addressed the wider issues for businesses in the countryside. What are the agricultural engineers going to do if the farmers produce less? The farmers are okay, but agricultural engineers are not protected. Other industries and businesses in the countryside will be radically affected by CAP reform, but we have not yet debated that.

My colleague Margaret Ewing referred to fishing, and members have heard me talk about it on previous occasions. We have not taken full account of the effects of the decline in the fishing industry in rural areas. The economists call them third-level effects, but I refer to them as the two-butchers-in-Strichen problem. Strichen, a town of 1,000 people, is 10 miles from the sea and has two butchers. Rather unusually, those butchers supply the fishing trawlers. Decline in the fishing industry means decline in some of our rural communities. By the same token, changes in the CAP will have the same effect.

Tommy Sheridan referred to the need for the labelling of Scottish food. I support that but I would go much further. We have got to stop obeying the spirit of European regulations and start obeying the letter. That means that in public procurement, for example, we could say that crops have to be gathered no more than 48 hours prior to delivery to public services. That is a permitted way of ensuring that public services buy locally. We cannot say that we must buy Scottish produce, but we can work the system. Let us start to do that.

I end by saying something fundamental that will show where I differ from many of those who are not in the chamber or are not members for rural areas and who might have a different attitude to some of us. Scotland's countryside, not Scotland's cities, is the future of Scotland. In Scotland's cities there are diseconomies of scale. Mass transportation is necessary to offset those diseconomies of scale—the time taken to travel to work causes loss of productivity. We have to subsidise our cities to make them work at all.

Our countryside is the lungs of Scotland, converting the carbon dioxide that is a result of human endeavour in our cities. It is also where people will look to discharge the stress of city living. If we do not support our rural areas, we will lose our cities as well.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is time for the briefest contribution from Jamie Stone.

11:24

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** Thank you Presiding Officer.

**Members:** Cheese.

**Mr Stone:** I am not going to talk about cheese.

Last Friday, I visited the village of Kinlochbervie. Amidst the understandable clamour coming from the east coast of Scotland, the decline in fish landings in little villages such as Kinlochbervie and Lochinver is often forgotten.

I was encouraged by what is happening in Kinlochbervie, where a community group has formed a plan to develop a marina in the harbour. I am on my feet at the moment to tell the minister about that development. I know that the group has written to him to ask for funding support for three years so that the plan, which I believe is workable, can be put into practice. People who own boats have relatively high disposable incomes, and the proposal is a positive way forward. If Ross Finnie's officials combine with Frank McAveety's officials we could address such plans. I believe that the future lies in the countryside, as Stewart Stevenson said. I also believe that it lies with the Scottish coastline and using the pleasure-boat trade to build on the back of tourism.

I have made my speech in one minute and five seconds, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. I call Karen Gillon to wind up for the Labour party.

11:25

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to participate in a debate on integrated rural development. I agree with Alasdair Morgan that rural Scotland is not just the Highlands and Islands; that mistake is made too often.

I was born and brought up in Jedburgh and I now represent Clydesdale, which is a rural constituency to all intents and purposes. However, we often come up against many barriers to obtaining the support that the Highlands and Islands manage to get when they encounter similar problems.

Although I do not agree with everything in the report, I welcome it. It is a good starting point for debate in the Parliament. We have had a good debate today and there have been several common themes.

The first theme I want to pick up on is rural housing. Everyone who has contributed to today's



debate has mentioned rural housing, and some interesting ideas and sensible suggestions have been presented. However, I have considerable reservations about how we are to increase the availability of rural housing if we simply plough money into the hands of landowners and, in turn, into the hands of those who will sell their houses for an increased profit. Those houses are effectively being lost to the community.

If we are to be serious about rural housing, we must talk about social housing. We should be increasing the availability of housing for young people who want to stay in rural communities but are not able to do so at the moment. There are innovative ways of doing that and I urge the Executive to continue to explore them.

**Alex Johnstone:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Karen Gillon:** I will give way in a minute.

There are issues about how people get on to the property ladder and we should continue to examine them. It has been interesting to hear the Tories berate the market system this morning. If we live in a market economy, people who want to pay more will pay more. The people at the bottom are always the ones who suffer. That is the point that we have been trying to make for decades: if prices are forced up, the people at the bottom will not be able to pay.

People have bought houses in rural areas as holiday homes and as second homes. The Executive should seriously consider removing council tax relief for second homes. That is a definite factor: if people had to pay more, they would be less willing to buy second homes.

**Tommy Sheridan:** Does the member agree that there must be measures to prevent the sale of houses that were built for social housing? That is one of the key problems in those areas.

**Karen Gillon:** The right to buy came up during the passage of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, and Maureen Macmillan discussed solutions in her speech. If we are investing in social housing in rural areas where there are no alternatives, steps must be taken to ensure that that housing is not sold off.

Integrated rural transport is another issue that is key to integrated rural development. In my time as an MSP, I have consistently come up against the problem of not being able to get effective integrated rural transport, even in the area served by Strathclyde Passenger Transport, which is supposed to be one of the best examples of an integrated transport system. Buses come before the train arrives, or the train goes before the buses arrive. Nothing can wait for anything else. If a train arrives at Lanark station five minutes late, the bus

to Biggar has gone. With luck, there will be another bus in an hour, but chances are there will be no more buses and the traveller will have to pay for a taxi. We have to get integrated transport working much better.

I know how difficult it is to get a rail link. When I became an MSP in 1999, the Larkhall to Milngavie line was almost there. If Sarah Boyack, who was then the minister responsible for transport, had not committed the money, that line would not be there now. We must consider how we make such rail links happen because the current system is not working effectively.

I make one criticism of the report, which relates to something that is missing. I did word searches in the report for the terms "poverty", "inequality" and "closing the opportunity gap", but none of them appears in the report. For me, integrated rural development is the key test of how we close the opportunity gap, raise expectations and take people in rural areas out of poverty. Poverty exists in rural areas. I experienced it—I was brought up in it. The report fails to recognise that issue. It fails to mention it and fails to say how the issues can be challenged effectively. The report may well be all about that issue, but the failure explicitly to say that or to mention poverty or inequality in a document of such length is a failure on the part of the committee.

11:30

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con):** I was the convener of the Rural Development Committee when it went about the inquiry. It has been slightly strange sitting here and hearing the report being debated quite a long time after we finally agreed it, but I am grateful to the current Environment and Rural Development Committee for agreeing to my request, in a letter to the successor convener, that it should seek chamber time to debate the report, because it is a substantive report that took a great deal of time and resource. For it not to have been debated in the chamber would have been a tragic waste.

If I may, I will take a brief moment to thank in particular the clerks and parliamentary staff who helped out in putting together the report. They put in an enormous amount of work, because the inquiry became wider than we intended it to be. Sarah Boyack rightly said in her opening remarks, and other members have mentioned, what a wide-ranging inquiry it was. The visits and public meetings that we had throughout Scotland took an enormous amount of time and resources. People worked tirelessly on them. As I said, I thank not just the clerks but other parliamentary staff as well. It would have been impossible without them.

I also thank the old Rural Development

Committee for the way in which we went about the work and for the unanimity that we managed to reach at the end of the day. Unanimity often means compromise and it would be fair to say that some of the recommendations are not as robust as some members might have wanted them to be; nonetheless, there was a determination that the report should be unanimous, and it is all the better for being so.

If I may indulge myself for a moment, I will go back to the reason why I wanted to conduct the inquiry. It grew out of a desire to produce something proactive and constructive in the wake of the unseemly length of time that the committee had had to spend on the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Bill. I cast no aspersions on the rights or wrongs of that bill, but it dominated our thinking for a very long period of time. There was a determination on the part of the committee to produce some rather more constructive work. The inquiry grew from an original idea of Rhoda Grant—who is no longer with us—to investigate the barriers that exist to the effective delivery of an integrated rural development policy.

I remember the first public meeting outwith Edinburgh that I convened, which was not on integrated rural development; it was on the national parks legislation. In a hall near Drymen we had a huge turnout of people who were bursting at the seams to contribute to a committee of the Parliament—a Parliament, do not forget, one of the watchwords of which is accessibility. I was pretty horrified to discover that parliamentary procedures did not allow the public to contribute unless they were named on the agenda. The whole committee was united in its determination to ensure that during the inquiry we could hear from members of the public who were interested enough to turn up, and not just hear from the usual suspects, although one also wanted to hear from them.

One of the pleasures of being on the committee during that process was that one witnessed the genuine passion and views held by people about integrated rural development. As Nora Radcliffe rightly pointed out, it is a subject on which a lot of people have a lot to say. I am proud of the role that the Rural Development Committee played in finding a way through the rather staid parliamentary procedure that prevented people from contributing, thereby allowing people to have a say. The procedure that we used, which I called the soapbox session, provided the absolute highlight of my parliamentary career, when a gentleman at Lochgilphead—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have one minute.

**Alex Fergusson:** Really? I wish the clock would stand still for me, Presiding Officer.

A gentleman at Lochgilphead drew himself up to his full height and said, "Gentlemen, you will never do anything about tourism in the Highlands until you do something about the Highland midge." I felt that that was an effective contribution.

Members have mentioned the report's recommendations on small businesses, the lack of affordable housing and forestry, and they were right to do so. However, there is one thing that members have not mentioned. It is one of the biggest barriers to integrated rural development and was drawn to our attention at every single meeting we held around Scotland. That barrier is the increasing role of quangos—specifically the role of Scottish Natural Heritage, whose autocratic nature and imposition of often almost impossible restrictions create a very real barrier to an effective policy on integrated rural development. I draw the Parliament's attention to our recommendation following paragraph 89 in that respect.

In her opening remarks, Sarah Boyack spoke about a lack of joined-up thinking. I highlight the recommendation that follows paragraph 97, on the need for a rural forum of some sort—there used to be one, after all—to co-ordinate the network of voluntary organisations, public agencies and sectoral interest groups relevant to rural Scotland.

Sarah Boyack also said that agendas are moving on, and of course they are, because time does not stand still, other than for David Mundell. However, I put it to the chamber—and I hope that the minister will accept this—that much of the report remains highly relevant to achieving an improved rural economy and meaningful integrated rural development. The Executive's written response seems to be somewhat complacent. Rural Scotland does not deserve that. I hope that the minister's contribution will effectively put that to rest. Rural Scotland needs action, not complacency.

11:36

**Mr Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** In closing for the SNP, I say that there are many issues in which we can share an interest with our colleagues on all sides of the chamber. We can start with the idea that there is a degree of connectivity between issues, which must become the hallmark of how this Parliament deals with rural affairs. Integrated rural development has to be thought out a good deal more clearly, because at present there are too many different funds and bodies. It is quite clear that there are no fewer of those bodies than there were when the report was produced, or even 10 years before then. Indeed, there are perhaps more.

I will apply the tests of social justice, sustainable

economic development and subsidiarity to the way in which the proposals in the report have been progressed. Those tests have to be applied wherever we are on the Government's handling of the contents of the report.

My colleague Alasdair Morgan pointed out the large sums that are available each year through the CAP and rural development budgets. Those sums are considerable, but need in rural areas is disguised. We have not talked about the Scottish index of multiple deprivation, but it must be taken into account. It is one of the indices that allow particular forms of public spending to be allocated, but it is not disaggregated enough to be able to show actual need in rural areas. The Government must take on board the fact that many of the funding packages have taken into account neither the extra costs of living in the countryside nor the degree of rural deprivation, which is hidden in some of the figures that have been produced. The SNP wants to see a much more transparent approach being taken to the provision of figures on deprivation, to spend the correct amount of money in rural areas.

We need to have an explicit statement about the democratic deficit in decision making. Members, for example Nora Radcliffe, discussed communities struggling to work out how to organise a community fund based on a wind farm development. That is a little example of how, as the report suggests, people are being forced into positions without much technical support and have to cope with the process of creating a sustainable cash flow. A rural forum is all very well, but such a forum tends to represent the usual suspects—the large organisations that lobby.

We need to take a much more careful look at devolving power within the local government structure to community councils and the like, so that more decisions are taken at a local level. Those bodies should not just be consulted about planning applications; they must play a clear part in on-going discussion about how planning, zoning and other matters are handled.

**Mr Stone:** I warmly support Rob Gibson's point about community councils. Will he go further and agree that although such a proposal would be laudable, it would require us to improve the democratic process for electing community councils?

**Mr Gibson:** I agree absolutely. I am glad that the community council with which I was recently associated has finally decided to hold a full postal ballot for its next election. I recommend using that system all over the place. People will value community councils more if they all have a chance to vote.

The Government must come clean on the production of food from our countryside and

access for many people to that food. It must provide seed money to support a labelling system to make food available to the whole population of Scotland, not only the highest bidders.

The biggest subjects are the release of land for rural housing and the building of rural housing. Forestry products that can no longer be sold for other purposes could be used to make new high-insulation houses. The planning and zoning systems must be changed for that but, above all, land must be released for such housing. The Government has failed to take that on board and has ruled out the radical redistribution of assets and resources in the land market. Until those matters attract debate and are addressed by the Government, we will not have the land for affordable housing.

The report is important and contains proposals that the Environment and Rural Development Committee can develop. The SNP sees many lines of argument that would allow us to progress a radical vision that would give people in rural Scotland the power that they deserve.

11:42

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** I welcome the opportunity to respond to the debate and the fact that the Environment and Rural Development Committee has obtained a debate on an important report that was produced in the previous session. I give credit to the former Rural Development Committee for undertaking what turned out to be, as that committee's convener said, a more ambitious inquiry than he expected.

I have no doubt that the preparation of the report has been helpful. I assure members that I am not complacent. I was touched by Alasdair Morgan's acceptance of the fact that integrating rural policy is a difficult job. I am bound to say that that was a grain of comfort, because there is no doubt that the task is difficult. The Executive has tried and continues to try to highlight the importance of the differences that must be tackled when we address problems, because we all have the same problems. The intention is not to create a divide between urban and rural areas, because that would be disastrous for Scotland's development.

Many issues in the report fit well with "Rural Scotland: A New Approach", which we published in May 2000. I do not say that with complacency; I merely make the point. That document deals with the importance of creating prosperous rural economies and providing all rural residents with the opportunity to fulfil their potential. I pick up Karen Gillon's point that people cannot fulfil their potential if they are in poverty, because there is no liberty in poverty. Therefore, we must consider the

issue in the round and examine all aspects of service provision. The intention is not to pick off the primary sector or to examine specific issues; the aim is to consider overall delivery. The themes that members have raised today make that clear.

The Executive's aim is to fulfil the overarching commitment to ensure that rural and remote communities have their distinct needs reflected across Government policy and initiatives. I understand and share members' frustration, because difficulties are created for me if people cannot get out of silo thinking and do not understand that we must have a more integrated approach if we are to address problems more effectively. We continue to strive for that approach.

I stress the importance that I, as the minister who is responsible for rural development, place on continuing to work across portfolio boundaries and across the boundaries of many organisations. I try not to make only one or two individuals understand the need for that, but to embed that idea in an organisation's thinking about how to address the problems.

I make it clear that the Scottish national rural partnership's role has expanded greatly in the past two years. It plays a valuable role in how we deal with the issues.

We are not yet making enough use of the important measure of community planning, which the Executive introduced. That could be central to bringing together the work of a range of agencies to deal not only with the problems that can arise in an urban community, but with some of the problems that members have identified today. We have placed community planning on a statutory basis and have committed ourselves to ensuring that rural community planning partnerships work for and report to their local communities and work together to develop best practice.

**Mr Ruskell:** Does the minister agree that the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department has a role in local community planning?

**Ross Finnie:** Yes. I make it clear that all that I am suggesting is that the community planning framework allows the local community from the bottom up to bring together many resources. However, that does not exclude my department or leave it sitting apart from, or hovering above, that. Our involvement is integral.

I will deal with the issues that have been raised in the debate. As Alasdair Morgan said, the parliamentary authorities have scheduled a debate on the common agricultural policy, so I will not dwell on that today. The Environment and Rural Development Committee's convener asked when the Scottish rural development plan review will be published. I advise her that the mid-term review of

the plan will be published in December.

On the CAP and food generally, I make it clear that if people have interpreted the Executive's response as unenthusiastic, that is not the case. We spend considerable sums of money and considerable time on promoting the private bodies that interact with food producers to raise the standard of quality assurance and, in turn, to promote labelling. However, there is a slight dichotomy in promoting a Scottish label, which even Tommy Sheridan mentioned. Difficulties exist because, although people in the wider market understand such a label, a slight tension and conflict are created when that is broken down to more local labelling. The food sector has difficulty in grasping that nettle, although we have had successes such as the "Orkney Gold" label, which has been mentioned.

Several members, Margaret Ewing in particular, referred to fishing. I do not control these matters, but I will seek permission from the parliamentary authorities for a debate on the common fisheries policy before we go to the fisheries council meeting. I say to Margaret Ewing that we are engaged in a range of discussions. Yesterday, a discussion took place in Edinburgh with English ministers and other ministers about the current position, what the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea have published and how to progress our agenda. We are mapping out preliminary meetings with the European Commission and the commissioner and with other member states whose assistance we might wish to obtain.

**Mrs Ewing:** If the minister succeeds in acquiring such a debate, will it cover the report from the Prime Minister's office, which has taken evidence around Scotland for several months?

**Ross Finnie:** I cannot give an undertaking on that. Work on that report progresses, but—unsurprisingly—it has been found that reaching a long-term view on the fishing industry is more complex than was thought. It would not help us to have a half-baked interim document, particularly as we approach the negotiations. I cannot give the member such an undertaking, but I assure her that we are on top of pressing that forward.

One of the major issues that members raised is housing. There is no question but that Communities Scotland's grant system is flexible and capable of accommodating variations in land and construction costs. Development funding is directed mainly at dealing with those issues and we have added £5 million in each of the next two years for that. I stress that that will be reinforced by several changes to funding systems. Communities Scotland's development funding will be transferred to local authorities to help them to implement their local housing strategies. A

prudential borrowing regime will be introduced for social housing and grant funding is now provided by the Executive.

We have addressed some of the planning issues that have been mentioned. There were tremendous questions about wind farms and I make it clear that we are not agnostic on that matter. We have said that development plans should define broad areas and, where appropriate, specific sites that are available and suitable for wind farms and other renewables developments and we have said that those sites should be covered by local plans. We have issued guidance and, although I am not saying that that is the perfect answer, it is wrong to say that we have not dealt with the matter. As for finance, we are wholly behind and promote the development of renewable energy in Scotland.

On transport, I hope that the creation of regional transport partnerships, which will cover nearly all Scotland's local authorities, will promote greater partnership to encourage strategic developments.

A large number of issues were raised in the debate and I am sorry that I have not been able to deal with them all. However, I assure members that the Executive is entirely committed to improving the integration of development in rural areas, that we take seriously all the recommendations that have been made by members and in the report and that we will continue our efforts to improve the quality of service delivery throughout rural Scotland.

11:52

**Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** In her introduction, Sarah Boyack said that it felt strange, as the convener of the current committee, to introduce the report, as she was not a member of the committee that produced it. It feels even stranger for me, because I was not even elected when the report was produced. However, I have read it and I very much admire the work that went into it. I am pleased to commend it to the Parliament.

I start by commending the way in which the committee went about producing the report and, in particular, its policy of going out and about to take evidence. That is one of the strengths of the Scottish Parliament and its committees. At the Rail Passengers Committee reception last night, I talked to some people who usually deal with Westminster. They told me how accessible they find the Scottish Parliament, including its parliamentarians and its committees. I am proud to be a part of that system.

The first way of solving a problem is to recognise that it exists and to talk about it. The report highlights issues about our rural areas,

although I do not claim that it has all the answers. As many members have highlighted, rural development involves developing not just the things that have traditionally been done in rural areas and the traditional rural ways of making a living, but ways in which people can make a living in rural areas in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Many members made similar points and I will run through a few of the issues that have been raised. Services were mentioned both as part of rural development and as an essential factor underpinning rural development. I echo that from the Highland perspective. Uncertainty about whether there will be a general practitioner or a dentist in an area is a barrier that prevents people who have young children from moving there. That also applies to schools, and I commend the policy that Highland Council has had for several years of not closing rural schools except with the agreement of local people. If we are serious about repopulating rural areas, we must be sure that services are in place and must not cut them. Even if families can find a building plot for a house and find jobs, they will not stay if services are not in place.

Transport is a major issue that was mentioned in the debate. From a Green perspective, I would much rather see spending on the maintenance and upgrading of rural roads than on building urban motorways that no one wants. However, transport does not mean just road transport. We have talked about the transportation of timber by water and rail, and we need to give much more consideration to those means of transport.

I want to make a plea for my constituency in relation to integrated transport, which was the big issue to come out of the report. Perhaps that is not something that the Executive can control at present, but it would be nice if it could do something about getting private transport providers to integrate their services. My constituency support worker gets the bus from Ullapool that connects with the Stornoway ferry. Three separate bus companies operate on that route and, if the ferry is late, buses from all three companies sit and wait for it. One bus will not set off, even though the people waiting might need to get to Inverness in time to catch a train to Glasgow. That kind of flexibility is what I mean by integration, but it is difficult for private companies to achieve.

I think that every member who spoke mentioned housing and the need to free up land, but I want to mention the type of housing that is built. I was disappointed recently to hear about a case in wester Ross, where an application to build a new house was turned down due to an objection from an allegedly environmental body—I will not name it—because the house, which was designed to be

environmentally friendly and ecologically sound in its construction and energy efficiency, would not have looked like the vernacular architecture. If we are serious about building energy-efficient houses, we must accept that they will not always look like traditional houses. There must be more flexibility about what is allowed. The site for that house was not in the middle of a village in a conservation area, so the building could have been allowed. We must consider creatively the sort of houses that are proposed.

We have heard the general view that the housing shortage must be addressed, one way or another. Land must be freed up for housing. Stewart Stevenson commented on the contribution that is made by incomers and their energy and drive. We all acknowledge that, and we must encourage people to come to live and work in rural areas, as well as encouraging local people to stay in those areas. We want to repopulate the glens.

Members talked extensively about renewables. Many speeches showed that good ideas can give rise to bad examples. There should be no slow-down in the move towards renewable energy, but there should be more rationalisation and stricter guidelines about what can be put in place and where. I think that that view is widely supported. It should be acknowledged that wind power is not the be-all and end-all of renewable energy. Members mentioned biomass energy, for example, although I do not have time to give examples of that from my constituency. Members also highlighted the need for local decision making.

The local production and marketing of food was mentioned. I do not intend to start a big discussion about agriculture, in part because I do not have time but also because we will have that debate next week. I was pleased that the minister said that he was not unenthusiastic about labelling Scottish produce, but I go further than that. There must be the infrastructure to produce value-added products in rural areas. Nobody ever got rich by selling raw materials; they have to produce something with them. We need to be able to process and market our products locally. Hotels are crying out to be able to say, "The lamb that we are serving at the table came from the hill outside—that is probably its mother that you see over there." Unfortunately, I do not have time to talk about the mid-term review.

Conservation was mentioned and we heard criticism—quite valid in many cases—of some of the conservation agencies. That problem will be addressed by the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Bill, which the Environment and Rural Development Committee is considering. SNH in particular, as a statutory body, came in for a bit of stick about its lack of consultation and it must take

that criticism on board—I think that it is beginning to do so. I look forward to the day when we can all love SNH, but I think that it is still some way off.

I welcome the recommendations on forestry, which considered a range of potential uses and benefits. The days are gone when people thought first about tax incentives and secondly about wood pulp when they planted trees. We can do much more in relation to biomass, timber construction, tourism, wildlife and non-timber forest products. I would like to talk more about that, but unfortunately I do not have time.

Initiatives were mentioned, some of which have been quite successful—I am happy to praise those where praise is due. However, we cannot just go from initiative to initiative; worthwhile rural developments must be assured of long-term funding. A sort of projectitis seems to run through Government departments and funding agencies. That should be examined because people must know that the money will be available in the long term.

The report is about integrated rural development. We focus a lot on rural development, but the minister and other members mentioned the fact that "integrated" is an important word because there must be integration. The report cuts across many areas and I recognise that it is difficult to do that, as the minister said. I am sure that the successor committee to the Rural Development Committee, which published the report, will give the minister every support to help him to fulfil his difficult role.

The minister mentioned community planning—

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** You must close, please.

**Eleanor Scott:** Sarah Boyack noted the challenge for all—

**The Presiding Officer:** You must close because you are cutting into First Minister's question time.

**Eleanor Scott:** I am sorry; I was looking at the wrong clock.

## First Minister's Question Time

12:01

### Prime Minister (Meetings)

#### 1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):

To ask the First Minister when he next plans to meet the Prime Minister and what issues he intends to raise. (S2F-288)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** I talk regularly with the Prime Minister and expect to speak with him again shortly. Among the issues that I will raise with him will be the success of the conference of Commonwealth education ministers that was held in Scotland this week and, in particular, the success of the Commonwealth's first ever youth education summit. I believe that 40 or 50 of the delegates from that youth summit from all over the world are with us in the public gallery today. I welcome them to Scotland and I hope that they will come back. [*Applause.*]

**Mr Swinney:** I associate my party with the First Minister's remarks about the Commonwealth education conference and the involvement of young people.

The opening days of the Fraser inquiry, which was established by the First Minister and the Presiding Officer, have heard from the late First Minister's closest ministerial colleagues and advisers: Sam Galbraith, Brian Wilson, Henry McLeish, Wendy Alexander and Murray Elder. They all gave their interpretation of the views and actions of the late First Minister in relation to the choice of the Holyrood site. Does the First Minister agree that it is absurd for the BBC and its film producers to know at first hand the views expressed on the issue by Donald Dewar, but for the Fraser inquiry and the people of Scotland to rely on the second-hand opinion of former ministers and advisers?

**The First Minister:** The investigation that is being conducted by Lord Fraser is independent of both the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish ministers. It is entirely a matter for Lord Fraser to identify and seek evidence that might be helpful to his inquiry.

The independence of that inquiry is important for two reasons. First, it is right and proper that Lord Fraser is able to get to the truth with the powers that he has and to help us learn the lessons about what has taken place. Secondly, that independence ensures that we in Government and in the Scottish Parliament can get on with our job of ensuring that we tackle antisocial behaviour, that we deal with improvements in education and health and that we grow our Scottish economy.

That is what we should be doing; the inquiry should do its job too.

**Mr Swinney:** The problem with that answer is that it ignores the reality of the difficulties that the inquiry now faces. The First Minister told the Parliament earlier this year what he would do if there were a difficulty in attracting information. He said:

"If that requires me at any time to intervene to talk to anybody, I will do so."—[*Official Report*, 12 June 2003; c 731.]

The First Minister also told the Parliament that Lord Fraser would have

"the right to request any documents, and any documents that he requests, he will have."—[*Official Report*, 19 June 2003; c 952.]

Lord Fraser has requested documents and information from the BBC, but he does not have them. Does the First Minister now accept that he should not have given those assurances to Parliament without giving Lord Fraser the powers to get the information that he requires?

**The First Minister:** I have been looking forward to this since Sunday, when the Scottish nationalist party started putting out the misinformation that the inquiry that was established under Lord Fraser does not have adequate powers, and comparing that inquiry directly with the inquiry that is currently chaired by Lord Hutton in London. I make it absolutely clear to the chamber and to anybody anywhere who wants to misrepresent the inquiry—with malicious intent or because of ignorance—that the Fraser inquiry has exactly the same powers as the Hutton inquiry that is now meeting in London. The Hutton inquiry has had full access to all the evidence that it required; there is no reason for Lord Fraser not to get that access as well. Misrepresenting the inquiry and its powers in this way is simply unacceptable and will bring the inquiry into disrepute. That should not be happening.

**Mr Swinney:** One would think that I was the only person calling for the inquiry to have more powers. In the House of Commons on Tuesday, George Foulkes, a former minister of state in the Scotland Office, and a political colleague of the First Minister, asked the Advocate General for Scotland whether she would argue that the inquiry should have more powers in order to guarantee that the BBC material could be handed over. Yes, the inquiry has the same powers as the Hutton inquiry, but it does not have the information that Lord Fraser requires. That is the critical difference. Does the First Minister not accept that, if the BBC can get away with this, the companies on the gravy train of this project will think that they can get away with it too? Will the First Minister now put right his original mistake and give the Fraser

inquiry the powers that it requires to complete the job that we all want it to undertake?

**The First Minister:** When someone receives an answer that they were not expecting, and that perhaps clarifies the situation, they should change their previously scripted response on the powers of the inquiry. This inquiry has exactly the same powers as the Hutton inquiry, as the Denning inquiry into the Profumo affair many years ago, and as the inquiry into the Paddington rail crash. All those inquiries had exactly the same powers as this inquiry. This inquiry has the powers that it needs. Contrary to the constant attempts by the nationalist party to undermine the inquiry from the very beginning by saying that it would not get all the evidence from Government that it required, 1,500 pages of evidence from this Government have been handed over to the inquiry. In the past 24 hours, the inquiry has also received tape recordings that were available to our Government of conversations that involved Donald Dewar and Enric Miralles. We have made those tapes available to the inquiry. We have made sure that we have offered full co-operation to the inquiry. We have made sure that the inquiry is able to do its job. Others should do the same. Those who misrepresent the inquiry should stop doing so and should build confidence in it. Let us learn lessons from this debacle and ensure that it never happens again.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

**2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-292)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** The next meeting of the Scottish Cabinet will discuss our progress with implementing the partnership agreement and the legislative programme. In particular, we will discuss how to build confidence in Scottish education, confidence in the Scottish economy and confidence in the Scottish identity—and how strong leadership helps to build such confidence.

**David McLetchie:** If the First Minister is seeking a model for that, he need only look here.

**Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** Is that a bid?

**David McLetchie:** No. At 33:1, the odds are too short.

Will the Cabinet look more closely into some of the issues arising from the Fraser inquiry that Mr Swinney has already explored with the First Minister today? The First Minister refers to previous inquiries and the powers that they had relative to the powers of the Fraser inquiry. The salutary difference between the other inquiries and

the Fraser inquiry is that the other inquiries did not have to deal with a BBC Scotland that was refusing to co-operate and support the inquiries in their work. That is the key difference.

In the context of the First Minister saying that he would talk to anybody at any time to help to facilitate the progress of the inquiry, could the First Minister tell me what representations, if any, he has made to John McCormick, the controller of BBC Scotland, or to Lord Fraser for that matter? If any discussions have taken place, what progress has been made?

**The First Minister:** I think that I have made my view clear. When we establish an independent inquiry—to operate independently of Government—it would be wrong for Government to intervene in the inquiry. That is the right position for us to take. The powers that are available to the inquiry allow Lord Fraser to carry out his duties well. I notice that Lord Fraser's assistant, John Campbell QC, has said this clearly on the record:

"I wish to counsel those who legitimately hold strong views to be patient in waiting for the inquiry's findings, to avoid unnecessary speculation as to what this type of inquiry process can, or cannot achieve, and to consider the whole picture rather than just a detached part of the jigsaw."

I have confidence in Lord Fraser and in John Campbell QC. I believe that they have shown this week that they are carrying out their duties well and are doing so independently of Government and this Parliament. That is the job that they have been set and we should support them in their work.

**David McLetchie:** The Conservatives value the independence of the inquiry and I, too, have confidence in Lord Fraser and in Mr Campbell. I refer the First Minister to what Mr Campbell said in his opening statement to the inquiry on Tuesday, where he called the interview tapes "primary evidence" and said:

"I believe that it is important that the Inquiry has access to the material"

held by BBC Scotland

"so that further decisions about its relevance can be made."

BBC Scotland is not handing over the tapes.

Yesterday, Presiding Officer, I raised a point of order and asked you, with whom the First Minister jointly commissioned the inquiry in the first place, whether you could offer to assist in breaking the impasse and finding a solution. You indicated your willingness to do so. Given that the First Minister's co-convenor of the inquiry is willing to assist in coming to a solution and brokering a way out of this unfortunate situation, why does the First Minister persistently refuse to do so? He is letting



the inquiry down and damaging its credibility in the eyes of the Scottish people.

**The First Minister:** I fundamentally disagree with that point. There are those who, this week, have jumped on a political bandwagon—that can lead only to the inquiry's being undermined. It is vital that we give the inquiry the space and the remit that it requires, that we ensure that the inquiry is able to work without political interference and that the inquiry, in producing its conclusions, is listened to by the Parliament and by Governments now and in the future to ensure that this never happens again. That was the purpose of establishing the inquiry. I believe that the inquiry is best placed to do that work itself and it has my full support in trying to achieve that.

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** I have heard the First Minister's answers but we have still not got to the bottom of the matter. In what way would helping Lord Fraser and Mr Campbell by changing the powers of the inquiry to insist that the BBC hand over the material undermine the independence of the inquiry? Surely that would show the leadership that the First Minister referred to earlier.

**The First Minister:** I repeat the point that I made earlier. It is absolutely wrong for the nationalist party—and for the Tories occasionally this week as well—to claim that the powers of the inquiry are inadequate. The inquiry has exactly the same powers as the Hutton inquiry in London, it has exactly the same powers as the inquiry into the Paddington rail crash, and it even has exactly the same powers as the inquiry into the Profumo affair many years ago. They are the right powers. Lord Fraser has the powers to ensure that he can complete his inquiry properly. Those who seek to undermine the inquiry in its first week should stop doing so and encourage everyone to co-operate and ensure that the inquiry is a success.

**Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** According to the press this week, Greg Dyke, the director general of the BBC, has lent his support to the actions of BBC Scotland controller John McCormick in refusing to hand over the tapes of "The Gathering Place". The First Minister has previously expressed his disquiet at United Kingdom figures interfering in Scottish politics. Despite broadcasting being a reserved matter, does the First Minister believe that the intervention of Mr Dyke was appropriate on a matter so closely related to the Scottish Parliament? Will he be writing to Greg Dyke to express his displeasure?

**The First Minister:** I am glad that Mr Brocklebank has the dignity at least to smile at the end of his question and to recognise the hypocrisy of the so-called unionist party of Scotland for somehow regretting that there is any UK context to broadcasting. I saw Mr Brocklebank on the BBC

the other evening, and he is one of the people who has misrepresented the inquiry this week. It is wrong for him and Mr Ewing and other members to misrepresent the inquiry. It has all the powers that it requires to do its job and people should co-operate with it. The inquiry will be a success if it is not undermined by parties in the chamber from the word go.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

**Margo MacDonald:** No the noo.

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** I would not normally take points of order during question time unless they were absolutely urgent. Is it absolutely urgent?

**Phil Gallie:** I believe that it is.

**The Presiding Officer:** On you go then.

**Phil Gallie:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. The First Minister has been asked two questions in succession, but on neither occasion has he made any attempt to answer them. Have you any powers to deal with that?

**The Presiding Officer:** That is a political point, as you well know.

**Margo MacDonald:** Does the First Minister recall that, in offering my total support for his choice of this form of inquiry under Lord Fraser in preference to a full-blown and very expensive judicial inquiry, I reminded him that, should some people prove shameless when named by Lord Fraser, this Parliament has the ability under section 23 of the Scotland Act 1998 to convene a special committee of the Parliament to ensure that tapes are made available to Lord Fraser? The justification for that is that the First Minister and the Scottish Executive will pay for the inquiry. As they have the duty of disbursing public funds as efficiently as possible, if it can be shown that Lord Fraser will expedite his inquiry more efficiently by having access to the tapes, I suggest that that is justification enough under the Scotland Act 1998 to make it plain to the BBC that the Parliament does have the power to compel the production of that evidence.

**The First Minister:** I believe that there is absolutely no reason why Lord Fraser cannot get to the bottom of the matter with the powers that he has and with the co-operation of everyone involved. I do not remember agreeing with Margo MacDonald the last time that she made that point about section 23 of the Scotland Act 1998, but I hear what she has said again today. I repeat that the inquiry has had the full co-operation of our devolved Government and of the UK Government,

contrary to the suggestions that were made at the beginning that it would not have such co-operation. In the past 24 hours, the inquiry has had tapes from the devolved Government that involve both the architect and the former First Minister, and I hope that they will be of assistance to the inquiry.

The Fraser inquiry has exactly the same powers as the Hutton inquiry, which has been used all week as a comparative example. I believe that, no matter what their political position or how much capital they want to draw from the issue, people should support the inquiry, not undermine it and not try to run it down in its first week. They should give Lord Fraser a chance to get on with his job. I have every confidence in his succeeding.

**Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** The First Minister will be aware of the recent publication of the report into the death of Caleb Ness in Edinburgh. Can he assure me—and, more particularly, the people of Scotland—that the overview of child protection services and the warning call already issued to local authorities will be acted upon and that the lessons of Caleb Ness's death and the child care tragedies of the past will be learned?

**The First Minister:** We all share Scott Barrie's concern not only about the case of Caleb Ness but also, unfortunately, about many other cases that have led over the years to equally disastrous and tragic results. We said a year ago that the services responsible for child protection in Scotland had three years to get their act together and to work together to ensure a seamless service that puts the interests of the child first and professional barriers and departmental interests second, and the sharing of information first and the professional prejudices that have led in the past to a lack of sharing of information second. I reiterate today that we meant what we said and we meant that we would see that process through and implement it. It will not be a matter of abandoning or abolishing social work in Scotland, as was wrongly reported two weeks ago. It will be a matter of ensuring that, at the local level, social work and education services, the police service and other agencies that are involved are all managed properly by putting the individual child at the centre of the service.

### Local Government Finance Review

**3. Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** To ask the First Minister when the Scottish Executive will establish its independent review of local government finance; who will be involved in the review body; how long the review will take, and whether the replacement of the council tax with a personal income-based alternative is now a realistic option. (S2F-301)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** We are discussing the timing, remit and format of the review with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I expect that the remit will include local taxation and we will consider carefully any recommendations that may come from the review.

**Tommy Sheridan:** First, given the unfairness of the council tax and that pensioners suffer most from that Tory tax, will the First Minister agree to invite Help the Aged or another pensioners' organisation to sit on the review body? Secondly, does he accept that, in the Parliament, only his party and the Tory party defend the council tax and that he is increasingly out of touch with Scotland's citizens in continuing to defend such an unfair tax?

**The First Minister:** Mr Sheridan's party is the only parliamentary party that defends his solution—a highly expensive and penalising Scottish service tax, which has been dismissed by the Parliament more than once in the past and is still dismissed by it.

We will ensure that the review is comprehensive, takes a variety of views on board and deals with the facts of the matter. I hope that it will propose good solutions and recommendations that we can take on board.

**Tommy Sheridan:** Perhaps the First Minister should consider the comments of Edward Davey, who is a Liberal Democrat local government spokesperson. Last week, he said:

"Labour inherited this unfair tax from the Conservatives, so what is stopping ministers addressing the council tax problem directly? Council tax is now so unfair to millions of pensioners and people on low incomes, that it must be scrapped."

The First Minister's partners in Government seem to be clear about what they want.

System 3 asked the people of Scotland whether they support the replacement of the council tax by a system based on the ability to pay. Some 71 per cent said that they would support that. Indeed, apart from Tory supporters, a majority of all parties' supporters in Scotland supported replacement of the council tax. Does the First Minister accept that he is isolated not only from Scotland's citizens, but from his party's supporters in respect of scrapping the council tax?

**The First Minister:** People throughout Scotland would shout "Yes!" if they were asked whether they would like a tax to be abolished and would leap in the air and start to celebrate. Of course they would say such things about any tax. [*Interruption.*] We will not take lessons about taxes in Scotland from the Scottish Conservatives. A certain poll tax will always stay in our memory.

Mr Sheridan claims to want to abolish the council tax, but he wants to replace it with a far more penalising and destructive system of taxation. That is wrong and is a deception. I am sure that different perspectives on the matter will come out in the course of the review and that when those perspectives are debated, they will lead to a proper set of recommendations and—I hope—solutions that will help us to move forward with a degree of consensus. There should not be such deceptions in the future.

**Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab):** I welcome the forthcoming review of local government finance. However, does the First Minister agree that there has already been substantial reform of local government finance through three-year budgeting, the prudential borrowing regime and the commitment of additional resources in the existing spending review, which has helped local government to stabilise local taxation levels? What priority would the First Minister expect local government finance to receive in a future spending review?

**The First Minister:** The Parliament and the devolved Government have been consistent in their support for local government services, in expanding resources that are available to local government and in expecting that services are delivered under regimes that operate best value for money. Sometimes in Scotland we get carried away with how unfair life is, but the reality is that, since devolution, increases in council tax in Scotland have run at around a quarter of the level of increases in England and around a third of the level in Wales. Furthermore, increases in business rates are running at a lower level than in England and Wales. In Scotland, we are running a low-tax policy that funds massive investment in public services. That can only be good for Scottish taxpayers and for those who use the services.

**Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD):** I am delighted that Tommy Sheridan relies so much on the wise words of my Liberal Democrat colleagues south of the border—if only he would also adopt Liberal Democrat policies.

Does the First Minister agree that it is unfair that constituents of mine in places such as Elie and Crail are paying twice as much in council tax as those in neighbouring houses that are second homes? Will he tell us when the Scottish Executive will make an announcement on the results of its consultation on the abolition of council tax discounts for second homes?

**The First Minister:** My understanding is that we are finalising the details of that announcement and plan to confirm our position soon.

**Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green):** Given that, on 30 January this year, the Scottish Parliament

agreed to consider and investigate the contribution that land value taxation could make to the cultural, economic, environmental and democratic renaissance of Scotland, will the First Minister confirm that the independent review will consider all alternatives to the council tax?

**The First Minister:** As I said earlier, we are discussing the remit of the review with Scotland's local authorities at the moment. I anticipate that the remit of the review will be wide enough to allow us to consider systems of local taxation and to have a proper debate on those systems in the course of the next few years.

### Fireworks

**4. Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Executive will take to deal with misuse of fireworks. (S2F-297)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** The irresponsible use of fireworks can seriously affect the quality of people's lives. We are committed to stamping out the injuries and upset that can be caused by their irresponsible use.

In June, the Parliament and the Scottish ministers supported the Fireworks Bill, which has now become law, and we plan to consult widely with the police and local authorities on its implementation.

In March, the Minister for Finance and Public Services wrote to each local authority drawing their attention to the good practice identified in the report produced by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and has written to them again this month to remind them that they should implement that good practice.

A joint working group on fireworks has been established by the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and others to enable proactive policing and problem-solving initiatives. Further, this morning the Lord Advocate reminded shopkeepers and others selling fireworks to children that they will be caught and prosecuted and will face fines or imprisonment.

**Maureen Macmillan:** Joint working with Westminster has produced legislation that, by next year, should solve many of the problems caused by the misuse of fireworks. However, will the First Minister join me in roundly condemning those shopkeepers who, this year, are selling fireworks to children under 18? Further, will he join me in congratulating the shopkeepers in Oban who, Oban police tell me, have voluntarily agreed not to sell fireworks to anyone under 21 so that it is less likely that irresponsible older teenagers will supply children with fireworks?

**The First Minister:** The initiative in Oban, which I discussed with the Oban police when I visited the town for the Royal National Mod earlier this month, is excellent and I strongly recommend that it be adopted elsewhere in Scotland. It will certainly help to reduce the irresponsible use of fireworks in that town. I want to reiterate that the fines, which can be as much as £5,000, and the imprisonment, which can be for as long as six months, are a serious threat to those who irresponsibly sell fireworks to children. I further repeat that, across Scotland, our police forces are targeting those who are selling illegal fireworks from their homes or out of the boots of their cars. I assure them that, over the next fortnight, the police will do all that they can to catch them. We are determined to work with our colleagues in Westminster to stop this menace in Scotland.

**Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP):** Is the First Minister aware of the British Fireworks Association's statement that, in 2003, more than 2,000 tonnes of fireworks will have found their way to illegal premises for the purposes of being sold illegally? That figure constitutes approximately 10 per cent of the total UK fireworks market. Does he believe that the legislation and the powers that the police have at the moment are adequate to deal with that situation? If not, what further measures does he think need to be taken?

**The First Minister:** I spoke with ACPOS and the Lord Advocate this morning. They are working together with trading standards officers and other agencies not only to minimise the sale of illegal fireworks and the sale of fireworks to children, but to tackle those responsible. They have my full support in doing so.

The Department of Trade and Industry is about to publish regulations following on from the Fireworks Act 2003, which has received royal assent. In trying to implement those regulations, in co-operation with our colleagues in London, I will welcome the support of the Scottish nationalist party if it is now available. It is unfortunate that it was not available in the chamber earlier this year when we debated the Sewel motion that allowed the legislation to be effective in Scotland.

### Concorde

**5. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what discussions the Scottish Executive has had on the provision of a Concorde for the National Museums of Scotland. (S2F-306)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** The Scottish ministers have fully supported the bid by the National Museums of Scotland to secure one of the retiring Concorde fleet and we have undertaken to provide up to £2 million from the

existing culture budget for the development plans for the Museum of Flight.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Does the First Minister agree that the bringing of a Concorde to the Museum of Flight would be a tremendous triumph for Scotland and a tribute to the Scottish contribution to Concorde and to aviation in general? As a statement from British Airways is imminent—I understand that it will be early this afternoon—will the First Minister highlight the supreme importance of obtaining a favourable decision on the matter?

**The First Minister:** I am delighted to say that I expect that British Airways will confirm later today that one of the Concorde fleet will be allocated to the NMS for the Museum of Flight at East Fortune. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton and John Home Robertson in securing that positive announcement. I hope that the Parliament will join me in praising them and in welcoming the fact that we have secured a Concorde for our country and our people.

**Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab):** That is good news for East Lothian and for Scotland. I thank the First Minister and the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport for their support for the bid. I also thank members of all parties, including Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, for their support.

Is the First Minister aware that the Concorde's last journey on the minor road to Athelstaneford will be rather slower than mach 2, which will highlight the fact that, at present, East Fortune is not the easiest place in Scotland to get to? Can we look to the Executive for support for better public transport so that people from every part of Scotland can enjoy the magnificent new visitor attraction at the museum?

**The First Minister:** While I admire the creative and imaginative way in which John Home Robertson engineered that question, today we are paying tribute to one of the greatest feats of British engineering of the past century. I hope that, in years to come, people in Scotland will have the chance to enjoy learning about and from it.

**The Presiding Officer:** Fergus Ewing has a point of order.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** I fear that Concorde is temporarily departing. Thank you, Presiding Officer for the opportunity to make this point of order. Of necessity, I gave you brief but immediate notice of it. In response to questions from Mr Swinney, the First Minister stated that the Fraser inquiry has exactly the same powers as the inquiry into the Profumo affair and the Hutton inquiry had. Is it not a matter of fact that that can be true only

in the sense that neither of those inquiries had any power whatever?

**The Presiding Officer:** What is the point of order, Mr Ewing?

**Fergus Ewing:** The First Minister went on to state that Lord Fraser's inquiry has all

"the powers that it needs."

The Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921 gives inquiries the power to require the production of tapes, but Lord Fraser has no such powers. Therefore, it appears that the First Minister has, perhaps inadvertently, misled Parliament.

Finally, Presiding Officer—

**The Presiding Officer:** Briefly.

**Fergus Ewing:** Is it not the case that Lord Fraser has about as much power to require production of the tapes as King Canute had to hold back the tide?

**The Presiding Officer:** At such short notice, it is impossible for me to make such a judgment. The BBC may yet reach an agreement with the Fraser inquiry—we do not know. The First Minister's answers were based, properly, on his interpretation of the inquiry's effectiveness. Therefore, Mr Ewing, I do not judge your point to be a point of order.

12:34

*Meeting suspended until 14:30.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Cod Fishery (Closure)

**1. Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to minimise the impact of any closure of the cod fishery on fish processors in Scotland. (S2O-645)

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** Without any doubt, the December fisheries council this year promises to be another difficult negotiation. However, given that there are some encouraging signs of cod recovery, my objective will be to assist fish processors and others by resisting closure while pressing on with the recovery programmes.

**Brian Adam:** I certainly welcome any efforts that the minister will make to resist closure. He will be aware that haddock are the most prolific species in the North sea, with around 400,000 tonnes of stock, but I am unsure whether he realises just how difficult it is for Scottish processors to market that haddock at the moment. Could extra funding be made available to support the processors?

**Ross Finnie:** One difficulty that we appear to be having in our current discussions with the processors is a misunderstanding about the money that we have set aside within the allocation under the financial instrument for fisheries guidance. We also have the fish-processing action plan, which Rhona Brankin originally introduced. There seems to be some doubt, but we are not prepared to fund things that duplicate the work of other organisations. The Sea Fish Industry Authority has a very important role to play as a marketing organisation. I recently had a meeting with the fish processors in which I tried desperately to get them and all the organisations to agree that we need to use all the available funding in the optimal way to benefit the processors.

**Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will the minister clarify that statement a little further? In the mind of many fish processors, the minister indicated back in February that there would be a financial package for the fish-processing sector. Is he saying that the proposed funding will not be available?

**Ross Finnie:** Absolutely not. Indeed, at my most recent meeting with the fish processors, which took place within the past fortnight or so, I

was quite staggered to find that one of them had formed such a view. They made a counter-proposal in response to my request that they come back with further measures because we had originally set aside a discrete £1 million for specific items, which I have always said would remain available. That money remains available, but it may not be used either to run the administration of the fish processors organisation or to replicate those matters that can properly be addressed by bodies such as Seafish.

**Mr Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** The minister wrote to me last month to say that a range of possible measures were being considered to increase applications for aid under the FIG programme, and I am grateful for that response. Can he now tell us how those deliberations are progressing? Although fish processors can apply for the aid, the uptake is low.

**Ross Finnie:** The biggest problem at the moment is the matter to which Brian Adam referred when he started this question and which was slightly picked up by Ted Brocklebank and now by Richard Baker. I am slightly at a loss to understand why the major fish processors organisation thinks that we are not prepared to release funds when I have been quite explicit that the only two reasons that we would not do so are either that the request related to the administration of the fish processors organisation or that those funds could more properly be used by other organisations. There has been a continuing uptake. For the 2002-06 period, some £30 million of the £36 million available under the FIG programme to the fish-processing sector still remains to be allocated. I can only repeat that I am anxious that that money be used by that sector.

### **Maternity Services (Glasgow)**

**2. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on the centralisation of maternity services in Glasgow. (S20-658)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm):** Planning and providing maternity services in Glasgow is in the first place a matter for NHS Greater Glasgow. At its meeting on Tuesday 21 October, the NHS board approved proposals that will now be the subject of public consultation. The outcome of that process will in due course be submitted to me for consideration.

**Patrick Harvie:** Will the minister acknowledge the wave of concern at the proposal to close the Queen Mother's maternity hospital? Will he acknowledge that those concerns are genuine and that they exist among patients, professionals and the wider public? Will he tell us what he intends to do to ensure that the concerns that have been voiced do not fall on deaf ears?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** As I indicated in my first answer, at the end of the consultation and once the board has submitted its final proposals to me, I will have to come to a view. It would therefore be wrong for me to express a view at this stage. I assure Patrick Harvie that I am conscious of the very strongly held views in support of Yorkhill. I am also conscious that other points of view are being expressed. One of the things that strikes me in the debate, which is possibly different from other debates, is the genuine division of opinion among senior clinicians on the issue.

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** The minister will be aware of the accusation that has been made by paediatricians that their advice has been ignored in the course of the independent review and report and that Greater Glasgow NHS Board says that a million signatures will not change its decision. Does he agree that Greater Glasgow NHS Board should be told that that is not an acceptable way in which to conduct a consultation, as it will jeopardise the Scottish Executive's policy on genuine consultation? Further, what are the exact criteria that he will use in making the decision on the fate of the Queen Mother's hospital, which has one of the most treasured maternity units in Scotland?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** One of the issues that I have to look at is the adequacy of the public consultation round the issue. The second issue is the substantive proposal that is to come to me on the reorganisation of the services. Those are the two key issues that I will look at. Clearly, I will pay close attention to what the paediatricians are saying. I will equally listen to the views of obstetricians.

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** The minister has heard the concerns of constituents and professionals. I want to go one step further. He mentioned the three-month consultation process, but he is aware that Glasgow has already undergone a consultation process. We are not happy about the present situation. Indeed, professionals and public alike believe the process to be flawed. I ask him not to wait until the end of the so-called consultation process. I ask him to instigate an investigation into Greater Glasgow NHS Board's handling of the whole affair of the maternity services review. I plead with him on behalf of the public and professionals to wait for the three-month process to be undertaken.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** The correct thing to do is to ensure that public consultation takes place now. It would not be appropriate for me to take the action that Sandra White suggests. I can certainly assure her that I will pay close attention not only to the substantive arguments that are being made but to the nature of the public consultation. As I made clear this week, when the final decision is made,

there will be no question of my just rubber stamping it. Over the next two months, which is the length of the remainder of the consultation, I will look in great detail at the issues. I have already started to do that and I assure her and others that I will continue to do that.

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** Last week, in an answer to Jackie Baillie on the issue of maternity services, the minister said that he had asked NHS Greater Glasgow and NHS Argyll and Clyde

“for a more detailed report ... on the pattern of patient choice between Glasgow and Paisley”—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 20 October 2003.]

in relation to maternity services. However, he said that the report would not be available until “April 2004”. How can he allow a decision of this magnitude to take place when he does not even have that detailed report?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** As I indicated, the reality is that the proposal from Greater Glasgow NHS Board will probably not come to me for another three or four months, which will be in alignment with the time scale that Tommy Sheridan indicated. However, he has flagged up an important issue, which will be raised again in Carolyn Leckie’s question. I will deal with the regional dimension at that point. I made it clear to NHS Argyll and Clyde that I was not going simply to rubber stamp its proposals. I am asking for further work to be done.

### Audiology Graduates

**3. Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how many students it expects to graduate within NHS Scotland in an audiology discipline in each of the next three years. (S2O-655)

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Tom McCabe):** NHS Education for Scotland has been asked to report to ministers before the end of this year on the options for education and training for audiology services in Scotland. Clearly, however, a new undergraduate course will involve a lead time of a number of years before audiology students graduate in Scotland.

**Christine May:** Will the minister outline the progress that has been made in improving audiology services following the needs assessment report that was commissioned in 2001? Is he satisfied with the progress that is being made to establish new training places for audiology services? Does he have any plans to meet the training providers soon to discuss the matter?

**Mr McCabe:** The audiology report of 2001

highlighted significant gaps in service provision. We have always known that there would be no overnight solutions to plugging the gaps in that service. However, since the publication of the report, we have committed investment of more than £19 million—£9 million of which I announced recently. We have established an audiology project board, chaired by an NHS board chief executive, and we have appointed a project manager to oversee the implementation of the service and drive forward improvements.

As I said, I expect a report on progress on undergraduate training to be produced before the end of the year. If progress is insufficient, I am more than happy to add ministerial weight to those discussions.

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** On the aspect of ministerial weight, given that the current waiting time for a hearing test in the Scottish Borders is almost a year, what assistance will the minister give to NHS Borders, which has one of the highest levels of elderly population in Scotland, to reduce that shocking statistic? There is not much point in digital hearing aid programmes if people have to wait a year for a hearing test.

**Mr McCabe:** I indicated in my previous answer that we know that there are significant gaps in provision. That is why the various initiatives that I outlined have been taken. Each NHS board in Scotland has been asked for their modernisation plans. When the plans are received the Executive will consider them and an adequate response will be made. That is as much the case for Borders NHS Board as it is for any other board.

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** Can the minister confirm that the target of the 2004-05 academic year for the start of the BSc audiology course could still be realistic? I was a little concerned when he referred to the fact that it might be introduced several years down the line. Can he confirm that 2004-05 is a realistic target?

**Mr McCabe:** I am not in a position to confirm that time scale as realistic because the discussions have not yet been concluded and the report has not come to ministers—as I said, it will not come to ministers until the end of the year. I realise that there is a need for urgency. We will pursue the matter as soon as the information is available.

### Genetically Modified Crops

**4. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive when it intends to make a statement on its plans for the future of genetically modified crops. (S2O-663)

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson):** A statement will be made when we have had the opportunity to evaluate both the outcome of the dialogue on genetically modified crops and the advice from the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment on the implications of the farm-scale evaluation results.

**Iain Smith:** Will the minister assure me that when decisions are being reached on the future of GM crops the precautionary principle will be rigorously applied? Will he take full account of the failure of the seed companies to provide pure samples for the recent trials in north-east Fife and elsewhere, which cast doubt on their ability to maintain separation of GM and non-GM materials? Will he also take full account of the recently published reports on the field trials, which suggest that farming methods associated with GM oil-seed rape are damaging to biodiversity?

**Allan Wilson:** I am pleased to give Iain Smith the assurances that he seeks. I go further and say that development of our future policy will be based on all the relevant information, including the outcome of the public debate to which he refers, the science review, the study on costs and benefits, and the results of the farm-scale evaluations, on which we will of course seek additional expert advice from ACRE prior to making any response. I suspect that a response will be made towards the end of the year or at the beginning of the new year.

**Mr Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Does the minister agree that the delay and indecision that have followed the discussions on the GM issue during the summer are damaging to the clean image of food in Scotland? Will he make it possible for a case to be made to the European Union for a GM moratorium in Scotland as soon as possible, so that we can end the indecision?

**Allan Wilson:** No. I do not agree with any of that. Last night, I was in discussion with colleagues in the ministries in Wales, Northern Ireland and Westminster about the development of the policy, which will continue to be science based and will continue to constitute responsible policy making. I have had this conversation with Mr Gibson in the past. He knows that it would be contrary to the EU single market for any member state or any part of any member state to impose the type of restrictions that he would seek to impose on the development of GM technology in this country.

**Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green):** I remind the minister of EU directive 2001/18/EC, on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms, which states:

"The competent authority should give its consent only

after it has been satisfied that the release will be safe for human health and the environment."

Given the results of the science, will the Scottish Executive now state that it, as the competent authority, will follow that directive and not give consent for the release of genetically modified organisms?

**Allan Wilson:** That is an unproven case as yet. I said to Mr Smith and repeat to Mr Ballard that we will take expert advice from the scientific community on the outcome of the farm-scale evaluations. I make one observation in advance of that: given that, in coming to our decision, we will apply the European regulatory framework to which Mr Ballard refers, any decision that we take will protect human health and our environment. However, the outcome of the farm-scale evaluations demonstrated clearly that the worst as well as the best result for biodiversity was from conventional farming.

#### **East Lothian Schools Public-Private Partnership**

**5. Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what involvement it has had, and plans to have, in the East Lothian schools public-private partnership. (S2O-641)

**The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson):** The Scottish Executive's role in all schools public-private partnerships, including the one in East Lothian, is to consider bids for financial support on the basis of business cases submitted by authorities. We also provide general advice and guidance as projects progress to contract signature. Thereafter, matters arising are subject to the agreed contracts.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Does the Scottish Executive share concerns about the fact that Ballast plc has now been placed in administration? Can the Executive tell us who owns the schools in East Lothian as of today? Should the Executive have to provide financial support at any time for the project to complete, would that not undermine the argument that PPP is off balance sheet and that the private sector takes the risk?

**Euan Robson:** As I understand it, the position is that East Lothian Council and the administrator are taking matters forward on the basis of the contractual position. The Executive has no present plans to intervene or to provide financial support. Fiona Hyslop asks about matters of contract between the parties concerned. It is my understanding, from East Lothian Council, that matters are being taken forward and may be resolved imminently.

**Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** The minister will be aware of the effect that the



collapse of Ballast plc is having on local subcontractors. One long-standing family firm in my constituency is set to lose 350 jobs as a result of it. Can the Executive do anything to put pressure on the administrator to deal with the matter as timeously as possible to try to ensure that payments are made? I am interested that the minister says that some movement on the matter may be imminent. Will he give us any further details about that?

**Euan Robson:** The matter of the subcontractors, which Mrs Smith has been assiduous in following up on behalf of her constituents, should be taken up with the administrator by the legal agents retained by the subcontractor. It is not for the Executive to intervene and raise the matter with the administrator. It is a matter of contract between the contractor, the subcontractor and the administrator working to recover the contractor's position.

East Lothian Council has given general indications that progress is being made with the administrator. My understanding is that there may, in the near future, be a possibility of a company taking over Ballast's assets, but not necessarily its liabilities. However, that too is a matter between the council, the administrator and those involved in the contract.

**Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab):** Notwithstanding opportunist political gripes from a nationalist list member who has some kind of ideological objection to the investment of millions of pounds in improvements to schools in East Lothian, is the minister aware that there are already several high-quality bids to take on the PPP contracts, and that the project should be back on track within the next few weeks at no extra cost to East Lothian Council? In relation to the point raised by Margaret Smith, will the Executive consider ways to ensure that Ballast's administrator hands over the £2 million that has been paid for work that has been done by about 20 local subcontractors? Would it not be a scandal if those companies were to be done out of their legitimate earnings?

**Euan Robson:** I am fully aware of the implications for the subcontractors, and I will consider the member's remarks. I agree that East Lothian Council has acted quickly to try to recover the position. The Executive has not been party to those negotiations, nor should it be. However, as I have said, I will consider the member's comments.

#### **Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Bill (Remote Areas)**

**6. Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive how the Primary Medical Services

(Scotland) Bill will help improve access to health services in remote rural areas. (S2O-627)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm):** The Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Bill and the contractual arrangements that it underpins will benefit general practitioners and patients in remote and rural areas, just as they will benefit people in more urban settings. For example, they will assist recruitment and retention and will facilitate the development of a broader range of high-quality services in primary care, with a 33 per cent increase in resources for primary care over a three-year period.

**Mr Stone:** It will come as no surprise to the minister that my concern regards the factor of distance and remoteness. The minister's colleague the First Minister will know from his recent visit to Stoer what we are talking about with regard to long distances in the north-west of Sutherland. Out-of-hours cover is the issue and I seek reassurance from the minister that there will not be a problem in that area, as there is a fear that there might be. I ask him to work as closely as possible with NHS Highland to ensure that a problem does not emerge in that regard.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I shall certainly work with NHS Highland. In addition, the group that is working on out-of-hours provision is working with NHS boards, and work on the issue is also being undertaken with boards through the remote and rural areas resource initiative.

Jamie Stone is right in what he says. The new contract is good in that it provides extra resources and, under the new formula, gives an extra weighting to rural issues. Overall, it is a very good contract for rural areas, as it is for urban areas. Work is being done on out-of-hours services. I saw some of the redesign work, which involved using paramedics in new ways, when I visited Moray during the summer. GPs and nurses will of course be involved too. There is great scope for services to be delivered in different ways. Any transfer of services will be made only to an accredited alternative provider.

**Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab):** The minister knows about concerns in Stirling constituency about out-of-hours provision under the new general medical services contract, particularly at an inducement practice in Killin. Can he provide details of the discussions on inducement practices that are continuing between the minister's officials, the Scottish General Practitioners Committee and the Rural Practices Association?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** Some of the details are still being negotiated, but inducement practitioners can be reassured. As I said at a previous question

time, their current income is guaranteed. In fact, the situation is improving for them. Not only will they benefit by the new formula, which is particularly beneficial for rural areas, but the current system, whereby practitioners who earn extra income beyond a certain point have that clawed back, will end. Inducement practitioners will certainly benefit from the new contract, as will primary care health care professionals and, more important, patients throughout Scotland.

### Healthy Eating

**7. Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to advance healthy eating in light of the recent reported issues with its healthy eating advice line. (S2O-662)

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Tom McCabe):** We will continue to take forward healthy eating as part of the integrated and wide-ranging strategy that was set out in "Eating for Health: a Diet Action Plan for Scotland" and which was included in "Improving Health in Scotland—The Challenge".

**Margo MacDonald:** I agree with what the minister has outlined, but I wonder whether he might comment on a couple of ideas. Could he undertake to instigate discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities as to how it might use the new well-being measures in local government legislation to dissuade people from selling food that is frankly antisocial, and which has a very high fat content?

Secondly, will he take the initiative in convening a European conference on the issue, which must be tackled throughout Europe? The conference should be charged with finding areas of common interest and ways in which European Governments and Administrations such as ours might dissuade the manufacturers and advertisers of junk food from getting at children through children's media.

**Mr McCabe:** As has been made clear in a number of documents, we see local authorities as an important part of health promotion in Scotland. Our discussions with local authorities through COSLA continue and I know that local government is keen to play an active part in improving Scotland's health. A number of initiatives have already taken place and cities such as Glasgow will show the way through the health promotion initiatives that they will launch in the near future.

As I am interested in promoting healthy eating and health improvement in Scotland, I would like first to spend my time concentrating on this country; perhaps I will think more about the European Union later.

**Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** What is the Executive doing to promote healthy eating in schools and hospitals? What can the Executive do to challenge the burger-chips-and-fizzy-drink mentality in schools and to improve the quality of food that is on offer? Is the minister aware of Unison Scotland's food for good campaign, which aims to turn hospital food into a byword for excellence rather than for poor quality?

**Mr McCabe:** A number of initiatives are taking place and have been discussed before in the Parliament. They include encouraging healthy eating in schools and the production of nutritional standards for food in hospitals and other public places. A considerable amount of work is being done to ensure that food that is consumed in public facilities is of a proper quality and meets appropriate nutritional standards. I am happy to endorse any initiative, such as the Unison campaign, that aims to improve nutritional standards in the food that is served in public places throughout Scotland.

### European Constitution

**8. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with Her Majesty's Government about the representation of Scotland's interests at the intergovernmental conference on the proposed European constitution. (S2O-652)

**The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr):** The Scottish Executive has been and remains in close contact with the United Kingdom Government in order to ensure that Scotland's interests continue to be represented at the intergovernmental conference.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Is the minister aware that the UK Government has made no objections in the IGC to the handing over of exclusive control of Scotland's fishing industry to the European Union? Will he clarify whether that is a result of the UK's ignoring the Scottish Executive's representations or of the Scottish Executive's failure to press the Scottish fishing industry's case with UK ministers? Does he agree that, if Scotland were an independent member of the European Union, there would be no question of our fishing industry being so badly let down because no Scottish Government worthy of the name would allow that to happen?

**Mr Kerr:** If Scotland were an independent nation it would sit in a far corner of the room with little or no influence over what happens in Europe. In that case, the views of our fishing industry, farmers and communities would not be well represented by an independent Scottish representative in the IGC or in any other European forum. The Hain paper, which was promoted in concert in Scotland and Wales, will ensure that, under European

subsidiarity, regional Governments and sub-national Parliaments such as ours will be at the heart of Europe when it comes to accountability, consultation and decision making. That will make a real difference. I do not agree one bit with Nicola Sturgeon's interpretation of the situation of the fishing industry in Europe.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Given the importance of the EU constitution, will the Scottish Executive make representations to Her Majesty's Government to seek a Britain-wide referendum on the constitution? If the British people find the constitution offensive, they should have the right to throw it out.

**Mr Kerr:** The member really wants a referendum to take Britain out of Europe. If we read the conclusions of his party's think-tanks and the treatises and leaflets that his party's MPs have written, we see that that party aims to create a different Europe altogether; one that is about trading and nothing else. To divorce ourselves from most of the institutions in Europe would mean that we would lose all the value and benefit that we get from Europe and do Scotland no good.

For a referendum to be required, there must be a proposal for substantial change in relationships between the member organisations and the EU. However, a substantial change will not take place. Murdo Fraser's party said that the Nice treaty was the end of democracy as we knew it but, of course, many years down the line that process has resulted in no great change to Scottish and UK democracy.

**Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):** Will the minister join me in welcoming to the gallery senators from the Czech Republic? [*Applause.*] Does he agree that the IGC and European enlargement provide opportunities for Scotland? Does he believe—as I do—that it is on the foundations of educational, cultural and business links that the new Europe will progress and move forward with Scotland playing a full part in that?

**Mr Kerr:** That is absolutely correct. European enlargement offers great opportunities for Europe and its nation states, including Scotland.

I was over in the Czech Republic recently, and I was welcomed there. I return that welcome in warmly welcoming the senators to Scotland. I saw democratic changes and reforms there and I saw the way forward for Europe, involving wider state coverage within Europe. Those are very positive things. In the British embassy in Prague, I met British and Scottish suppliers in order to ensure that the trade and learning that we can pass on to our colleagues in the Czech Republic were being passed on. That presents advantages and benefits to Scotland as a whole.

### Housing Grants (Water Supply)

**9. Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether, under the terms of the new housing grants scheme, local authorities may make grants in relation to applications made under the terms and conditions of the old scheme, with particular reference to water supply provision where current installations have been declared unfit for use. (S2O-666)

**The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran):** Local authorities may continue to award grants under the terms and conditions of the old scheme if an application was approved before the new scheme came into effect or if the grant is linked to a statutory notice made before that same date. A statutory notice could have been made in relation to a house that lacks a wholesome water supply.

**Phil Gallie:** From a quick assessment of that, I believe that I can take some encouragement. Can the minister confirm that, under the transitional arrangements under note 19 of the terms of guidance, an improvement order or a repair notice could be taken as an indication that a water supply that has previously been subject to a grant should be considered for a grant under the old terms of the scheme?

**Ms Curran:** I hesitate to give Phil Gallie any further encouragement, in case he makes a point of order. Nevertheless, I think that he can take some encouragement from that.

### Maternity Services

**10. Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on regional and national planning in relation to the provision of maternity services. (S2O-651)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm):** The report of the expert group on acute maternity services makes it clear that acute maternity services should be planned and commissioned in a regional context. To help to facilitate that, we have provided funding for a regional maternity services co-ordinator in each of the three regional planning groups. I also emphasised the importance of looking at maternity services across board boundaries when I responded to the Argyll and Clyde maternity proposals last week.

**Carolyn Leckie:** As the minister indicated in reply to Jackie Baillie's question, he shares my concerns about the lack of regional planning. Does he also share my concern that an inspection of the minutes of the meetings of Argyll and Clyde NHS Board and Greater Glasgow NHS Board shows that there was no one from the neighbouring health boards in attendance at any of those

important decision-making meetings? Does he share my concern that there is no reference to any research having been conducted into the impact of the changes across health board boundaries and that the Glasgow area medical committee has not been asked for its opinion on the proposals in Argyll and Clyde? In the context of competing rationales being put forward for stand-alone maternity units in Argyll and Clyde and for the closure of an obstetric unit at the Queen Mother's hospital, does the minister agree that, until there is proper and accountable planning, there should be a moratorium on all maternity closures?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I do not think that we can have a moratorium, because it is widely recognised that some of the current services are not sustainable. However, I certainly accept that we need to do more in a regional context. That is why I asked both Argyll and Clyde and Glasgow NHS boards to undertake further work in that area. It is important that we do not look at the matter just in the context of board boundaries. That is my strong view and it is the view of the expert working group on acute maternity services report to which I have referred.

Therefore, there is a strong regional dimension to the issue and a strong national dimension in terms of the framework that the EGAMS report outlines. Obviously, Carolyn Leckie raised other points about community midwife-led units and Yorkhill. I have talked about Yorkhill, but just as there are different views on Yorkhill, so there are different views on community midwife-led units. Carolyn Leckie has a view and many other people, including other midwives, have different views. Certainly, the EGAMS report believes that there is a place for community midwife-led units. That is certainly an important way of giving women choice and the opportunity of local delivery.

#### **Police (Racism and Sectarianism)**

**11. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to ensure that racism and sectarianism have no place in the Scottish police service at grass-roots level. (S2O-634)

**The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):** A wide range of measures have been put in place to promote and improve race equality within the Scottish police service and to ensure that racism is not tolerated. All police forces now have detailed guidance to enable them to fulfil their statutory commitment to eliminate unlawful discrimination, as well as racial diversity performance indicators covering recruitment, retention and career development.

**Donald Gorrie:** Thank you—that is encouraging. Can the minister ensure that the police take the most effective action that they can

to deal with recruitment and training? Unfortunately, some police recruits reflect the racism, sectarianism and prejudice that are present in parts of our society and the police force has to try to educate its recruits out of such attitudes. Will she encourage that to happen?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I put on record again that there is no place for racism or sectarianism in the police force, or in any part of Scottish society. We must be constantly vigilant to ensure that recruitment processes and training stop people from having such attitudes and deal effectively with the problems when they arise.

#### **Scottish Forests (Support)**

**12. Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it accepts the conclusions of the recent University of Newcastle upon Tyne study that stated that Scottish forests contribute £104 million per year in total benefits and whether current support for Scottish forests is adequate. (S2O-659)

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson):** Yes, ministers are pleased to accept the conclusions in the report "The Social and Environmental Benefits of Forests in Great Britain". The estimated value of public benefit supports the rationale behind the Scottish forestry grants scheme and the continuing management of Scotland's national forests by the Forestry Commission Scotland.

**Mr Ruskell:** I thank the minister for his answer. Given the significant social and environmental benefits that Scottish forests provide, will the Executive seek to take full advantage of the current opportunities that the reform of the common agricultural policy affords by modulating funds into rural development measures at the maximum possible level, thereby ensuring that woodland and agri-environment schemes are more adequately funded in the future?

**Allan Wilson:** There are different historical aspects to that, which have produced a set of circumstances in relation to wider CAP spend. Mr Finnie would certainly wish to consider those matters in the context of the opportunity for discussion of the balance of support. The university study, of course, does not compare values from forestry with the values from other activities including agriculture, but seeks merely to quantify environmental and other public benefits that accrue from forestry investment.

#### **Edinburgh Royal Infirmary (Generators)**

**13. Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether the provision of standby generators at Edinburgh royal infirmary is adequate. (S2O-649)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm):** The site has three generators, any two of which can provide for the full requirements of the hospital. There were differences between the two recent power interruption incidents at the ERI. The first one, on 4 September, was due to equipment issues; a forensic examination of equipment and systems has been undertaken. The second, on 21 October, was due to human error, and a programme of retraining for engineering staff at the infirmary has already started.

**Colin Fox:** I thank the minister for his answer. Given the obvious dangers that a loss of electrical power represents in a state-of-the-art hospital—there have been two such losses in as many months—and given the remarks of the chairman of the Lothian NHS Board, Brian Cavanagh, who said that he had “little or no trust” in Consort Healthcare (Edinburgh Royal Infirmary) Ltd’s ability to provide such electrical power, does the minister believe that the recent episodes expose again the fact that private finance initiative projects put profits ahead of the need to save lives and to provide quality health care for the people of the Lothians? Is it not time that the new royal infirmary was taken into public ownership?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** It is quite a big jump from two power interruptions to that conclusion. I understand the extreme frustration and dissatisfaction of the chair of Lothian NHS Board, Brian Cavanagh, and I commend him for the robust attitude that he has taken towards Consort Healthcare. It is unacceptable that such power cuts happen. As I explained in my initial answer, robust action is being taken to deal with the problem and we do not expect the power supply to be interrupted again. There is now 24-hour cover by permanent engineering staff should anything go wrong again.

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** That concludes question time. As usual, I ask members leaving the chamber to do so quickly and quietly.

## Point of Order

15:11

**Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Following a point of order that I made yesterday, I attempted to lodge a motion to the effect that the Parliament should invoke section 23 of the Scotland Act 1998 to require the BBC to produce any documents or tapes requested by Lord Fraser in the course of his inquiry into the Holyrood building project. I was told by the clerk in the chamber office that he would have to consult the Parliament’s legal advisers before the motion could be lodged formally. That was nearly 24 hours ago, but the chamber office is still apparently waiting for a response from the Parliament’s legal advisers. Presiding Officer, can you use your good offices to expedite matters and to try to ensure that my motion is lodged and debated by the Parliament?

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** This is a serious question that deserves serious consideration. The matter has been referred to the legal advisers for legal advice on ultra vires powers. I understand that we shall have an answer by 5 o’ clock tonight.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

**The Presiding Officer:** Is it further to Mr Canavan’s point of order?

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** It is related to the same issue. Presiding Officer, can you give me guidance on the exact status of the Holyrood progress group? Does the group, either collectively or as individuals, represent the Parliament or the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body?

**The Presiding Officer:** The progress group was appointed by the corporate body at the instruction of the Parliament. I hope that that is clear. If so, we can move to the next item of business.

**Margo MacDonald:** Further to my point of order, if the progress group represents the Parliament, I presume that its members can represent the views of the Parliament and reflect what the Parliament considers to be debate in the public interest. Is it in order for a member of the Parliament’s press office to instruct a back-bench member of the Parliament not to take part in a public discussion on radio on the Fraser inquiry?

**The Presiding Officer:** I have no knowledge of that matter. As I received no advance notice of the point of order, I cannot be expected to respond to it now. I shall look into the matter and respond to Margo MacDonald on the record. Under standing

orders, I am the only person who can represent the Parliament.

We move to the next item of business. Those members who wish to leave should do so now.

## **“Building Better Cities”**

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-526, in the name of Andy Kerr, on “Building Better Cities: Delivering Growth and Opportunities”, and on three amendments to the motion.

15:14

### **The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr):**

Scotland’s future is bound up with the future of its cities. They are drivers of growth and dynamism for all of Scotland. The people of Scotland deserve to enjoy a world-class urban environment. We can be proud that we have a rich inheritance of historical experience and present-day expertise on which to build.

Many of us will share the unique problems that our cities face, but, equally, we have a common interest in finding collaborative solutions that can be sustained in the interests of the whole of Scotland—city, town, highland and island. It would be wrong to conceive of cities as sharp-edged, single units that are cut off from the rest of the country and from one another. Each city is the sum of a complex set of economic, social and cultural transactions in which we all take part, wherever we live or work.

“Building Better Cities: Delivering Growth and Opportunities” is a catalyst for change, but it is also a recognition of the need for coherence in the approach to our cities and in the policies that we design around them. The approach is inclusive and draws on not only the resources of local and central Government, but the experiences of those who live in our cities so that regeneration is sustainable and not driven from the outside or from above. “Building Better Cities” is about a collaborative framework to address the distinctive challenges and opportunities that our cities face, but it is also the beginning of a change process in how we develop our urban policy. It is rooted firmly in the evidence that was set out in the “Review of Scotland’s Cities”, but that was never an end in itself.

“Building Better Cities” has been a catalyst for substantive and innovative action on the part of the six cities and their community planning partners. The past months have seen the development and approval of six strategic city-region agreements—the city visions—which are clear and constructive statements by each city of its strategic vision for the next 10 years. The city visions have been developed in close collaboration with community planning partners and endorsed by communities and stakeholders such as councils in each city region and ministers.

**Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab):** Does the minister agree that when cities engage in planning, it is important that they take into consideration areas that they border, such as my constituency of Midlothian, which borders and has a close economic relationship with Edinburgh?

**Mr Kerr:** When we discussed these matters with cities, we made it clear that we wanted to ensure that they were working in collaboration with their neighbours and, in that respect, we were pushing an open door. I have not had representations to the contrary about the involvement of authorities that neighbour cities in the development of city regions.

We have a set of genuinely innovative and exciting proposals for each of our cities, which are now being implemented. The visions reflect the diversity of our cities and address the full sweep of social, economic and cultural needs. They will make a real difference to quality of life for people in and around our cities.

In Glasgow the first aim of the city vision, "Metropolitan Glasgow", is to support major regeneration projects, such as for the Clyde, the Clyde gateway project in the east end and the millennium canal. The largest project is a cross-cutting move to address key skills gaps by expanding the schools vocational training programme to all eight local authorities, investing £9 million to provide up to 4,000 training places for potential early school leavers, supporting social cohesion and addressing skill shortages across the city region. I welcome warmly the depth of collaboration that there has been with Glasgow and its partners in developing the vision.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** An excellent example of cities meeting need far beyond their boundaries is the Clyde tunnel. I ask the minister to reflect on the fact that the Executive is currently funding the 1,000m of the Clyde tunnel to the same level as 1,000m of a rural road with light traffic. I urge the minister to meet representatives of Glasgow City Council and to talk to the Minister for Transport about addressing the important need for improvement to the Clyde tunnel so that the burden does not fall unfairly on the citizens of Glasgow.

**Mr Kerr:** I am well aware of how local government resource calculations work. Nicol Stephen is dealing with the issue that the member raised and I will liaise with her about that. If it would be helpful, I would be happy to meet the leadership of Glasgow City Council, as I do frequently.

We are at a staging point in relation to our cities. In Edinburgh, the city vision focuses on managing growth, promoting affordable accommodation—

**Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Mr Kerr:** Yes, if it is on Glasgow.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Glasgow has had higher than average economic growth in recent years. Does the minister accept that one of the city's challenges is the fact that 30 per cent of its working-age population is not in work and often lacks the skills that are needed to access the jobs that are being created, many of which go to those who live outside the city boundaries? If the problem is not tackled, we will have labour shortages, which will threaten continued economic growth, and we will not be able to tackle the social deprivation that mars Glasgow. How will the minister tackle the skills gap in Glasgow, not just among young people but across the age groups?

**Mr Kerr:** I agree with that view, which was reflected by the Glasgow local economic forum. That view confirms Glasgow's above-average gross domestic product and employment growth and its healthy economic figures. I accept wholeheartedly the member's point that Glaswegians sometimes do not benefit directly from that growth. Therefore, as part of the cities review process, there has been a £9 million project to develop the skills agenda within Glasgow. The Executive acknowledges fully the need to tackle that issue, which is part of the city vision. We seek to support the city by ensuring that we match the population to the skills that will be needed for the major regeneration projects that are going on. We want not only Glaswegians but their partners to benefit from that—the leader of Glasgow City Council has sought that through the wider regional partnership.

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** Will the minister take an intervention before he leaves Glasgow?

**Mr Kerr:** I need to leave Glasgow soon.

**Tommy Sheridan:** I know that the minister used to have affection for Glasgow. Will he comment on the report by independent consultants, which stated that the Glasgow Alliance had

"underperformed, failed in its main objectives and did not give value for money",

or on the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's remark that there is

"sometimes illogical competition between enterprise companies"?

Is there not a need to get more co-ordinated, joined-up working in Glasgow instead of having so many agencies?

**Mr Kerr:** I agree with that point. The Executive is working hard with its partners in Glasgow. The Rocket Science report made that point but, to be fair, the member has selected his quotations.

Although there are things that we need to learn from the consultants' report about Glasgow, they are predicting that, over the next 10 years, average growth in the city will outstrip growth in the rest of Scotland, that it will gain 11,000 new jobs and that its working population will grow. Good things are happening in and around Glasgow, as is the case with many of our cities.

In Edinburgh, our capital city, the focus is on managing growth, promoting affordable accommodation for key workers, improving public transport and supporting the Executive's commitment to the city tramway. Edinburgh's city vision promotes the city as a world-class centre for culture and will enhance the public realm. Edinburgh has many things going for it, further work on which we seek to support through the cities review project.

In Stirling, the growth fund will support the Stirling sustainability centre, an eco-friendly business space, good practice in sustainable living and the Executive's commitment to the green jobs strategy.

Dundee is a city in transformation. Its city vision centres on the need to attract fresh talent and new investment in a dynamic and regenerating local economy. The city growth fund is reconnecting the city with its waterfront. As all members will acknowledge, Dundee has one of the best estuary settings in Europe. When I visited Dundee, I saw the incredible potential there. I am very pleased that Dundee City Council has invited the architect Frank Gehry, who is famous for the Guggenheim Museum and the Dundee Maggie's Centre, to be involved in some of the work on the waterfront.

Recently I also visited Aberdeen, which is building its vision of an energy city by diversifying—moving from oil and gas into renewable energy sources—establishing a seedcorn energy fund and developing a new energy futures centre as a key driver for growth. The city vision for Aberdeen incorporates an innovative approach to the cultural quarter and to sports and city heritage work.

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** I welcome the review, but does the minister acknowledge that more people live in Scotland's towns, which have populations of between 2,000 and 20,000, than live in its cities? Many of the problems and issues that the review addresses in relation to Scotland's cities could also be addressed in relation to Scotland's market towns, of which there are five in my constituency. Does the minister see the review as a model for progressing that?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Be careful with your time, minister.

**Mr Kerr:** I am conscious of that. We want to

ensure that the process, which is bedding down extremely well, works and we will assess that. The review provides a model for future practice. I agree whole-heartedly with the member's point about the smaller towns, villages and market towns throughout Scotland.

Inverness is a city with strong cultural values, a thriving economy and imaginative plans for the historic riverside, the castle, a recycling innovation zone and the Merkinch social inclusion partnership.

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will the minister give way?

**Mr Kerr:** I will not; the Presiding Officer has given me clear advice on that.

There is a powerful unifying theme of collaboration and partnership working. The city visions imply a forward-looking perspective that is about connecting our cities to one another and to the wider regions. We must lift our sights above the immediate concerns and extend them across different sectors and activities and beyond local boundaries for the benefit of cities' communities. We want to ensure that the city visions have those tangible outcomes, which we will measure in the future.

Members have drawn my attention to community planning and to ensuring that that process works well in the city regions. There are many issues to be addressed and that is why planning across all sectors is critical. Issues such as economic development, land-use planning, health care, protection of biodiversity and many others span entire regions and are significant for all of Scotland. We are convinced that the Executive can play a key role in supporting the spark and impetus coming from the cities and how they see their communities developing.

We intend to use mechanisms such as urban regeneration companies and other new delivery vehicles, such as business improvement districts. Among the pathfinder projects, Stirling Council is considering the advantages of using an urban regeneration company for the Raploch regeneration project. That will cut across many of the important issues for the city.

I have seen much good work being done in our cities. The Executive is investing in addressing some of the cultural, transport and infrastructure issues, such as supporting the rail links between Edinburgh and Glasgow, the reopening of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine line, the completion of the motorway network, and the opening of the Aberdeen peripheral route. Many of the Executive's innovative projects sit well with the regeneration of our cities and with the city vision statements.



We are talking not just about sustaining the momentum that has been built up by the cities so far, although we must acknowledge that, but about building on that beginning and taking our cities further. We are demonstrating vision, commitment and ambition. The vision is about Aberdeen being a world energy city, Dundee having the best waterfront in Europe, Edinburgh growing as an enterprise centre and capital city, Glasgow being a cohesive and modern merchant city, Inverness thriving as the capital of the Highlands, and Stirling being a healthy city with a revitalised Raploch estate.

That is our vision. Cities matter and people matter. There is much to celebrate about our cities, but planning and delivering better cities is imperative and our future well-being rests on that.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the significant progress made by local authorities and their community planning partners in taking forward the recommendations set out in *Building Better Cities: Delivering Growth and Opportunities* since its publication in January 2003 and the collaborative process led by the community planning partnerships in each city region to develop a 10-year City-Vision; welcomes the strategic plans set out in the six City-Visions, including the projects to be funded by the Cities Growth Fund, and endorses the Scottish Executive's long-term commitment to the regeneration of Scotland's cities.

15:27

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** At the risk of disconcerting the Minister for Finance and Public Services, I begin by saying that there is some common ground between us. There is no doubt that some of the initiatives that the minister mentioned in his speech are welcomed by all. The minister mentioned the Maggie's Centre in Dundee; I hope that a Maggie's Centre will soon be established in Inverness, although most of the money for that is coming not from the Executive, but from charitable effort.

We welcome many of those initiatives, unlike the Conservatives who seem to oppose them all. It is right to start by saying that. The purpose of debating the principles involved is to point to what I regard as valid criticisms of, and flaws in, the analysis and approach that have been adopted. I suggest that those flaws should be considered so that we can achieve common aims.

There is no doubt that Scotland's cities are drivers of economic growth. Equally, there is no doubt that economic growth is a top priority for us as it is for the Executive, even if we have different ideological views about the context in which that can best be achieved. We want to be ruthlessly constructive.

I am sure that the minister and other members will be aware that there has been valid academic

criticism. Ivan Turok from the department of urban studies at the University of Glasgow said that the review was "a modest response" to the range and intensity of the challenges facing the cities.

Some of those challenges have been mentioned. Depopulation is a serious problem for most if not all of the cities. Shona Robison mentioned Dundee to me in that context, and I believe that Nicola Sturgeon and members from all parties have that concern. That is not something that a cities policy can necessarily solve, but solving it is a key to our future—a sine qua non of economic success.

Professor Michael Pacione from the department of geography at the University of Strathclyde said:

"The Cities Review provides a succinct analysis of the current health of Scotland's cities but neglects the opportunity to address important issues such as those relating to city boundaries and local retention of business rates."

Members mentioned that in the debate on the same topic that took place in January 2003.

Professor Glen Bramley pointed to finance being a key issue and said that although the £90 million was welcome, it was not sufficient to address some of the more serious problems.

Let me mention a second flaw in the approach—as my audience departs from the public gallery. There is a strong argument that the best way in which to approach the intellectual and policy issues of improving our economy is to do so not solely on a geographical basis, but also on a sectoral basis. To do so on a geographical basis rather suggests that Government knows better than business what the remedies and solutions are. If we look at each sector of the Scottish economy—whether it is financial services, manufacturing, various types of modern technology, such as biotechnology, which the minister mentioned, or traditional industries, such as whisky—ask what the problems are and then try to address them, we can more readily achieve the aims that we all share.

It is ironic that it was the second First Minister who, when he wore the hat of Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, took the initiative of the pathfinders document, which set out on exactly that course of looking at each industry to find out how it could achieve more—although of course there are terrific successes. Sadly, Mr McLeish has departed. We were pleased to hear from him yesterday in another place, and were reminded of the past. It is unfortunate that the approach that he advocated, and which we supported, seems to have been abandoned somewhere along the line.

**Jeremy Purvis:** Does not Mr Ewing recognise that that strategy is being carried through in "A

Smart, Successful Scotland” and through the cluster approach of Scottish Enterprise—the budget of which Mr Ewing’s party wishes to slash?

**Fergus Ewing:** I find it impossible to agree with any of the assertions contained in that intervention. Since the point has not been grasped, perhaps I can restate it in a simpler way so that it is easy for anyone to understand. Let us take the whisky industry as an object lesson. It faces the problem of the highest taxation in the world for Scotland’s most famous Scottish product. Why is that so? I do not hear answers coming from the finance team opposite or from anyone else, for that matter, on the unionist benches.

**Mr Kerr:** Does the member agree with the recent study issued by the Executive, which showed that, in terms of taxation on business, Scotland—and, indeed, the UK—sits very well in comparison with most of our major competitors, and is at the lower end of the middle grouping of economies in terms of overall taxation?

**Fergus Ewing:** Obviously I do not agree, but that was a particularly inapposite intervention, because I was talking about tax on whisky, which is excise duty. The Executive’s report did not include any study of excise duty. It ignored it. Neither did the report include—and the minister raised this, so it is an open door—any reference to the tax on our oil, which is the highest or second highest in the world.

I return to Mr Purvis’s point, which I was trying to address before I was interrupted by the minister. On the whisky industry, we would be looking at the water framework directive, at labelling, and at all the regulations that are being foisted on the industry, and we would try to lift them, so that the industry could achieve more success. However, that has not happened.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have one minute.

**Members:** Hooray!

**Fergus Ewing:** I see that they are enjoying my speech. Obviously it is stimulating some mental activity on the opposing benches, which is always welcome, if surprising.

As an émigré from Glasgow, it seems to me that much of what we can do is not linked to Government or policy. Glasgow has some of the friendliest people that could be imagined—myself included, or not—and if that friendliness could be bottled, it would be more expensive than even the most expensive bottle of whisky.

It is not all about money. Inverness sought to become Europe’s capital of culture. If Scotland were an independent country, Inverness would have been the European capital of culture. Directly because we are not, that honour goes to

Liverpool. Next year, it goes to Cork and the year after that it goes to Luxembourg. Because of our subservient status, we lose the huge benefits that I am sure everyone recognises would have come from that honour.

I move amendment S2M-526.2, to leave out from “endorses” to end and insert:

“notes the concerns of many that the publication of the *Review of Scotland’s Cities* was a modest response to the challenges facing Scottish cities and that the review neglects the opportunity to address properly important issues of transport infrastructure and finance.”

15:35

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife)**

**(Con):** I have absolutely no reason to doubt the sincerity of the minister, the deputy minister or the officials—indeed, the whole team—who put forward the proposals in the cities review and the strategic vision that we are debating today. Indeed, I do not argue with their goal of a successful Scottish economy and I do not deny the fact that our cities are central to achieving that. In fact, so fragile is the Scottish economy that, were it not for the economic engine that is known as Edinburgh, we could expect to see Scotland in a real recession and not, as yesterday’s gross domestic product figures showed, just flirting with recession.

The cities are vital—on that much, we on the Conservative benches agree with the Executive, unlike the nationalists. I thought for a moment that I was at the wrong debate, because it did not seem that the intrinsic merits of cities and their development were being adequately debated. We differ from the Executive because we think that a different approach is required. We believe that, no matter how bright the minds that are involved, no matter how eager and sincere the ministers and no matter the amount of taxpayers’ money that is spent, the Executive cannot back winners, although that is what it seeks to do—

**Fergus Ewing:** That is just IDS.

**Mr Monteith:** Another day, Fergus, another day.

In the strategy, cities are chosen from a range of urban centres according to a geographic definition and by size. Choosing cities in that arbitrary way is flawed. We define Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee as cities because of their size. Since 1997, we have added Inverness and Stirling, both of which have received royal charters. They are to be congratulated on receiving the charters and on being included in the Executive’s plans in one way or another.

The difficulty with the economic approach is that it leaves out several other areas that make a significant contribution to Scotland’s economic activity. For example, Paisley has 74,000

inhabitants, East Kilbride has 73,000 inhabitants and Livingston has 50,000 inhabitants. All those places are larger than Inverness, which has 40,000 inhabitants, and Stirling, which has 32,000 inhabitants. That is the flaw at the heart of the strategy.

**Mr Kerr:** I took a lot of interventions during my speech and perhaps did not have a chance to put out some of the other messages around that point. We are spatially planning what we want to do in Scotland—we are not considering cities and their boundaries in isolation. Every city vision was based on close collaboration between the city and its immediate surroundings. East Kilbride and Paisley, as well as all the cities' other civic and community partners throughout Scotland, were involved in the process.

**Mr Monteith:** I thank the minister for his answer, as it leads me to consider another place that is clearly an economic centre, but which is not a city and is therefore not included in the process. That is the fair city of Perth, which is talked of as and considered to be a city and, indeed, had a lord provost until the local government reorganisation of 1974. However, Perth is not a city, as it does not have a royal charter. There is great concern that, sandwiched as it is between Dundee and Stirling, Perth is not able to access the funding, is not part of the strategy and cannot be part of the networking that will result from the Executive's programme.

Indeed, Perth and Kinross Council has confirmed to me that it has been approached by Stirling Council to discuss what Stirling might do but has not received any such approaches from Dundee. If the minister feels that areas outwith the immediate cities must be brought together, I should tell him that much more needs to be done in that respect.

Instead of managing the situation and having a top-down approach, we can change cities for the better and improve economies and public services on a national basis by ensuring that everyone benefits from a reduction in business rates and that every council—not just every city—can free up its spending through an end to ring fencing in all areas except police funding. Moreover, there must be better infrastructure in and between the cities to ensure that other areas outwith the cities are pulled in and pulled up economically.

Cities are prosperous because of their organic activity and the interaction between commercial businesses in them. We argue that the Executive, simply by picking and choosing cities, is leaving out areas of similar merit. That is why we have lodged our amendment.

I move amendment S2M-526.4, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"believes that the cities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness and Stirling are vital drivers of economic growth in Scotland and that they, together with Scotland's urban and rural economies, would benefit from a reduction in non-domestic rates, an improvement in transport infrastructure and better public services and further believes these three policies would achieve far more than centrally-directed government-inspired initiatives, strategic plans and visions."

15:41

**Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green):** Overall, there were many good things in the "Building Better Cities" document. It was encouraging that it included strategies that encompassed various policy strands such as housing, transport, economic regeneration and education. We would all agree that such partnership thinking is vital. The document also contained a stated commitment to sustainability and a recognition of the key challenge that we face in spreading success more widely around the country while managing current growth to improve quality of life in our cities.

In its motion, the Executive is keen to point out the progress that has been made since that policy statement in January. However, if the development of our cities is based on the framework outlined in "Building Better Cities", it will not give us sustainable cities.

I am sad to say that the environmental aspects of building better cities are not fully explored and that sustainability is by far the weakest of the six key themes set out in the document. It is mentioned only in the introduction and no fully fledged examples of sustainable development are given in the rest of the document. Sustainability is not an add-on; it must be integral. Without sustainable development, our cities will not achieve the diverse and productive economy that the document seeks.

I will look at the key issues that are dealt with in the document's sustainable development strand. The Green party supports the Government's target of recycling 25 per cent of household waste by 2006. However, the document does not mention recycling or waste reduction after the introductory pages. We should recognise that households produce relatively little waste compared with industry and commerce. It would be more satisfying if, in the development of city policy, figures and objectives were distinguished from each other and industrial waste and commercial waste were given greater emphasis and appropriate targets. We must ensure that the national waste strategy is integrated with "Building Better Cities".

Transport is also a recognised part of sustainable development. The figures on page 13 of the document suggest that traffic levels in the

five cities are set to increase by around 30 per cent by 2021. Although we welcome the commitment to improve public transport and acknowledge that each city is spending money on bus priority measures, park-and-ride schemes, new rail links and so on, it seems that, as usual, managing traffic is more of an objective than reducing the need to travel and overall traffic levels. The document barely mentions those issues.

For example, the five cities allocated only £6.6 million for walking, cycling and safer streets initiatives over the four years to 2003-04. It is unlikely that more people will be tempted on to their bicycles or that more children will walk to school unless safety for cyclists and pedestrians is vastly improved. Walking and cycling—

**Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** I agree with much of what the member says about the need to prioritise safer streets, walking and cycling. Does he agree that the City of Edinburgh Council's commitment—part-funded by the Executive—to introduce 20mph zones around all our schools is an excellent commitment and that it is exactly the way we need to go in our cities?

**Mark Ballard:** I welcome the initiatives that Sarah Boyack outlines, which are central to building better cities. However, my problem is that I do not feel that that vision is always properly integrated into the document.

I contrast the £6.6 million that is being spent to promote walking, cycling and 20mph zones with the sum of up to £500 million that has been allocated to the M74 extension. As the document shows, 41 per cent of households in Glasgow have access to a car. Therefore, the majority of households do not have access to a car, yet that vast amount of money is being spent on building the motorway.

What about the other priorities? Community planning is mentioned repeatedly in a variety of contexts as a framework for development, and the need for community involvement in decision making is recognised. However, the definition of environmental justice on page 22 of the document is watered down with no mention of community involvement in planning or the need to address environmental justice in new developments. Community planning must be led by communities; it must be planning by, not just for, communities.

Employment is rightly emphasised strongly in the document, with many statements that relate to job creation, training and business diversification. However, a green jobs strategy is not mentioned in the document. I am pleased that the minister talked today about Stirling—the city that is not covered in the document—and its development of

ecological opportunities, including employment opportunities.

Where the document discusses energy diversification in Aberdeen, it focuses on the internationalisation of existing oil and gas industries. I welcome the statements that the minister made today about looking at the technologies of the next century rather than those of the previous century.

No real distinction is made between locally owned and multinational corporations. Local companies are key parts of local communities. Local companies are less likely to move operations overseas even if it is more profitable to do so, yet, typically, the "Building Better Cities" document names sectors such as biotechnology and call centres, which tend not to be locally owned.

Environmental issues do not relate simply to rural Scotland. It is encouraging to see a themed policy statement that encompasses a wide range of issues that affect Scotland's cities. However, there is not enough emphasis on the importance of the environment and sustainable development.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close now.

**Mark Ballard:** That is why I urge members to support the amendment. We must make progress on building better cities through integrating sustainable development fully in all aspects of the process.

I move amendment S2M-526.3, to leave out from "since" to end and insert:

"; welcomes the bringing together of a wider range of policy strands; believes, however, that sustainability must lie at the heart of urban policy rather than being an afterthought to economic growth, and urges the Scottish Executive to take forward a policy of urban regeneration that is led primarily by the needs of local communities, rather than by big business."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I emphasise to members that the debate is tight; in fact it is oversubscribed and I must hold members to time.

15:48

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** When Mark Ballard was speaking, I was struck by the thought that "Building Better Cities: Delivering Growth and Opportunities" was perhaps like a book in the bible rather than the whole bible. It was not intended to contain all the answers to all the issues. Perhaps it is more like "Genesis" than "Exodus"—at least I hope so in this context.

**Mark Ballard:** Will the member give way?

**Robert Brown:** I would like to get going, especially as the member went a little over time in his speech.

Liberal Democrats welcome and value the cities review and the recognition of the magnetic hub importance of Scotland's city regions. The document does not have the last word on a complex and changing situation—it does not have all the answers, but it is a useful analysis and snapshot.

The success or failure of Scotland's cities, particularly Glasgow, is crucial to Scotland, and the ability to link economic revival with community regeneration is vital to the health of our society and the opportunities that are available to our citizens. We cannot allow the story of our cities to be a tale of two cities—an upward, vibrant European city in part and a darker, declining, deprived, blighted hinterland; two societies that sometimes co-exist like strangers. We have to be able to link economic regeneration with social justice.

The review's emphasis on sustainable solutions is welcome because too often investment has been made in part of the problem only, and the part that has missed out has been local community involvement or effective, longer-term maintenance. That is a strand that runs through the document, despite what Mark Ballard said about that.

I want to concentrate on Glasgow and on some issues that are key to the city's future. Foremost among them is the issue of business rates—although the issue is slightly different from what Brian Monteith suggested. Colleagues from other parts of Scotland frequently complain when money is spent on Glasgow to help to tackle the city's health problems or the consequences of its poverty. Less common is sympathetic comment on the £83 million that Glasgow loses every year to the uniform business rates pool. It is a nonsense that there is no direct relation between the profits of Glasgow's enterprise and investment in enhancing the life chances of its citizens. It is high time that the proceeds of Glasgow's business rates and the profits of its buoyant economy were made available to spend in Glasgow. I am glad that the review has kept open the possibility of moving forward in that area, which I hope will happen as part of the local government finance review.

I want to mention transport. Glasgow has the unique blessing of the underground which, I might point out, would not be built today under the sort of cost-benefit analyses that Government departments now use to evaluate major rail projects. The underground has the ability to enhance the urban network, but its ability to do so is greatly restricted by capacity problems at Queen

Street and Central stations, where there are difficulties in the linkages between the two systems. I hope that the minister will be able to confirm today, or in the near future, that the Scottish Executive will give urgent approval to the crossrail project that will link those systems. I know that that has been the subject of discussion between Nicol Stephen, who is the Minister for Transport, Strathclyde Passenger Transport and others.

Let me say a brief word about structures. There is no doubt that current arrangements can be handicapped by a plethora of overlapping bodies that have to work in partnership but can sometimes damage one another's ability to move forward. For example, at least six bodies have a legitimate interest in transport and rail issues in Glasgow alone, to say nothing of the surrounding local authorities that might be involved outwith the city boundaries.

Similarly, some of the effectiveness and accountability issues that are raised by the social inclusion partnerships will be only partly resolved by the move towards community planning. Some SIPs use up to 30 per cent of their resources in staff and operating costs, which is not acceptable if we are to move forward. I accept that the imposition of a single body could create other problems, but I think that we need just to keep an eye on the situation to ensure that effective decisions can be made on many of those issues. However, the jury is out on that matter at the moment.

Let me also deal with two other issues. First, on planning, we need to be careful that as we move forward, particularly in the cities, we do not simply give the green light to the building of more and more houses in areas that are already congested and overcrowded. In recent years, the tilt has been towards housing developments without regard for the services that go with developments, such as schools, green places and all the rest of it. I think that we could do with a tilt backwards on that in the review of the national policy planning framework that is taking place. Suburban centres are also important in that context.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I welcome those comments from Robert Brown. Will he join me in acknowledging the difficult struggle that people in Glasgow's west end have faced over the past few years in opposing a housing development that is being pushed forward for a much-used and well-loved local park? Is not that symbolic of what is happening across Glasgow and many other cities in Scotland?

**Robert Brown:** I was thinking very much of the issues in the west end of Glasgow and in areas such as Rutherglen and Cambuslang, where that situation has prevailed. Existing planning

restrictions, conservation areas and listed-building status do not seem to offer sufficient protection against unsuitable developments in high-quality urban environments.

In my last few seconds, I want to make a final point about the importance to the cities of manufacturing industry. The issue has been given greater prominence by the recent announcement about Cambuslang—albeit that it is outwith the city of Glasgow—where Hoover is set to reduce and eliminate its manufacturing force. If organisations such as Hoover cannot be compelled or persuaded to stay in Scotland to help us to improve and increase our manufacturing capacity, we will have some difficulty in being able to sustain the balanced environment that we need for our cities.

We need to go forward on a whole series of issues. The document is a useful beginning and a useful tool for analysis, but we look forward to having further debates in the future on many of the issues that arise about our very important cities.

15:55

**Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** I welcome the debate. I also welcome the investment that is to come from the city growth fund, which will make a real difference to people in our cities. For those of us who live in Edinburgh, it will improve our city streets and our bus information and it will play a part in tackling congestion.

Edinburgh was awarded £24 million from the fund, the aim of which is to improve the quality of life for people in our six cities. I know that the Minister for Finance and Public Services, who has left the chamber, visited Edinburgh in September this year to see for himself what the improvements will mean on the ground. Edinburgh will undertake urban rail improvements and improvements to the Usher Hall. The funding will also allow improvements to be made to parks, pavements and roads in the capital. We are talking about key investment for key infrastructure.

I am glad that the minister acknowledged that Edinburgh is a world-class city. It is a vibrant and cosmopolitan city with a dynamic economy. However, there is a huge amount that needs to be done, working in partnership, to ensure that Edinburgh remains a successful and attractive place to live, work and visit. In the debate, it is absolutely vital that we are not complacent about the progress that we need to make in future. That said, we can acknowledge the city's strengths and the progress that it has made in the financial sector, in the tourism industry and in the quality of our further and higher education institutions.

Scotland's future is bound up with the success of

our cities. Edinburgh is the key driver for growth in the east of Scotland and beyond. We urgently need a regional approach that builds in work on affordable housing and tackling congestion. I would like the minister to undertake a creative examination of the business rates process—I will focus briefly on that issue later in my speech. The Executive's partnership work and partnerships between the cities, including Edinburgh and Glasgow, and between Edinburgh and its neighbouring authorities in the south-east of Scotland, are absolutely critical.

I want to focus on a couple of issues on which we really have to make a difference. Housing is a key issue for Edinburgh. We have a growing population, but also a growing problem. We are moving towards a crisis in the lack of affordable housing for the people of Edinburgh. We have a booming economy, but we are not getting the affordable houses that allow people to live in our city. I commend the City of Edinburgh Council for the work that it is doing on tackling homelessness and for its affordable housing strategy. I also welcome the £3 million that the Executive has made available for work on affordable housing. However, if we are to tackle the problem, we need sustained, long-term, additional support. Edinburgh's £17 million budget buys around 350 houses a year through new build and refurbishment. If we are to tackle the real affordability crisis that we face, we need to double that amount of money. A modest increase in investment could lever in significant private investment. A joint approach is needed between the City of Edinburgh Council and the private sector. I hope that the minister will take my plea on board and will discuss it with the Minister for Communities in advance of the next spending review.

Transport is also vital. I welcome the work that the Executive has undertaken with the City of Edinburgh Council. We need integrated, reliable and efficient transport. Huge investment is planned for transport but we must ensure that we tackle our congestion problems. I hope that the minister will work with the City of Edinburgh Council to tackle congestion. That will enable us to meet the Scottish Executive's targets for bringing down traffic levels in the city.

**Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab):** Given that Sarah Boyack said that the future of Edinburgh was dependent on its hinterland, does she agree that Fife is an important part of that hinterland? Will she join me in urging the City of Edinburgh Council to take on board the views of Fifers on the plan to extend the exemption from congestion charging to some of the outer parts of Edinburgh but not to Fife?

**Sarah Boyack:** The biggest issue before us is the massive investment that is needed in public transport. A consultation process is going on at the moment and I welcome the fact that the surrounding councils are engaged in that discussion.

Another big issue on my agenda is the weeks of endless speculation about the investment that is to be made in Waverley railway station. I know that Christine May agrees that Waverley is a big issue for people in Fife. This week, we heard about investment in lengthening platforms. However, there have been all sorts of speculation and rumour that we are not going to get the investment that is needed in Waverley station. There is much that we need to do now to tackle congestion problems. I ask the minister to comment on that in his winding up speech.

I said that I would briefly mention business rates. There is scope for looking at business rates. If we take Edinburgh as an example, the council has invested in the new conference centre, the burgeoning financial district and the superb festivals that draw people into the city throughout the year. However, because of the current pooling of business rates, the city does not receive a direct return on that investment. I do not expect an instant response from the minister on that point, but I would like a reassurance that he is at least examining the issues and considering a flexible approach.

I will conclude on the issue of quality of life. People who live in Edinburgh deserve to benefit from living in a world-class city, but not everybody does. There is a serious imbalance in our city, particularly in my constituency. We are gaining the wrong kind of reputation. A lot of superb cultural events happen in Edinburgh, such as those in our theatres and the forthcoming MTV attraction, which I know my colleague Ms McNeill is most interested in. However, we have a big problem in that we are getting out of sync. There are problems in my constituency with stag parties and binge boozing and, at the last count, there were seven clubs offering what is euphemistically described as adult entertainment. I do not think that that is the way for Edinburgh to go as a world-class tourism destination and it is not what the residents of Edinburgh want. I would like a commitment from the minister that he will progress the work on licensing. Some superb work is being done by the Minister for Justice as a result of the Nicholson review. A gap needs to be plugged on issues such as lap dancing and strip clubs. I hope that the Executive will take that on board and bring back proposals so that Edinburgh can tackle those issues urgently.

The minister made a very positive start in his speech. Edinburgh has been transformed over the

past 20 years; we must move forward for the next 20. That means that there must be partnership work between the City of Edinburgh Council and the Executive. We must continue Labour's leadership because although we have done a lot, there is a lot more still to do.

16:01

**Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP):** The debate is about the vision of Scotland's future that this Parliament was created to deliver. For the Parliament to work for the Scottish people it has to turn ideas, aspirations and forward planning into reality.

With the building better cities initiative, the Executive has correctly identified Scottish cities as important generators of Scottish economic activity. It is crucial that Scotland now moves ahead in its development of business and industry in order to create jobs and reverse the trend of falling population.

In developing and revitalising Scottish cities through successful economic growth, it is also important that we remember the failures of the past. That means that local and central Government must understand the demands of shifting populations and co-ordinate growth so that Scottish cities not only meet the needs of their own citizens and businesses but become the creators of economic, social and cultural dynamism locally and nationally.

Scotland's population is changing and faces many challenges, including coping with a falling birth rate and retaining the university and college graduates of tomorrow. As Scottish graduates earn almost £3,000 a year less than the United Kingdom average, the Executive must make a firm commitment to forge the university and business sector links that are essential in providing decent, modern, well-paid jobs for Scotland's graduates and school leavers. Although the UK predicts general population growth over the next two decades, Scotland continues to haemorrhage people. Without the dynamic of immigration, Scotland faces the real prospect of depopulation.

Creating employment and fuelling growth in our cities means promoting diversity and an atmosphere that is conducive to opportunity. Scotland needs to work towards an economy that is socially responsible. Businesses and communities should set goals and work in partnership to achieve them. Residents of the Scottish cities involved in the initiative need hope for jobs now, not later on.

The Confederation of British Industry Scotland reports a continuing trend in falling orders, declining output, pressures on price and job losses—all at a time when Scotland is witnessing

the highest proportion in 11 years of Scottish companies that claim that they are operating below capacity.

We need to give hope to people who are searching for work in our cities. Dundee lost 679 jobs in manufacturing industries between 1998 and 2000 and Glasgow contains six of the 10 parliamentary constituencies that have the highest rates of unemployment. Building better cities requires a blend of manufacturing and service jobs to ensure burgeoning, well-rounded and sustainable growth. Scottish cities can only benefit from smart growth. Forty per cent of all Scottish employee jobs are located within five city authorities. Since 1995, 40 per cent of new recipients of Scottish inward investment chose to locate in those five cities.

To ensure that we do not repeat past mistakes, Scotland will need to keep an eye on the way in which cities grow. Cities should be seen as good places to live and centres from which sustainable growth can expand. Unfortunately, residents of Glasgow and Dundee are in worse health than residents in any other part of Scotland. On the whole, traffic is projected to grow 27 per cent by 2021. Existing infrastructure and public services therefore need to be updated to sustain intelligent expansion. Scotland must examine the base on which her cities are built if we are to connect the new with the old properly. We must set down policies that promote prosperity and enterprise. Scottish firms should not have to pay property taxes at a poundage rate that is 9 per cent higher than those in England.

Honest economic growth requires economic policies that are suited to our specific needs. In Glasgow, 58 per cent of residents are not satisfied with their neighbourhood. The more quality housing, convenient schools and improved public resources that we can provide, the better off we will be, with safer streets, a cleaner environment and a more satisfied work force.

Those are straightforward, commonsense aims that can be delivered for all Scotland's citizens, but that must be done with total community involvement. All too often, the view of individual citizens is blurred by the interests of businesses and local councils. The general public needs to be an equal partner in making decisions about how their cities and communities grow. Regrettably, development planning is often based on the policymakers' assumptions, which are not always correct: industry will not automatically move with the population; migration will not automatically follow jobs; and the creation of jobs will not always mean revitalisation.

Local residents, along with council and community business leaders, will play a pivotal role in how planning progresses. All must be

involved and contribute. I wish the building better cities project well. The initiative is about vision, but its aspirations are based on hard reality and will ultimately be judged by its results.

16:06

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** No one will be surprised to learn that, as a Glasgow MSP, in the next five minutes I will talk about Glasgow's story. However, I will do so only in the context of the importance of the city to the rest of the economy, not for its own sake. Glasgow is Scotland's largest city and has a population of more than 600,000. It is important to note that Glasgow serves the function of driving economic activity in the wider conurbation. The issue is not only Glasgow's success, but the contributions of other surrounding towns, not least the minister's town of East Kilbride.

As Robert Brown said, Glasgow's story is a tale of two cities. Glasgow is a booming centre of economic activity, but it is also still managing the decline of the industrial sector and still has too high a level of unemployment and too large a skills gap. At one level, the story is about a physical process of ensuring that we have the capital infrastructure in place for economic growth, but at another, it is about those who live and work in the city. That is what I will talk about.

Glasgow will receive £40.1 million over three years as an outcome of the cities review. That is a generous settlement out of the £90 million that was made available, but there is still a lot of disappointment that no long-term solution has been agreed on the way in which Glasgow pays for, supports and provides services for surrounding areas. I support the views that Robert Brown and others have expressed that we should consider as one potential solution returning the uniform business rate to Glasgow.

We must spread the success. The key message about Glasgow is that its economic growth has outstripped that of probably every other area in Scotland. The key point is how we spread that economic growth around the citizens of Glasgow and, indeed, Scotland. I recently went to an area in my constituency that is known as Merchant City—some members have perhaps spent time in the cafés and bars down there. The transformation there is quite remarkable, but no one should be fooled by the wonderful appearance of Merchant City, because we have issues in Glasgow about the growth in jobs not benefiting Glaswegians. We have a qualifications problem: Glaswegians do not have the qualifications and skills to get the new jobs that we are creating. The key priority for Glasgow is to invest in ensuring that Glaswegians get the opportunities, qualifications and skills.



I fully support the Scottish Executive's view on social inclusion, which I believe runs through all its policies. Addressing problems there is fundamental to moving on. Better-paid jobs will provide the higher income that we are trying to achieve for all our citizens.

I acknowledge the renaissance in the shipbuilding industry in my constituency and in other constituencies, as the apprenticeship schemes on the Clyde have begun to reverse some of the decline that has been discussed.

Mark Ballard raised the subject of call centres. We have had to accept reluctantly the growth in call centres in Glasgow city centre to replace some of the former industrial jobs, but we are now losing call centre jobs to other countries, and there has to be some way to address how to retain them, because it will be a significant loss to Scotland if we do not do so.

Regeneration is Glasgow's key priority. As we have seen, investment is being made at an amazing pace on the Clyde waterfront in what is a remarkable project. In particular, there is the harbour development, which lies partly in my constituency. I have watched a presentation on the recruitment plan for the development, and I was heartened to hear about the way in which industries are to be revitalised.

I turn to the questions of housing and planning in relation to developments such as the harbour development. Planning is fundamental to cities. It is not acceptable to me that we are to build 3,500 houses at a harbour without considering what could be done to attract social housing. I do not underestimate how difficult that is, but I cannot whole-heartedly support the project without there being consideration for that. In my constituency, which covers the vast majority of the west end, there is a serious, chronic shortage of social housing—the problem is probably worse there than it is anywhere else. As Patrick Harvie pointed out, we face what is probably the greatest ever number of planning applications for flat after flat in tiny areas of the west end that should instead be green spaces. My closing message, on planning, is that all authorities should be required to consider housing need across the board, and not just the planning process.

16:12

**Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I think it was a former publicity man for the City of Glasgow District Council who came up with the slogan, "Glasgow's miles better." Some years later, when he came to Edinburgh, people asked him how he could now promote the capital. He pointed out that he had meant, "Glasgow's miles better than it was." Externally, that seems to be

the case. I was in Glasgow yesterday and, compared with when I lived and worked there—under a previous Labour Administration—it looks very spruce, with lots of city-centre developments.

I confess that I am one of those who believe that the finest prospect offered by the modern conurbation is the motorway leading out of it, but people must live in cities, and those who make condescending remarks at cities' expense are as unfair as those who make similar uncomplimentary remarks at my expense. Like overweight individuals, cities can become chronically obese and downright unhealthy unless regular toning takes place. In my view, toning—returning our cities to optimum health—is best achieved by boosting the general economy. A dynamic and competitive economy is, ultimately, the only way to create wealth, raise the quality of public services and thereby improve living standards in our cities and in other communities.

It was significant that, at this week's meeting of the Finance Committee, two of Scotland's top economists criticised the Executive's draft budget for appearing to increase the dependency of the Scottish economy on the public sector. In 2001, Scottish public spending represented 47 per cent of gross domestic product. According to Donald MacRae of Lloyds TSB Scotland, by the end of this year, public spending will have risen to 50 per cent of GDP, and it could rise even further. The size of the public sector compared with that of the private sector is woefully skewed.

We need to do far more to encourage business to make our cities the vibrant and dynamic places that we would like them to be. Productivity is too low in both the public and private sectors.

**Johann Lamont:** On thriving businesses in Glasgow, does the member agree with my constituents, who feel that there is something unjust about the level of wealth that is generated in Glasgow, in that it is not retained within the city to benefit the citizens, who are currently not benefiting from Glasgow's economic boom? Is he in favour of addressing business rates so that Glasgow can benefit from the hard work that it has done on the economy?

**Mr Brocklebank:** I accept that point. We have talked a lot about reducing business rates.

To deliver growth and opportunity in our cities, we must get away from the subsidy culture and develop the private sector. In the draft budget, Executive spending is increasing on items such as tourism, sport and culture, but the sums spent on economic development are decreasing, with only £120 per capita being spent on developing Scottish business and industry, which is less than the figure in Wales or Ireland.

**Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** I am sorry, but he is in his last minute.

**Mr Brocklebank:** Much more money is being spent on health—the figure is around £1,500 per capita—and few of us would grudge that extra spending, provided that we were sure that we were getting value for money.

**Bruce Crawford:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Brocklebank:** Not at the moment.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Sorry, but you have two minutes remaining. That was my mistake.

**Mr Brocklebank:** Fine.

**Bruce Crawford:** Ted Brocklebank made a point about subsidies. Will he say which subsidy the Conservative party would remove and from where?

**Mr Brocklebank:** It would take longer than two minutes to get into the detail of that issue.

I want to talk about health. Nobody denies that there should be adequate spending on health but, in “Building Better Cities”, the Executive admits that

“Across the urban central belt of Scotland ... life expectancy is shorter than it is in any other region of the European Union.”

In Glasgow, the mortality rates for stomach cancer, lung cancer and heart disease are more than a third higher than in the average local authority area. A person’s chances of dying of heart disease are two and a half times higher in Glasgow’s Castlemilk housing scheme than they are in suburban Newton Mearns.

**Patrick Harvie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mr Brocklebank:** No. Such inequalities exist in all of Scotland’s cities. Although I accept that it is early days, the Executive’s strategy in “Building Better Cities” appears to offer few real solutions. On any impartial judgment, the Executive’s pledge to deliver growth and opportunities for Scotland’s cities is a long way from being realised. Although I commend the Executive’s efforts so far, any progress report would be along the lines of, “Could do a lot better.”

16:17

**Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** I welcome the chance to contribute to the debate and to comment on the “Building Better Cities” report and on “Edinburgh’s City Vision: Building a Better Edinburgh”, which is the City of Edinburgh Council’s response to the report. Other members

have mentioned the importance of cities, so, given that we do not have a great deal of time, I will skirt round the importance of Edinburgh.

One key point is that we should recognise that each city has its own identity and should have its own challenges, problems and successes taken into account. I will dwell on some of Edinburgh’s problems. Sarah Boyack rightly highlighted the major problem of the lack of affordable housing, which has a major impact on planning policy. I welcome the City of Edinburgh Council’s robust policy on affordable social housing, as a result of which around 2,000 houses will come on stream in the not-too-distant future. However, at present, the lack of affordable housing is costing us key workers and means that we are failing to attract the people whom we want to come to Edinburgh and Scotland.

The lack of affordable housing causes major problems for the public sector, for example in the care home and education sectors, and it is important for Edinburgh and Scotland that we do something to tackle it. We must also tackle the high land prices in Edinburgh—land costs about £2 million per acre—and the impact of that on the local council and on public and private sector organisations.

We are dealing with inequalities of wealth. My constituency covers areas of great poverty as well as areas in which people are doing well. We must ensure that we tackle poverty, not only in the large conurbations where we find deprivation, such as Muirhouse in my constituency, but also in the pockets of deprivation and poverty in Edinburgh, which are much harder to reach.

The issue of non-domestic rates, which members have highlighted, applies equally to Edinburgh as it does to Glasgow, if not more so. We have the problem of the constant fight between economic growth, which is necessary, and the needs of the environment.

I will mention some points about Edinburgh that are of concern to me. I will pass quickly over the issue of policing in the city because it has been raised many times before. The support that Lothian and Borders police receives for its role in policing the capital city does not compare well with what happens in Westminster, which is the nearest equivalent. I welcome the fact that the minister is considering reviewing the position across the board. The Executive will have to come back to the issue. I urge the minister to look favourably on the request from the chief constable for special funding over and above that for Edinburgh.

Another issue that has arisen recently is the fact that the Executive’s plans for integrating community planning and social inclusion

partnerships will bring quite a lot of challenges. It is important that we involve local people in our discussions. What concerns many of us in Edinburgh is the fact that the new arrangements will mean a potential reduction in SIP funds for the city from £7.2 million in 2003-04 to £3.5 million by 2006-07, with a knock-on reduction in European matched funding. Many local projects in my constituency, including the Pilton partnership and the Muirhouse and Drylaw community centres, will see their activities under threat because of that. I would like us to take the same approach that we took on Arbutnott, which is not to reduce the work that people are doing, but to take stock and to keep a standstill budget before moving forward with growth in specific areas—Glasgow being one area that is going to get some of the extra money. We should not be pulling back.

The success of Edinburgh and Scotland will be based on education. Scotland's schools—especially those in Edinburgh—face a particular set of problems. Edinburgh has a growing population and will have a growing school roll. That means that we do not have the same ability to close down schools here as there is elsewhere in Scotland. There is also the enormous cost of land in Edinburgh. For example, in Craigmoynton, we are struggling to find a site for a new school not only for that area but for the waterfront, which is an important development not only for the city, but for the rest of Scotland. I ask the Executive seriously to consider supporting to a greater extent than it has the council's public-private partnership 2 bid.

Many people talk about the success of Edinburgh's economy. I do not think that we can be complacent about that. A job lost in Edinburgh is still a job lost to a family and the city. I ask the Executive and the council to work together to discuss the issue of our losing civil service jobs from Edinburgh. That will have an impact not only on this city, but on the region.

**Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Because of the time limit, the Scottish Socialist Party is not going to get a chance to contribute to the debate. We will be the only party to be denied the opportunity to speak in the debate. I ask the Presiding Officer to think about whether that is fair. I have sat through the whole debate and have listened to other members with a great deal of interest. For me to be denied the opportunity to speak is not on.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The debate is oversubscribed. It is a matter for the Presiding Officers to decide whom they call. Your intervention means that I will probably not be able to call Bruce Crawford either.

16:23

**Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):** I subscribe to the comments that Robert Brown and other members have made concerning the need to ensure that agencies' activities in the cities do not overlap. I also make a plea in respect of the large number of consultancy reports that we receive in Glasgow and the conferences that are organised at the same time. When we consider a cull of the organisations, we should perhaps also consider a cull of the consultants, who are good at creative reporting on this issue, and of the conferences that are organised on the subject.

Like many other urban areas, Glasgow has suffered dreadfully economically due to its dependency on heavy industries, especially during the 1920s and 1930s. Undoubtedly, the economic transition away from the traditional industries has followed a number of periods of difficulty. It was due to the utter complacency of the Conservative Government and 18 years of Tory rule that Glasgow found itself facing the many challenges that we face in the post-1997 years.

However, Glasgow is fighting back. In my constituency, unemployment has been reduced by 46 per cent and five brand new secondary schools have been built—a pipe dream during the years of Tory rule.

**Mr Monteith:** Will the member give way?

**Paul Martin:** I am afraid that I do not have time.

There has been record investment in the stock-transfer process and the opportunity, for the first time in my generation, for full employment in the city of Glasgow. That has not happened since 1967, when I was born.

Other members have said that we must harness the opportunities for the benefit of Glasgow's citizens. I believe that the minister must take immediate action on that. There have been several consultancy reports on the best opportunities that exist. There have also been several conferences in Glasgow and other cities on the issue.

How do we ensure that those who live in Glasgow benefit from the city's economic achievements? One example of how to do that is the St Rollox Partnership initiative in my constituency, which has resulted in more than 90 per cent of the local Tesco superstore's employees being local residents. I would like the minister to consider that example, which is a partnership with the business sector. Recently, I met the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, which advised me that it would like to consider the possibility of an employers charter that would ensure that employers have the opportunity to employ locally.

On council tax, we face a number of challenges. I do not support the Scottish socialists' proposal of a service tax. However, I believe that there is a need for a top-to-bottom review to ensure that those who decide to play and work in Glasgow also consider residing in Glasgow. I acknowledge that there has been progress in restricting council tax increases in Glasgow. For example, council tax in East Dunbartonshire has increased by 5.6 per cent, whereas Glasgow's council tax has increased by only 2.5 per cent.

I welcome today's debate, but I believe that it is time to ensure opportunities for full employment in Glasgow so that those who are unemployed in Glasgow can benefit.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Bruce Crawford for two minutes.

16:27

**Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** In that case I shall cut straight to the quick and get a press release out at the same time.

Too many agencies operate in silos in our cities. They work to their own ends and deliver their own corporate plans, but they do not necessarily deliver for the people whom they profess to serve. The creation of multichannel decision making and the lack of connected executive responsibility are causing less ownership, more rationing of resources and, most important, the draining of our people's energy and the stifling of innovation.

Let me give members an example of what I mean. Stirling regards itself as our most vibrant city. Certainly, there is great aspiration for the city. A strong community partnership has been formed that involves 10 different sectors and organisations. One of its key aims is to develop Stirling as a healthy city that is recognised as such by the World Health Organisation. However, if the community partnership decides that the key to real health improvements comes from the funding of housing, sport or education, there is simply no capacity or culture to enable the partnership to make a significant shift of resources from the NHS sector or any other sector into its priority areas.

If we want successful cities, we must rid them of the shackles that hold them back and ensure that we have better funding streams and processes to enable funding to be shifted from one budget to another more successfully. Our cities need connected executive responsibility, with the people as the driving force for democratic change. They also need to be supplied with adequate resources to drive hard for sustainable success.

I am two seconds short of two minutes, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. We move to wind-up speeches. I call Patrick Harvie. You have five minutes, Mr Harvie.

16:29

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** In the minutes that I have, I will try to respond to as much as I can of what has been said in the debate. I apologise to any members whom I miss out.

Andy Kerr has given us what looks like an holistic vision of our cities, which is greatly to be welcomed. However, we remain concerned that sustainability is not yet at the heart of urban policy. The minister spoke about Glasgow as a metropolitan city and about major regeneration projects. However, all the while the smaller aspects of urban policy have been missed out. I refer to the community assets that Robert Brown and I have discussed, which all too often are railroaded and bulldozed.

The minister—and Nicola Sturgeon in an intervention—recognised some of the appalling costs of economic growth. Those costs have not been addressed—they have merely been acknowledged. The issue of incapacity benefit has been raised. Thirty per cent of Glasgow's working population is not in employment. Economic growth in itself does not address such problems.

**Fergus Ewing:** We are all concerned about people on incapacity benefit. Can the member demonstrate to me exactly how people are on incapacity benefit because of economic growth?

**Patrick Harvie:** I am hoping to demonstrate that the economic growth that has taken place in Glasgow—and which neither the Labour Party nor the SNP has acknowledged—does not solve the problem. A bigger economy is not necessarily more socially just.

The minister talked about lifting our sights. Why can we not lift our sights beyond the narrow concept of gross domestic product growth and look to true quality of life?

I will now address some of Mr Ewing's comments, which is bound to please him. He gives enthusiastic support to the single-issue politics of growth. Too often, improving our economy is seen as synonymous with growing our economy. A bigger economy does not necessarily create healthier places to live or more fulfilling jobs to do. Growth that undermines our health, freedom, dignity and relationships is not progress.

I will now respond to Brian Monteith's speech. He began with what is becoming a familiar Tory theme—let us tax less and spend more on public services. Many of his comments were not connected with our cities, but those that were,

were every bit as single issue as the speeches that preceded them. Again he called for growth—any growth—at any price: the same old single-issue thinking.

In his amendment to the Executive motion, my colleague Mark Ballard sought to connect the ways in which we live in our cities: the waste that we produce, how we get to work, where our work and homes are located and which businesses we buy our goods and services from. Do we buy them from local businesses that create and sustain the community strength of our cities, or from the soulless multinationals that undermine working conditions, social justice and the environment at global and local levels?

Robert Brown's support for Glasgow's crossrail scheme will, of course, receive my enthusiastic backing. However, we must go further and say that investment in public transport must be seen as an alternative to the ghastly, obscenely expensive, outrageous M74 northern extension project. Only a tiny fraction of the Executive's transport spend is directed at walking and cycling. Public transport is also not prioritised. We need those forms of sustainable transport to be right at the heart of transport policy, not just squeezed in between the gaps in the traffic.

Many members have mentioned jobs. We must look to protect local businesses and to invest in public transport, community-owned renewables, community recycling and other social enterprises. All those green alternatives create more jobs than the grey policies that they would replace.

Although we support the attempt to take an holistic approach to urban development, there is something lacking at its heart. I urge members to support Mark Ballard's amendment, to give up the single-minded, single-issue politics of growth at any price and to make true quality of life central, creating a healthy and sustainable green future for our cities. I support Mark Ballard's amendment.

16:34

**Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab):** I, too, welcome the debate and the many constructive contributions that have been made by members from all parties. I am still reeling from Fergus Ewing's speech, however; perhaps I will be able to work it out later, when I read the *Official Report*.

I also welcome the action and investment that has flowed from the cities review in all our six cities. That gives us a positive base on which to build. It is appropriate that we pay tribute to the excellent work done by all local authorities and partner bodies that have been involved in developing the responses to the cities review and, crucially, which are implementing its proposals.

I echo a point that Rhona Brankin made in an intervention earlier about the importance of our thinking beyond city boundaries. I represent a constituency that spans the Edinburgh city boundary and stretches into East Lothian. It is vital—and I know that this is happening—that cities work with the areas that they border and they must continue to be vigilant about that.

The cities review and the debate have highlighted the great diversity of Scottish cities, which is positive. However, a number of themes have arisen and it is important that ministers take them on board. We have, quite rightly, heard a great deal about transport infrastructure and environmental concerns, but two issues feature time and again, particularly in the contributions from my colleagues: affordable housing and skills shortages.

In Edinburgh the situation in relation to affordable housing is now reaching a critical stage. Margaret Smith talked about the need to be able to house key workers in the city, but the issue goes beyond that. Our inability to meet social need in this city is profound, given the extent to which the property market is now rocketing. I make a genuine plea—and I note Pauline McNeill's comments on this from the perspective of the other end of the M8—that the Executive steps up its efforts as a matter of urgency and works with local authorities to address the situation.

I also highlight skills shortages. It is not an exaggeration to say that in some sectors in Edinburgh it is becoming acutely difficult—and in some cases it is virtually impossible—to get skilled, qualified people. Margaret Smith mentioned the care sector, but of course in many trades, particularly in the construction industry, recruitment is becoming nigh on impossible in certain areas. I say to the minister and to my colleagues on the Enterprise and Culture Committee that it is vital that we address that. We must consider the particular role that industry has to play in that regard and how the modern apprenticeship scheme can be developed appropriately and we must recognise the vital role of our further education colleges. Colleagues on the committee will know that we heard a great deal from representatives of FE colleges at our meeting this week.

There are tremendous opportunities here in Edinburgh, as in other cities, but I want to end on a specific point about Edinburgh. All too often the perception of Edinburgh is that it is simply a story of economic prosperity and success. To a degree that is true and I pay tribute to the Labour-led City of Edinburgh Council for its vision and determination in what it has achieved over the past 20 years. However, Edinburgh is not all about Harvey Nichols and Jenners; it is not all about

castles and palaces. In my constituency are some of the most profound pockets of deprivation in the city. Craigmillar ranks fourth in the index of most deprived wards in Scotland and Restalrig, which is also in my constituency, also now features in the top 100. We must recognise that poverty exists right on our doorstep here in Edinburgh and we must work nationally and locally to close the gap.

The cities review has proved a valuable piece of work. I admit that it is more valuable than I thought it was going to be when it was launched. The challenge now is for us to maintain the momentum. We must work not just to address the problems of the past; we must act now to minimise problems in the future.

16:39

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** After the debate, we will be clear about the importance of cities to Scotland's success. My colleague Brian Monteith made the good point that Edinburgh is very much the driver of the Scottish economy. If we examine the most recent growth figures, which were announced this week, we find that Scotland would probably be in recession without the economic performance of Edinburgh and the Edinburgh region.

We must consider Scotland as a whole and must develop policies for the whole country. That means improving infrastructure throughout the country, reducing business taxation and tackling regulation, which is what our amendment calls for.

**Robert Brown:** Will the member take an intervention on that?

**Murdo Fraser:** If the member will forgive me, I will not, because I wish to make a number of points; I may allow him in later.

Given the nature of the debate, there was a danger that we would end up getting special pleading from all sides of the chamber. We got a bit of that—for example, Sarah Boyack and Margaret Smith spoke about Edinburgh and Robert Brown and Paul Martin talked about Glasgow. When discussing the record of the previous Conservative Government, Paul Martin—who I think has now left the chamber—seemed to forget about the Glasgow eastern area renewal project, which levered in some £250 million of private investment. That compares well with the £40 million of public investment from the city growth fund that has been invested over three years.

In his speech, Fergus Ewing mentioned everything from whisky to bottling friendship, but said very little about cities. Perhaps he should have deferred to his colleague Andrew Welsh, who made a thoughtful and comprehensive

speech on cities. Mr Ewing did not even refer to the city of Inverness, which he represents.

**Fergus Ewing:** I did. I invite the member to retract that.

**Murdo Fraser:** I do not recall Mr Ewing referring to Inverness but, as he assures me that he did, I apologise.

As an Invernesian, I wonder whether Mr Ewing would agree that the best thing that the city fathers in Inverness could do would be to demolish the horrendous 1960s monstrosities that blight the riverside underneath the castle and to replace them with more sympathetic buildings.

**Fergus Ewing:** I am most grateful for the member's kind retraction. The First Minister appeared to acknowledge that one of the best things that we could do for Inverness would be to rid it of the millstone of the PPP at Inverness airport terminal. The trouble with the cities review is that, instead of achieving such things, which could really make a difference to economic growth, we will achieve worthy but minor things.

**Murdo Fraser:** That was an interesting point, but it would have been more relevant to make it in a debate on PPP, for example.

We have had some special pleading, so here is some of my own. I know from my regional interest that people in Perth feels that, although Perth is a city—albeit a city without a royal charter—and the ancient capital of Scotland, it is not given the same recognition as Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow, Stirling and so on. As Brian Monteith mentioned, Perth and Kinross Council feels that that is particularly unfair, given that the population of Dundee, for example, is in decline, while that of Perth and Kinross is on the increase. Even though Perth is becoming an increasingly popular place to live, it always seems to be losing out to Stirling and Dundee when it comes to central assistance.

Civil service job dispersal is an example of that. Dundee secured the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care, but Perth and Kinross has missed out on all the projects that it has pursued, in spite of the fact that it has the lowest average earnings for men of any local authority area in Scotland.

We know all about the decision on Scottish Natural Heritage going to Inverness and the difficulties that that has caused. If the decision had been that SNH should go to Perth, many of the Executive's problems would have been averted. It might not be too late for ministers to change their minds on that, so I urge them to think again and to consider Perth as a safe third option for SNH's location.

If we isolate the cities and treat them as special cases, other equally needy parts of the country

lose out. That is unfortunate and our amendment talks about the need to consider all parts of the country, not just our large cities, as economic drivers.

The territorial ambitions of cities also represent a threat. For example, there are those in Dundee who wish that city's boundaries to be extended to take in part of Perth and Kinross and Angus, in the mistaken belief that the people who live in those areas consume city services and should therefore be contributing to them through their council tax. In fact, the great majority of council spending goes on education and social work, neither of which is consumed by non-residents.

The best way for us to regenerate our cities and all our communities is to boost economic growth. Let us cut business rates, water charges and regulation and invest in our transport infrastructure. It is by getting government off the backs of people and business that we will achieve thriving and prosperous cities, both old and new, throughout Scotland.

16:45

**Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP):** This has been a strange debate. We have a principal motion and three amendments thereto and yet they have rarely interacted and we seem to have been shadow-boxing around the issues. However, we might be disparaging if we said that today's debate will not be one of the highlights of the Parliamentary calendar. Aside from the special pleading for individual cities, we can take a kinder view and say that valid points have arisen from the debate.

There was no contrast between the points that were being made because there was a great deal of consensus, and because many members were talking about two distinct documents. The Executive's motion is obviously about "Building Better Cities: Delivering Growth and Opportunities", while it is quite clear from our amendment that the SNP is talking about the "Review of Scotland's Cities—the analysis".

We take the view that the "Review of Scotland's Cities—the analysis" is a fundamentally important document, and that if we empanel a body of experts, it is important that we should take cognisance of that. That is why I highlight Fergus Ewing's mention of the comments made by Professor Ivan Turok from the department of urban studies at the University of Glasgow who indicated that the "Building Better Cities: Delivering Growth and Opportunities" document was a "modest response" to the range and intensity of the challenges facing the cities. He added that the document had

"surprisingly few concrete recommendations and

proposals"

and said that the £90 million investment over three years was inadequate.

Although it was right that the review was initiated—by Henry McLeish in December 2000—we believe that the Government's response is, as Professor Turok said, inadequate. That might be one of the reasons why there has been a failure to engage in debate.

It is also quite clear that, although parties and participants made individual points, there is agreement. Many of the points made by the minister are not in dispute. Who could possibly dispute that cities matter, people matter and that planning is fundamental? Besides his interesting travelogue, the most important and valid point made by the minister was in his intervention on Mr Monteith, when he went on about the importance of city regions and co-operation. That has been addressed by others in the debate such as Mr Monteith, Ms Deacon and Ms Boyack—I apologise if I have missed anyone out.

We must acknowledge that our cities are particularly small. We must consider competitor cities. In Denmark and Sweden, Malmö and Copenhagen—in different countries and with different currencies—are conjoining to co-operate because they recognise that they must have critical mass to compete with urban metropolitan areas in countries such as France, Germany and England.

**Mr Kerr:** Will the member agree with me and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that while Berlin was the city of the last decade, Glasgow will be the city of the next decade?

**Mr MacAskill:** I hope so, but if we are going to be successful, we must ensure that our cities fight individually and stand together. Co-operation between individual cities is important and Edinburgh and Glasgow either hang together or, as others have said in debates elsewhere, they will fall apart. It is important that we acknowledge that.

Mr Monteith made points that many of us would not disagree with as he gave us a valid view of cities. Given his predilection for football, I was surprised that he failed to give the ubiquitous Brechin a mention during his tour of cities that had not been mentioned.

No one would disagree with Mr Ballard's points on the importance of the environment. At the end of the day, cities are not just about the quality of jobs and the economy. They are about the quality of life of the people who live in them. Of course, we must acknowledge that cities are not just about building houses and creating jobs. We must

ensure that the jobs are sustainable and that they are not detrimental to the environment, that the houses we live in are fit for purpose, and that our quality of life is acceptable.

Robert Brown also made valid points because manufacturing is important and that is where we have to distil the consensus within the chamber. Mr Ballard's points were valid and important, but Mr Brown's points about manufacturing were equally important. If we are to implement a strategy, we have to conjoin those two views and get a balance.

I am cognisant that others have referred to Edinburgh and that is important, but we must recognise that we should not be comparing cities just within Scotland. The city of Edinburgh's competitors should not be perceived as Glasgow and Dundee. If it is to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the city of Edinburgh must compete with Helsinki, Dublin and Copenhagen. Those are the competitors. The tragedy is that Edinburgh may be punching above its weight when it comes to Glasgow and Dundee, but it is losing out significantly in terms of its competitiveness with other places in Europe. We need to take cognisance of that.

Points made by Margaret Smith, and to some extent by Susan Deacon and others, were also valid. They said that Edinburgh, to some extent, is a victim of its own success. The development and driving forward of the economy is resulting in problems with infrastructure, skills shortages, a lack of affordable housing and transport problems. At the same time, under this Executive, Edinburgh is paying the price for its success. It is perceived that because Edinburgh is doing well it does not need any further assistance, which means that it is not being backed properly. The £23 million being put in by the Executive over three years does not meet the need identified by the City of Edinburgh Council for more than £200 million over 10 years, not for the whole city, but simply for affordable housing.

The outcome of this debate should be to bring matters together. We endorse the review. We do not believe that the Executive's critique and overview meet or benefit it.

16:51

**The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services (Tavish Scott):** I begin by supporting one point that Mr MacAskill made, which was about the international competitiveness of the city market, particularly in tourism terms. However, I recall going to Copenhagen last year with the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee to examine that issue and I tell Mr MacAskill that Edinburgh is not losing out internationally.

Edinburgh is very much seen by Copenhagen, Vancouver and other leading tourist destinations round the world as an equal player. We should support the good work that goes on in that field, rather than always drawing a negative.

The Government's review of Scotland's cities, including its analysis and promotion of solutions, is an approach built on partnership. Far from being top down, as the Conservatives suggested, city visions are local authority and local partner led. In many questions, motions and debates, including today's, Parliament has expressed concern about Scotland's cities in relation to transport, health, jobs and the built environment. The devolved Government's response has been to work with cities and city-region partners to develop the "Building Better Cities" review.

City visions are part of a continuing process. They provide an overarching context for the development of each city region. It is important that they are driven by local authorities and their partners. That is why I cannot accept the point that Brian Monteith made about Stirling. If I understood him correctly, he suggested that the Government should dictate that Dundee be part of the Stirling city vision and that there should be a top-down approach. Rather, our approach is very much for Stirling and its surrounding partners to build their own plan for their area.

**Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP):** Can the minister clarify for the record what he means by Dundee being part of Stirling's city vision? Was that a typo?

**Tavish Scott:** It would have been helpful if Shona Robison had been here for the debate. In his opening remarks, Mr Monteith argued that Dundee should be driven by the Government to be part of the Stirling city region. Our approach is to allow the development of Stirling in the right way.

**Mr Monteith:** I am sorry if the minister is confused. The point that I made about Stirling and Dundee was in fact about their relationship with Perth and how Perth was concerned about missing out. Perhaps the minister missed my mentioning Perth, but my point was about the fact that Perth is sandwiched between two cities and fears that it might lose out on the munificence of the Executive.

**Tavish Scott:** I accept that clarification, but I was suggesting that our approach is to let the bottom drive the process, if I may put it that way, rather than have Government at the top level driving it. That approach is right in principle and is not the one that the Conservatives suggested that we are taking.

The example of Copenhagen and Malmö is important, because it illustrates in spectacular style the approach of developing city regions—and



there was some criticism of our approach to city regions. Those two cities prosper, innovate and grow. That is the approach that we seek in Scotland's city regions—the partnerships should prosper, innovate and grow in a positive way.

Jeremy Purvis asked a question on market towns and I say to him that the Government will reflect on his suggestion. There are other areas and towns, including market towns, which seek solutions; that is an issue to which we will want to come back. The Government's vision is to help councils to deliver local solutions to fit local circumstances—only thus can we ensure true consistency with our partnership's ambitions for the whole country.

I will deal briefly with some other points that were raised in the debate. I recognise that Mr Monteith's approach was thoughtful and I trust that he will accept the assurances that I have given, particularly on the fact that areas will not miss out. It is not the devolved Administration's intention to allow that to happen—we will not do so and I hope that he will accept that.

I cannot consider Mr Ewing's contribution to be "ruthlessly constructive"; "toothlessly destructive" might be a better description. I commend to him Andrew Welsh's speech, which was intelligent and thoughtful. I might take issue with some of Mr Welsh's economic statistics, but I certainly do not disagree with his central point, which was that cities are drivers of economic growth. Cities drive economic growth for the whole of Scotland, not just for the city regions. Mr Welsh delivered the right speech in the right debate and I commend it to Mr Ewing for that reason.

Pauline McNeill, Robert Brown and Paul Martin raised issues about local taxation. The devolved Administration is taking forward a review of local government finance with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which will provide the opportunity to make the case that has been advocated. I think that those members would expect me to say that the Government should take a long-term perspective, so that its view does not change from day to day and so that changes that are essential for companies and businesses do not happen in a way that does not allow them to plan for the long term.

The Opposition amendments—

**Mr Monteith** *rose*—

**Tavish Scott:** Let me finish my point. The Opposition amendments make three core criticisms of the Government, relating to a lack of transport infrastructure, the need for better public services and the need to put sustainability at the heart of urban policy. I have concerns about the Conservatives' criticism of us, not least because Mr Brocklebank spent some minutes telling us that

he would like to cut the percentage of GDP that is spent on public services. I do not understand how he can on one hand argue for increased investment in transport infrastructure—as the Conservative amendment does—and on the other hand suggest such a cut. He does not say where the cut should be made—

**Murdo Fraser:** Read our manifesto.

**Tavish Scott:** Ah, the Tory manifesto. Shall we remember the Tory manifesto? What did it say? I seem to remember that Scottish Enterprise was the main area that the Tories wanted to cut hard. We reject that position absolutely.

The Administration is investing £3 billion in transport infrastructure, 70 per cent of which will go towards public transport. I presume that the Conservatives reject that position.

On public services and sustainability, city authorities must develop their waste management plans and practices within the national waste plan. In that context, I say to Mr Ballard that that is core to what is going on and that the Minister for Environment and Rural Development, Mr Finnie, is taking the matter forward. It is for city authorities, just as it is for other local authorities, to develop those plans appropriately.

I pick up, in particular, the points that Susan Deacon, Margaret Smith and Sarah Boyack made about affordable housing. The Administration recognises that that is a serious issue. Edinburgh has received £3 million from the cities review, which it has chosen to allocate to key worker housing. Local authorities and registered social landlords can include key worker status among the factors that are used to decide priority for housing allocations and the City of Edinburgh Council has included those arguments in its local housing strategy, which it is discussing with Communities Scotland. I take members' points about those matters and Mr Kerr and I will certainly bring them to the attention of colleagues in the relevant departments.

I take Pauline McNeill's point about housing mix in Glasgow. The Clyde waterfront working group is seeking to find solutions that consider the housing need across the city. Susan Deacon rightly raised the problem of skills shortages—an overall theme that we seek to take forward through the work of the Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department, the Executive's lifelong learning strategy and "A Smart, Successful Scotland".

It strikes me as slightly ironic that an islander should sum up a debate on Scotland's great cities. However, let me reflect a little on Scottish history. In his tome "The Scottish Nation: 1700-2000", Tom Devine writes beautifully of the architectural legacy in Scotland's cities. He notes how, on visiting Scotland in 1826, the great European architect

Karl Friedrich Schinkel described the “purity and splendour” of Glasgow’s architecture and he recalls the poet Hugh William Williams’s recognition of Edinburgh as the Athens of the north. Devine then notes that the last major architectural project of the period was Playfair’s remodelling of the Mound in the 1840s and 1850s. Indeed, that was the last major project until the Miralles project, as the Parliament might note or, indeed, pray about.

My connection is slight. The neo-Gothic might of Edinburgh’s St Mary’s Cathedral and the splendour of the University of Glasgow were the architectural product of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, who was my great-great-great-uncle.

I commend the Executive’s motion to the chamber.

## Business Motion

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-518, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for legislation.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee reports to the Justice 2 Committee by 14 November 2003 on the Civil Legal Aid (Scotland) Amendment (No.2) Regulations 2003 (SSI 2003/486).—[Patricia Ferguson.]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions, motion S2M-519 and motion S2M-522, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Victim Statements (Prescribed Courts) (Scotland) Order 2003 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 (Ancillary Provisions) Order 2003 be approved.—[Patricia Ferguson.]

**The Presiding Officer:** The question on those motions will be put at decision time.

## Decision Time

17:02

### The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to this afternoon's debate on "Building Better Cities", if the amendment in the name of Brian Monteith is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Mark Ballard falls.

The first question is, that motion S2M-477, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on integrated rural development, be agreed to.

#### *Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament notes the recommendations contained in the Rural Development Committee's 1st Report 2003 (Session 1): *Inquiry into Integrated Rural Development* (SP Paper 735).

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that amendment S2M-526.2, in the name of Fergus Ewing, which seeks to amend motion S2M-526, in the name of Andy Kerr, on "Building Better Cities: Delivering Growth and Opportunities", be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 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)  
 Gibson, Mr Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, 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)  
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)  
 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)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 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)  
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 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, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (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)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)

Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)  
 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

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)  
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 26, Against 84, Abstentions 7.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that amendment S2M-526.4, in the name of Brian Monteith, which seeks to amend motion S2M-526, in the name of Andy Kerr, on "Building Better Cities: Delivering Growth and Opportunities", be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (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)  
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 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, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)

Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (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)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)  
 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)  
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (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)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (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

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Gibson, Mr Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)

Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, 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)  
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 14, Against 77, Abstentions 25.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The fourth question is, that amendment S2M-526.3, in the name of Mark Ballard, which seeks to amend motion S2M-526, in the name of Andy Kerr, on "Building Better Cities: Delivering Growth and Opportunities", be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)  
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 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, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 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)  
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 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, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (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)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (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

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Gibson, Mr Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

Mather, 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)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 13, Against 79, Abstentions 24.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The fifth question is, that motion S2M-526, in the name of Andy Kerr, on "Building Better Cities: Delivering Growth and Opportunities", 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)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Glen, Marilyn (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)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 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)  
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (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)  
 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)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 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

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)  
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Gibson, Mr Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)  
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, 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)  
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 65, Against 26, Abstentions 26.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament notes the significant progress made by local authorities and their community planning partners in taking forward the recommendations set out in *Building Better Cities: Delivering Growth and Opportunities* since its publication in January 2003 and the collaborative process led by the community planning partnerships in each city region to develop a 10-year City-Vision; welcomes the strategic plans set out in the six City-Visions, including the projects to be funded by the Cities Growth Fund, and endorses the Scottish Executive's long-term commitment to the regeneration of Scotland's cities.

**The Presiding Officer:** The sixth question is, that motion S2M-519, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Victim Statements (Prescribed Courts) (Scotland) Order 2003 be approved.

**The Presiding Officer:** The seventh question is, that motion S2M-522, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 (Ancillary Provisions) Order 2003 be approved.

## European Week for Safety and Health

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):**

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-442, in the name of Karen Gillon, on the European week for safety and health. The debate will be concluded without any questions being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that the European Week for Safety and Health will take place between 13 and 19 October 2003; welcomes the week's acknowledgement of the need to promote safety and health in the workplace; congratulates trade unions for the role that they have played in improving health and safety in the workplace, and commends the commitment of the European Agency for Safety and Health and the Health and Safety Executive to promote safe and healthy working.

17:09

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** I am pleased to bring to the chamber this debate on the European week for safety and health at work. It is a matter that affects us all as workers and, given Scotland's comparatively poor record, it is one that we must continue to address in the chamber. This is not the first time that health and safety has been discussed in Parliament, but it is important that we recognise the changes that have happened and look forward to what else we can do to improve standards of health and safety in Scotland.

The European week for safety and health at work for 2003 has focused on hazardous substances. Nearly all workers, from painters to farmers to hairdressers, have regular contact with hazardous substances. It is therefore important that people are aware of the risks that can be associated with certain substances. The importance of supplying and using protective clothing can never be underestimated. The knowledge that we now have about how harmful substances such as asbestos can be to the health of the work force shows the importance of having up-to-date research. We need to provide the best available information to everyone in the workplace.

However, instead of concentrating on hazardous materials, I want to focus on health and safety in general. We need to improve awareness, support and the rehabilitation of staff who have been affected. If necessary, we need to prosecute those who are responsible for placing the health and safety of Scottish workers at risk. In 2001-02, 11,954 work-related injuries were reported to the Health and Safety Executive in Scotland, including 32 fatal accidents. Those figures do not take into account work-related illnesses or injuries that were not reported. It is clear from the figures that far too many Scottish workers continue to be injured at

work. We must continue to consider how we can improve those statistics and the health and safety of people in the workplace.

I put on record and pay tribute to the role of the trade unions in bringing about many of the changes that we have seen across Scotland and across industries. At times, employers have had to be dragged kicking and screaming into making changes—as, indeed, Governments have had to be dragged kicking and screaming into introducing the appropriate legislation—but it has been worth it. We in Scotland should never be in the position where profit is placed ahead of the safety of our work force.

The motion is closely linked to two other issues that I have raised in Parliament: the attacks on emergency services staff, which we debated last September and which was later taken forward by my colleague Paul Martin, and corporate killing, which I hope we will discuss before long. To some extent, both those issues are concerned with health and safety in the workplace. Members will also be aware that Transco is currently facing charges under the health and safety legislation following the deaths of the Findlay family in Larkhall in December 1999. I will not comment further on that as I do not wish to prejudice the ongoing legal proceedings, but the fact that the company could not be prosecuted for culpable homicide is a gap in our legal system.

Responsibility for legislation on health and safety in the workplace is reserved, so we are limited in the action that we can take. In March 2000, the Parliament debated a report on the Scottish safety anomaly. The then Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Nicol Stephen, offered little support on how the Scottish Executive could improve health and safety at work. I hope that the current deputy minister will offer something more concrete this afternoon.

It is clear that there is scope for the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive to make a contribution. In fact, the Scottish Executive has moved forward by establishing the Scotland's health at work scheme—or SHAW—which brings together national health service boards, NHS Health Scotland, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Scottish Enterprise, the Confederation of British Industry, the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the Scottish Executive. By doing that, the Executive has shown that improvements can be made when all the stakeholders work together. I understand that, as of January of this year, 27.9 per cent of the work force participated in SHAW. I would be interested to know from the minister whether that figure has increased over the year and what steps the Executive is taking to increase participation. The Executive also funds the safe and healthy working initiative, which is a

new occupational health and safety service for those in small and medium-sized enterprises. Again, I would be grateful to know from the minister how that initiative is being developed.

The initiatives that the Executive has implemented, along with work that has been done by the HSE and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, have managed to improve standards recently and should be commended. However, we are still behind the rest of the United Kingdom in our health and safety record. That is simply not good enough. If we are serious about improving health and safety, we must consider what more can be done.

There is a call for a more strategic approach to improving health and safety in Scottish workplaces. Instead of funding small packages from a variety of sources, the Scottish Executive could implement a single strategy that would oversee, regulate and impose health and safety standards. Such a strategy could provide education on occupational health issues to the general public, employers and employees and could work in conjunction with the Scottish Parliament when relevant legislation is being considered.

The main objective of such a strategy would be to improve the health and safety of individual workers and to raise the general standard of health and safety in Scotland. Nobody would deny that that would be a good thing. However, there would be another major advantage, which is that the Scottish economy would undoubtedly benefit from reduced absenteeism, increased productivity and an overall healthier work force.

As I mentioned earlier, the Scottish Executive is already involved in health and safety. As it is possible for the Executive to fund health and safety initiatives through its Health Department, it might be possible for it further to develop its role in this field. There are European examples of how that could be done. I encourage the Executive to explore these matters along with other bodies such as the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

The most important thing is to improve health and safety and in turn prevent injury and illness. By stopping occupational accidents, we can save the time, money and effort that are involved in rehabilitation and return to work, not to mention compensation. We need to improve the information and advice that are given to employers and employees. Advice about their responsibilities and legal requirements should be made available more freely.

It might sound clichéd, but in my experience education on the basics of workplace health and safety could have prevented the vast majority of minor accidents that have occurred over the past



few years. We need to do more to provide that sort of information to people when they enter the work force and continue to update it as they go through their working lives. Health and safety practices will change over time and people need to be reminded about them.

Just to be controversial towards the end of my speech, I encourage the Executive to look again at enabling the NHS to reclaim from insurance companies the cost of treatment in personal injury cases. The figure involved amounts to around £8 million per year, which could be reinvested in the provision of appropriate services. If the NHS were also able to reclaim the cost of treatment of work-related illnesses, a considerable amount of money could be made available. The idea seems worthy of exploration in the medium to long term.

In conclusion, I thank all the members who have stayed tonight. Once again, I pay tribute to all those who are committed to improving the health and safety of all our work force. I encourage the Scottish Executive to continue to do more to improve the health and safety of all our citizens.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Eight members have indicated that they wish to speak in the debate. It should be possible for everyone to speak.

17:17

**Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP):** I congratulate Karen Gillon on securing this evening's important debate. I will begin by declaring an interest. I am the president of the Tayside industrial safety association, which is an important organisation that does a lot of good work. Some of its work is to bring together local businesses and public sector bodies to ensure that they are up to speed with the most recent legislation and to share good practice.

I attended a recent lecture that the association held on an employer's responsibility to provide its pregnant women workers with adequate ante-natal and post-natal care. It was extremely interesting to hear about the detail of the responsibility on employers from the very early stages of someone's pregnancy. I am certain that there are many employers who are not complying with their responsibilities in that area although provision should be being made.

The debate raises awareness about the importance of health and safety through a recognition of the European week for safety and health. It also raises awareness about the important role of improving health and safety in the workplace. Although we have come a long way, we have a long way still to go. As Karen Gillon mentioned, there are still unacceptable levels of workplace accidents, with more than 11,000 work-

related accidents taking place in Scotland in one year. There is no room for complacency.

Unison has done a fair bit of work in the area, including the recent production of a new report on the subject. Dave Watson, who is Unison's Scottish organiser for policy and information, said:

"Although in Scotland the level of results were better than down south, the targets set for local authority inspections are not always met, and the levels of HSE inspections here tend to be much lower than elsewhere in the UK. Employers in some other parts of the UK often have no real incentive to comply with regulations because there is no chance that they will get caught, investigated or prosecuted."

We cannot rest on our laurels in Scotland. The days of workers' lives being put at risk every day that they went to their work are thankfully over and robust legislation is now in place. However, tragic events still happen far too often—whether it is the death of workers on our oil rigs or accidents in the construction industry.

There is no room for complacency and there is always room for improvement. That will be achieved through keeping up the pressure on employers, whether they are in the public or the private sector. I look forward to hearing what the minister thinks the Scottish Executive can do to play its part in achieving that.

17:21

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** I thank Karen Gillon for bringing this important debate to Parliament. I also welcome the European week for safety and health and I take this opportunity to thank the trade union movement for keeping this important issue high on the agenda.

Health and safety is an issue for workers throughout the world. While we consider what we could do to save lives and avoid injuries and work-related illnesses, we need to talk a bit more about Scotland.

As Karen Gillon said, there is a Scottish safety anomaly. That term was coined by academics several years ago and recent statistics show that it still exists. There were 36 fatal injuries to workers in Scotland in 2000-01, which is five more than there were the year before. Although there was a larger increase in Great Britain overall, Scotland still remains above average for Britain. In particular, Scotland has a higher rate of fatal injury in the construction and service industries.

We have a particular problem in Scotland. There were 2,720 major injuries to employees in Scotland in 2000-01, which is about the same as in the previous year. It is worth noting that the figures are subject to significant under-reporting. Surveys suggest that only 43 per cent of non-fatal reportable accidents are reported in Scotland. The

worst sector is agriculture, in which only 17 per cent of such accidents are reported. England and Wales have 100 per cent reporting; Scotland has 61 per cent reporting. As for the self-employed, fewer than one in 20 reportable injuries is recorded.

The anomaly is not only a poorer record of accidents but a poorer record of enforcement. The average fine per conviction last year was just over £4,000 in Scotland, but it was over £7,000 in Britain as a whole. The figures for Britain remain considerably higher than the Scottish ones and that has also been the case in previous years. Furthermore, in Scotland, only 138 out of 238 charges resulted in convictions. That is a poorer success rate than in Great Britain as a whole, which last year secured 1,402 convictions from 1,908 charges.

When concerns about health and safety are raised in the Scottish Parliament, we are reminded that health and safety is a reserved issue and therefore outwith the remit of the Scottish Parliament. However, the current structure is failing to improve the situation for Scottish workers. The reverse may be the case as the danger is that current plans to alter court jurisdictions are likely to result in many personal injury claims being heard by sheriff courts. Decisions by less-expert sheriffs will do little to improve the situation in Scotland.

I believe that we need a Scottish commission for health and safety. That would not replace the national commission but would work with the STUC, employers and the Health and Safety Executive to promote good practice, highlight weaknesses and be active in all matters relating to health and safety in Scotland. The commission would have a clear view to consider health and safety throughout Scotland. It would be independent, but it would have statutory status and would report to the Scottish Parliament. It would not be an enforcing body but would have the power to conduct investigations. I ask the Scottish Executive to consider that suggestion and to work with the STUC and others to work towards a safer Scotland for workers.

17:25

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** I must say to Cathy Peattie that I do not see that health and safety is specifically a reserved matter—it is a matter of great concern to all members. Indeed, we all have a responsibility to our staff and for the conditions under which they work.

I refer to the European week for safety and health. Health and safety do not relate to any one week; they relate to every day, hour and second that we work in whatever workplace and, perhaps

even more, in our homes. When we analyse accidents, we find that one of the most dangerous situations in which to carry out work is on our own in our home. We should all take that on board.

On the European aspect, just as health and safety has no boundaries in time, it has no geographical boundaries. I sympathise with the people in Russia who have recently been through horrendous times with mining incidents in the past few weeks. I am sure that all members' sympathy goes out to those who were involved in those incidents.

I take marginal exception to the motion, in that it mentions the unions but not the employers. Shona Robison mentioned the sterling efforts of employers in trying to keep up reduction of accidents in their workplaces. She mentioned the private and public sectors' coming together—in their own time, no doubt—in the organisation of which she is president. That is an indication of a commitment by employers to trying to do something about the health and safety records of their companies and groups.

I go back to my experiences of employer involvement in the 1960s when I worked in the power industry. At that time, we had group schemes to try to encourage a situation in which accidents did not happen in dangerous work spaces. In one scheme, various groups were created within the power station. Their objective was to go a full year without a reportable accident. To be honest, we had reportable accidents, and few groups made the full year, but one group—of which I was lucky to be a part—managed a trip to a theatre in Glasgow as a reward for our compliance with the regulations to the extent that there were no accidents.

I acknowledge Cathy Peattie's point about some of the industries that deserve special attention, in particular agriculture and construction. The construction industry has moved a long way. It has its safety representatives on the ground floor and they constantly watch the work force, but often the work force is prepared to take the stupid risks that end in disaster.

**Cathy Peattie:** Will Phil Gallie give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No—he is in his last minute.

**Phil Gallie:** I am sorry. I would have liked to take that intervention.

I will mention members' responsibilities. I am on the health and safety committee that the Parliament has set up and I am conscious that MSPs and their staff do not seem to be aware of the health and safety situation in the Parliament building or out in the sticks, where we have our constituency offices. When we run induction

courses, the Parliament and we MSPs have a responsibility to make our staff aware and to ensure that our offices are safe for them and for us.

17:29

**Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I begin by congratulating Karen Gillon on securing time for the debate. Despite her concerns about its being in the Thursday afternoon slot, I am sure that the attendance reflects members' concerns about health and safety. I especially welcome the fact that we are holding the debate around the time of the European week for safety and health, although it ought to be said that every week should be a health and safety week.

I pay tribute to the trade unions for the efforts that they have made in pursuing the Government to implement robust workplace health and safety legislation and to ensure that employers are forced to provide their employees with the necessary protection under those health and safety regulations.

Cathy Peattie illustrated the extent of the work that has still to be done to make the workplace much safer for employees. Many employers tend to try to ignore health and safety regulations if they can. It is important that procurators fiscal and the Crown Office take prosecutions on such statutory matters very seriously, and that they have the resources to carry out what can often be complex and detailed investigations in the pursuit of individual cases against employers. I hope that the minister can assure us that the Crown Office is aware of the need to pursue such matters vigorously.

I wish to touch on two issues under the wider matter of health and safety regulations. My particular interest in the matter lies in the extension of health and safety regulations to the police. When that happened, the regulations were by default extended to include mountain rescue teams. As a member of a mountain rescue team, I can report that such teams have indeed had to comply with the health and safety regulations. The result is that they have had to allow for a higher turnover in their personal safety equipment and in general safety equipment for their teams. Mountain rescue teams' problem is that they are voluntary organisations that are having to raise more and more funds in order to comply with health and safety regulations. I hope that ministers will ensure that the funding that is to be provided to the police for mountain rescue purposes reflects the increasing demands that are being placed upon mountain rescue teams.

Cathy Peattie mentioned the particular Scottish dimension in health in safety. There is an issue

around the accountability of the Health and Safety Executive and how it interprets regulations. Cathy Peattie and I have both been involved in the matter of the Health and Safety Executive's decision to extend the consultation zone around the Grangemouth oil refinery from roughly 1 mile to 3 miles. The zone now takes in a wide range around the refinery. No one says that we should compromise on the safety of residents living within that zone, but it is interesting to note that other countries have chosen to interpret matters differently as regards their oil refineries.

Falkirk Council has highlighted the danger that the Health and Safety Executive might, in relation to the Grangemouth area, have chosen to interpret the new regulations in a way that could stifle economic development, leading to population decline and possibly causing a whole range of problems in the community. It is important that the Health and Safety Executive and the Scottish Executive recognise, despite the fact that health and safety is a reserved matter, that the concerns that have been expressed in the Scottish Parliament must be taken into account and acted upon.

Also in relation to the consultation zone around Grangemouth refinery, I hope that the idea—which has attracted cross-party support—of a review of the way in which call-in procedures operate will be pursued. The likelihood is that if a 3-mile consultation zone goes ahead—indeed, it is already operating—it will cause serious problems for any development in the Grangemouth area. I believe that that would stifle development, which would be to the detriment of the area in general.

17:33

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** It is excellent that Karen Gillon has secured the debate and has linked it with the European Union. One of the benefits of the EU is that it provides us with a much wider sphere from which to learn of best practice. I have no doubt that some countries do particular things particularly well, and that we can learn from that.

Other speakers have covered the basic safety at work issues very well, but I would like to stress some of those points. There is the question of violence against employees, whether that involves shop workers, council officials or firefighters. For example, this is the season when people working in small shops often suffer intimidation, with attempts made to persuade them to sell fireworks to the wrong people. We can do more to prevent or discourage violence against employees in both the public and commercial sectors.

Smoking is a hot issue that arouses a lot of passion. The issue of smoking in public places

and in workplaces is important and the Parliament can address it—I hope that we make serious progress on it. Legislation may be necessary because voluntary systems do not seem to work well.

Stress affects a huge number of people, although it is difficult to do something dramatic about it quickly. My two sons work infinitely too hard because doing so is part of the culture of the organisations for which they work. The option of working more reasonable hours for less money does not exist for them. Along with the commercial and public sectors, we must examine ways of reducing stress.

Enthusiasts of health and safety regulations—for example, fire regulations—often impose unrealistic conditions on offices. The result is that offices build lots of fire doors, which are permanently wedged open until the telephonist at the front door says, “Help! The fire people are coming,” at which point everyone rushes around, unplugs the wedges and closes the doors. There is no point in that. We need regulations, but they must be sensible and go with the flow. We want to push people along, but not too far. Another example of foolish regulations, which I think is driven by the insurance industry, is that home helps are not allowed to climb up ladders to work high up in a room. The assumption is that the frail, elderly person that they are helping should do that, which is stupid.

There are modern issues, which have been dealt with in the past, such as the problems of looking at computer screens for too long, repetitive strain injury and noise. People who work in the entertainment industry must suffer from noise, even when loudspeakers are not involved. I know that musicians in orchestras who habitually sit in front of the trombones tend to go a bit deaf.

The issue of health and safety at work has many aspects, which we should pick up individually. I hope that the minister will address some of my points.

17:38

**Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP):** I, too, thank Karen Gillon for bringing the debate to the Parliament. The issue of health and safety at work is vast, but the aim of the European week for safety and health is to raise awareness of the issue among trade unions and Parliaments throughout Europe, and perhaps to encourage the introduction of legislation as a result.

As Karen Gillon said, last year, 37 workers in Scotland were killed at their workplace. The figure for the UK as a whole was 300. Since 1999, only two company directors have been prosecuted in Scotland for health and safety at work offences—

one was admonished; the other received a fine of £1,000. Although the rate of accidents in Scotland is higher, in the same period, 29 company directors were prosecuted in England and Wales. One worrying trend in Scotland is that the number of fatal injuries at work has increased by 14 per cent from 2001-02 to 2002-03, although in Britain as a whole, the figure fell by 11 per cent. The rate of fatal accidents at work reflects the trends in health and safety at work. We must ask ourselves why the figure is rising in Scotland.

One difference between England and Wales and Scotland is the way in which health and safety at work offences are prosecuted. In England and Wales, the Health and Safety Executive can bring prosecutions directly but although, as has been said, such cases can be complex, in Scotland, procurators fiscal prosecute them. It seems that there is a reluctance on the part of the PFs to prosecute many of these cases. I do not have the answer, but I am raising the question: should that be looked at? Is it the place of the PFs to prosecute? Should we look for some other form of prosecution or of taking up these issues when they are raised?

How are we going to force workplaces, employers and, especially, companies to take health and safety issues seriously? That is at the heart of the matter, and trade unions have been at the forefront of doing that work. They are the bodies that have pushed this issue more than anybody else to ensure that there is safety in the workplace.

The issue of corporate manslaughter charges is very important. The UK Labour Government gave a commitment in 1997 that it would introduce a new law on that. It undertook consultation in 2000, which found that there was huge support for such charges. Those who were in favour of them included trade unions, lawyers, victims' families and voluntary organisations. Those who were against them included the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors and the big companies' chief executives.

Karen Gillon is going to introduce a member's bill to create a charge of corporate culpable homicide. We need to send the signal out about how seriously we take the issue. It is a devolved issue and we can change the law in Scotland on it. If we were to move in that direction, it would concentrate the minds of many employers on taking the issue of health and safety at work seriously.

The two main issues are the question of prosecution—and who prosecutes—and the need to change the law. I know that the minister does not want to talk about Transco, but if the big companies think that they are only going to get their knuckles rapped or a little fine, they will not

take the issue seriously. If they think that their directors might go to jail for 20 years, that would tend to concentrate their minds on the procedures in their workplaces. Therefore, a central part of changing the culture and attitudes is passing legislation to force companies and workplaces to take health and safety at work seriously.

17:42

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** I, too, congratulate Karen Gillon on securing today's debate. Health and safety does not normally reach out and grab people as a subject that they want to discuss. It is seen as a bit of an anorak subject. However, the fact is that health and safety is, ultimately, an issue of life or death. Unsafe working conditions affect our quality of life in the workplace and beyond.

I will say a bit more about trade unions. Trade unions, as we know them, grew from the need to improve pay and conditions, especially concerning issues of health and safety and the quality of workers' lives. To understand the issues that we face today, it is important that we remember the origins of the trade union movement and, in particular, the role that women played in that process.

In 1888, Clementina Black gave a speech on female labour at a Fabian Society meeting in London. In the audience was Annie Besant, who was appalled to hear of the plight of the workers at the Bryant & May match factory. Their pay and conditions involved their working 14 hours a day for an absolute pittance and they did not necessarily get their full wages, as they were fined for heinous crimes such as dropping the matches or going to the toilet without permission. If they were late, they were docked half a day's pay. However, worse than that, they also suffered ill health and death through working with yellow phosphorous—a substance that was, at the time, banned in the United States and Sweden. Yellow phosphorous was not, however, banned by the British Government, as that would have created a restraint on free trade. Basically, it was an example of the familiar rule of putting profits before people, which Karen Gillon touched on.

Annie Besant wrote an article entitled "White Slavery in London", which caused the management of Bryant & May to try to make their workers say that they were all happy and that everything was fine. When they did not, the organiser was sacked, a strike took place and the Matchgirls Union was formed. *The Times* said that the women had been egged on by

"pests of the modern industrialised world".

It is just as well that those pests existed, as the match girls won improvements in their working

conditions, although it was not until 1901—following a visit to the factory by MPs and journalists—that Bryant & May stopped using yellow phosphorous.

The match girls are an early example of workers forming into organised labour to win improvements at work. We have to ask ourselves whether we still face such horrendous conditions and hazards to health. I think that we do. We face issues such as repetitive strain injury, sexual harassment, bullying and stress, which Donald Gorrie mentioned. Those are some of the modern health hazards at work, and they are faced particularly by women.

Of course, the match girls are not the only workers who have been fined. For example, petrol station workers are fined if someone drives off without paying. Further, it is regarded as a heinous crime if workers in some factories and call centres go to the toilet without permission. Conditions can still be outrageous in many workplaces because the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 may not always be adhered to. Modern issues such as stress must also be considered in the context of working conditions.

I want to talk briefly about sexual harassment because it can really blight women's lives at work. Sexual harassment can involve verbal or physical advances, offensive, sexually explicit remarks and the display of pornographic and offensive literature and pictures. Sexual harassment can also interfere with performance and security, affect promotion opportunities and cause stress-related illness. Sexual harassment is not a modern phenomenon. I wanted to give a lovely quote by Isabella Ford from 1893. Sadly, I do not have time to do so because I have only one minute left.

Many of 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain's attitudes are still with us in the new millennium. Trade unions have historically been the workers' champions in fighting the profit-before-people rule, promoting health and safety and securing that as a sensible approach to industrial relations. I inform Phil Gallie that a happy, healthy, well-trained work force and team will yield more profit for employers than a sick, stressed set of individuals. However, the challenge is to persuade employers of that.

In the new millennium we are fighting the same fight as in the previous one. Trade unions are battling for health and safety standards and women are still striving for equality. We should commend the trade unions and the STUC for their work in the field of health and safety. We should also commend the STUC women's committee and Rozanne Foyer for the work that they do for women. We acknowledge that pests can win over profits and achieve decent standards of health and safety for 21<sup>st</sup> century workers—if we shout about it.

17:46

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** I am grateful to Karen Gillon for bringing the motion before us today.

The theme of the European week for safety and health at work is really the prevention of risks from dangerous substances at work. In my previous working environments, I was exposed to many noxious, dangerous and toxic chemicals because I worked as a scientist in the pharmaceutical industry and the health service. However, among probably the most dangerous, noxious and toxic chemicals I was exposed to in those environments—and which, I regret to say, I am still exposed to in my present working environment—is environmental tobacco smoke. Donald Gorrie referred to that in his speech, but I will spell it out a little more.

We have heard in the debate about the number of people who die in industrial accidents. However, it is estimated that if we had totally smoke-free workplaces in Scotland, the smoking rate would drop by 4 per cent and total tobacco consumption would drop by 7.5 per cent. Action on Smoking and Health Scotland estimates that we would have 1,000 fewer deaths each year if we had smoke-free workplaces. I believe that the Scottish Parliament can certainly address that issue and I hope that it will do so. In fact, a member's bill on the issue is currently before Parliament. If we enact that legislation, it will affect people's workplaces and will benefit many people.

Passive smoking causes a 25 to 35 per cent greater risk of coronary heart disease, a 20 to 30 per cent greater risk of lung cancer and an amazing 82 per cent greater risk of stroke. Further, people who are exposed to passive smoking have decreased lung function. There is no safe level of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke. Ventilation systems do not reduce the significant health risks that are associated with passive smoking.

Currently, only half the workplaces in the United Kingdom and less than half the workplaces in Scotland are smoke free. However, in other parts of the world, legislation on the issue exists or is being implemented. For example, Ireland is due to bring in smoke-free workplace legislation in January of next year; Norway will do the same late next spring; New Zealand's smoke-free environment legislation is going through its Parliament; and successful legislation has already had an impact in various states in the United States.

We can have legislation on smoking in public places and workplaces. Evidence from other countries suggests that primary legislation is the most effective mechanism for reducing

environmental tobacco smoke and exposure to passive smoking. Environmental tobacco smoke should be listed explicitly in the forthcoming European Union carcinogens directive. It should also be added to the COSHH regulations. The European Union health commissioner has advocated a European Union-wide approach to protecting workers from passive smoking in the workplace. Others have suggested that there are no geographical boundaries where this issue is concerned. I welcome the commissioner's suggestion.

The voluntary approach that some have adopted is clearly not working. Seven in 10 of all Scottish pubs and bars permit smoking throughout. That affects workers as well as customers. Four in 10 of all Scottish leisure industry sites, including superstores, sports grounds and sports centres as well as pubs and restaurants, permit smoking throughout. Only one in seven of all leisure industry sites complies with all the key aspects of the voluntary charter. It does not work.

17:51

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald):** I, too, congratulate Karen Gillon on lodging the motion and providing an opportunity to debate safety and health in the workplace. The Scottish Executive concurs with her entirely about the importance of the European week for safety and health, the message that it conveys about the key role of trade unions and the importance of the work of all those who are involved in promoting safe and healthy working.

Overall, Scotland's safety and health at work record is broadly comparable with that of England and Wales. However, as has been said this afternoon, there are some important exceptions—in both directions.

In construction, the fatality rate is higher here than it is south of the border. In August this year, I took delivery of a report from a group that was set up to advance a strategic approach to the construction industry, addressing a range of issues. Significantly, the members of the group, most of whom were drawn from the industry, identified as one of the five major constraints on progress in the Scottish construction industry the inadequacy of previous achievements in health and safety. In its report, the group made a number of detailed recommendations aimed at addressing that problem.

The construction innovation and excellence forum that we hope will be set up as a result of that process will act as a point of contact between the Executive and the industry. I hope that the forum will also serve as the starting point for

addressing safety and health issues. Clearly, employment practices such as bogus self-employment and lack of training have a significant impact on safety and health in the construction industry. We look forward to the outcome of the forum's work and to its proposals for tackling such problems. The trade unions played an active role in the work of the group that produced the construction industry report, as they have in many other areas.

There are anomalies in the other direction. For example, the labour force survey that was commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive indicates that the rates of self-reported, work-related injuries and ill health are significantly lower in Scotland than they are elsewhere. The reasons for those differences are not clear and it is important that we identify them. The HSE has undertaken to carry out further research to do that. Cathy Peattie suggested that the fundamental explanation for the difference is under-reporting, which would be a very serious matter. I understand that the HSE's research is intended to establish whether that is the case.

As has been said, legislative responsibility for health and safety at work is a reserved area. However, the Scottish Executive is very clear about the fact that health and safety at work is critical to the achievement of our strategic objectives for health improvement in Scotland.

**Brian Adam:** Proposals for two members' bills that affect health and safety at work are before the Parliament. Will the minister indicate how the Executive perceives the proposed regulation of smoking bill and the proposed culpable homicide by corporate bodies bill?

**Lewis Macdonald:** Both proposals are too important to be tagged on to a debate on a wider issue. I do not intend to provide a definitive Executive view on them this evening. However, I recognise the significance of the issues and I will say a word or two about them in a few moments.

There is a common agenda in Government at every level on tackling health and safety issues. Employees and trade unions have an interest in that and so, of course, do employers. The point was made that a work force that is unhealthy or unsafe is, by definition, bad for recruitment, bad for morale and bad for business, as well as bad for the work force itself. There is clearly a common interest, with responsible employers, trade unions and others working together on that. I am pleased to say that we work closely with the Health and Safety Executive, the Confederation of British Industry and the STUC in pursuing a safety-at-work agenda. The First Minister recently discussed precisely those matters with the STUC.

The "Securing Health Together" document,

which we signed three years ago, constituting a Great Britain-wide occupational health strategy, has laid the basis for the way in which we seek to improve Scotland's health at work. It covers a project to deliver health and safety support to small and medium-sized enterprises, which often do not have the capacity to have those professional skills in house. It provides to employers and employees in the small-business sector confidential, high-quality information, advice and support.

In March 2003, in "Improving Health in Scotland—The Challenge", we confirmed our view that the workplace is one of the core target areas for health improvement. To develop our approach to a healthy-working lifestyle, we have come together with the STUC, employers and the voluntary sector. We have increased substantially the funding to the Scotland's health at work award scheme, which was mentioned in a number of speeches. SHAW is a unique, national awards scheme to address Scotland's poor health record and, by doing so, to improve our business position. The scheme rewards employers who demonstrate a commitment to improving the health of their work force and to reducing sickness absence. I am pleased to say that, just last month at the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents conference in Glasgow, the Scottish Executive was congratulated by the chairman of the scheme on achieving its SHAW bronze award this year.

Donald Gorrie and Brian Adam will be interested to know that smoke-free workplaces were part of what qualified the Scottish Executive for that award. I understand that the Scottish Parliament has now registered with SHAW, in pursuit of a similar award and, no doubt, there will be some discussion of how that will best be achieved. I look forward to the outcome of that. Karen Gillon asked how many employees were now covered by SHAW initiatives. In August of this year, just over 726,000 Scottish employees were covered.

The latest health white paper, "Partnership for Care", confirmed our broad view that health in the workplace is important, but it recognised that specific things needed to be done to address the matter. The issue was raised of a Scottish strategic overview—or, in Cathy Peattie's words, a Scottish commission for health and safety. Clearly the Health and Safety Executive has responsibility for that throughout Great Britain and I believe that it is open to discussion on how best its objectives can be met in Scotland. I welcome the suggestion that we take a joined-up approach to those matters and I will ensure that the comments that have been made today are drawn to the HSE's attention.

A number of members raised the issue of prosecutions. We share the view that no one should get away with criminal negligence resulting in death or serious injury at work. As Frances Curran said, there is a different prosecution system in Scotland from that in England and Wales, which explains partly the differences in some of the statistics. There are different evidential requirements in the Scottish and English systems. I give the reassurance that the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service takes seriously health and safety cases and will always raise prosecutions if there is sufficient evidence and if it is in the public interest to do so. All fatal accidents at work will result in prosecution where the HSE reports the case to the procurator fiscal and there is sufficient evidence to proceed.

The Parliament will have the opportunity to consider corporate homicide in the future. We acknowledge the commitment of Karen Gillon and others to ensuring that the law in that respect is adequate to meet need. We look forward with great interest to developments in that area.

We in the Scottish Executive are also employers and members will be interested to know that we have a procedure for addressing workplace stress. I do not know whether any elected members want to take advantage of that. That procedure is part of a health and safety management programme that we have implemented across our work force. It might seem surprising, but members of our work force report that their knowledge and understanding of health and safety issues have improved and that, in their experience of their workplace, it is a safer place in which to work than it was a couple of years ago. That improvement has been driven by a health and safety team in the Executive and a network of health and safety liaison officers. I commend that model to others in the public and private sectors.

We hope that our example will be followed. It is for all employers to follow the lead that is given by the best and most responsible employers and to work with their staff and trade unions, which, as a number of members have said, have made a critical contribution on the health and safety agenda for more than 100 years. We look forward to the continuation of that work, so that Scotland will be one of the safest countries in Europe in which to work.

*Meeting closed at 18:01.*



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