

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 27 January 2005

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 27 January 2005

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

Energy Policy

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business this morning is a debate on motion S2M-2320, in the name of Alex Johnstone, on energy policy, and four amendments to the motion.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Where is the minister?

09:30

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): To the chorus that I hear from my right, I say that I am delighted that so many of us have had the energy to come here this morning to discuss energy policy, but it is disappointing that, once again, the Executive seems to be ignoring the issue.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Have you received apologies from Allan Wilson, who, I notice, intends to speak in the debate?

The Presiding Officer: No. That is not a matter for me.

Alex Johnstone: I will proceed regardless.

As is made clear in the amendment that has been lodged by the Scottish National Party, Scotland is an energy-rich nation. In fact, we are energy exporters in a range of ways. We are oil and gas exporters and in recent years we have generated more electricity than we can use. The excess has been put out through the national grid to our neighbouring countries and it has been important to their economies, too.

We are fully aware that energy is not specifically a devolved matter, but so many of the issues that are discussed regularly in the Parliament are related to energy that it is essential for us to consider it as a uniting subject. That is why we brought forward today's debate. We must consider energy policy in the long term and ask how it is affected by the subjects that we discuss.

One of those subjects is climate change, which was debated in Executive time last week and on which the Environment and Rural Development Committee yesterday began a detailed inquiry. One thing that became obvious during last week's debate, and yesterday at the beginning of the

inquiry, is that there is now a great deal on which we all agree. No longer do we dispute that global warming is happening and no longer do we dispute that the emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from industry and other sources throughout the world are part of that process. What we have to debate is how we deal with the problem and how we apply the means that are at our disposal to deal with it.

We must take into account the fact that Scotland has a developed economy. The need for a readily available and affordable supply of energy is indisputable. When we consider the problems that other countries have suffered, such as the power cuts in the United States and parts of Europe in recent years, we realise that we are in a lucky position because we are not exposed to such effects. If we believe that growth is the key to our future economic stability, we must be able to supply affordable electricity. It is therefore important to consider, in the context of our broader energy requirements, the balance of how that electricity is generated.

Estimates of future consumption are repeatedly disputed. I—and, more recently, my colleague Phil Gallie—have asked questions about those estimates and the need for spinning reserve within the generating capacity in Scotland. It is therefore a surprise to discover that Jim Wallace has only recently indicated that a study will be undertaken to work out what percentage of wind energy is usable in the Scottish electricity system. It is surprising that that comes rather later than the commitment to move towards ensuring that 18 per cent of Scotland's electricity comes from renewable sources by 2010, with an ambitious target of 40 per cent by 2020. To some extent, Jim Wallace seems to have put the cart before the horse.

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): Surely the member must agree that, in addition to wind power, there are a considerable number of renewable sources, all of which will feed into the mix to achieve the target by 2020.

Alex Johnstone: Indeed. That is exactly what I was about to say.

As we have said repeatedly in the chamber, we have a serious problem, in that the policy that the Executive is pursuing is resulting in large-scale investment in the only available mature technology, which is, of course, onshore wind. We believe that the resources that are available for the development of renewable sources of electricity need to be spread more widely. The opportunities that are afforded by other environmental methods of generation, such as wave and tidal power, obviously deserve investment, but the Executive has missed the opportunity in relation to biofuels—whose development could have been accelerated

in Scotland had the Executive's policy followed that of the Government south of the border—and the opportunities that are afforded by the burning of waste that cannot be recycled. Moreover, when we look at the technologies that are available, we must not forget that, as Shiona Baird has reminded me in the past, energy efficiency is also a significant part of what we need to achieve.

That range of opportunities does not alter the fact that it is absolutely essential that we have a balanced method of guaranteeing energy supply in the longer term. That means that we must consider the methods that are currently used to generate most of our electricity, including coal, gas and nuclear power.

Stewart Stevenson: Last time the Tories referred to nuclear generation capacity, I asked whether they had a figure for the cost of decommissioning the sites that are occupied by nuclear power stations and returning them to their original state. Is the member, having had a period of time to consider the matter, now able to give us that information?

Alex Johnstone: If the member wants that information, he should put a written question to the Executive, which itself is unable to give those details.

I turn to the alternatives to the main methods of generating electricity that are used today. Our supply of gas comes predominantly from the North sea, but in future that will not necessarily be the case. The ministers, who are now on the Government bench, have expressed concerns about the security of supply of gas in the future. Investment to guarantee a reduction in emissions from the necessary capacity generated by the coal sector means that it is likely that we cannot rely on that sector for a considerable period.

As I said, we brought forward today's debate to examine the balance of capacity and to consider how we can start a wider debate on how that balance will be achieved. At the moment, nuclear capacity provides a significant part of the energy that we use. Unless we are prepared to enter into a debate now about the future of that capacity, there are grave doubts about whether we will have the security of electricity supply that we need for our economy to be balanced in future.

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): There has been a lot of debate both in the chamber and outside about where wind farms should go. Can the member state where nuclear power stations should go? Should they be on the Tay? Should they be in Fife? Where should they go? Will the member give us a clue?

Alex Johnstone: We already have sites that are in use for nuclear generation in Scotland and in many cases we have the capacity to expand on

those existing sites. In addition, I am sure that the member is aware that there will be opportunities for efficiencies of scale if nuclear decommissioning and rebuilding take place on the same site. That is possible in Scotland, unlike in some other areas.

I take this opportunity to offer an apology to the two members who are named in the Conservative motion, although we have referred to them simply to provoke debate on the future of nuclear energy. John Home Robertson is a regular supporter of the issue. In recent times, he has gone to great lengths and has made great personal effort to try to establish a cross-party group on the civil nuclear industry. In that venture, he can be assured of constructive support from the Conservatives. Allan Wilson, who will make the opening speech for the Executive, was named in the motion perhaps less enthusiastically and more with mischief in mind. He has been extensively quoted in the press recently on the security of gas supply and on the future of nuclear capacity in Scotland. In fact, he wrote:

"When the issue does arise in Scotland, I hope that there will be some maturity of debate. Nobody living near or working at Hunterston thinks of nuclear power as something which must be opposed on principle. Nobody who cares about global warming can lightly dismiss the current source of more than half of Scotland's electricity."

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Is the generating capacity to which the member referred used or needed in Scotland?

Alex Johnstone: We must avoid becoming little Scotlanders in this debate. It is essential that Scotland takes its place as a power exporter, if for no other reason than to develop our renewables sector. Our development of renewables will inevitably result in our being exporters of power.

The balance between renewable energy and base-load generating capacity is the key to long-term stability. If we burn gas instead, we will be exposed to risks of security of supply. If we burn coal, we will be put under increasing pressure over our CO₂ emissions, given the levels of road and air transport that are still essential for the Scottish economy. For that reason, we must have this debate.

The Executive amendment draws some sympathy from me, but it is unfortunate that it is not prepared to go as far as Allan Wilson's statements in the press. The amendment states Allan Wilson's policy, but his position has been watered down so severely as a result of the partnership agreement with the Liberal Democrats that the amendment refuses even to begin to address the decisions that need to be made about the future of nuclear capacity in Scotland. I beg Allan Wilson to have the courage to say in the chamber what he has said outside it. He must join in the debate.

Nuclear power has a long-term future in supplying electricity to the Scottish economy. That is why Conservatives believe that it is essential that we begin a debate on the subject now. We may lose today's debate, but we will not stand idly by while a technology that has been developed and run so efficiently in Scotland is lost simply because the decision to proceed with the next generation of nuclear power stations is avoided by ministers whose hands are tied behind their backs by their junior partners, who have never made a decision in their lives. I beg members to support the motion in my name, in spite of the amendments against it.

I move,

That the Parliament is concerned that the Scottish Executive's renewable energy policy is unduly biased in favour of wind power to the detriment of other renewable technologies, which has led to widespread local opposition to wind farm developments throughout the country and to higher costs for electricity; furthermore agrees with Allan Wilson MSP, Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, that the concerns of security of supply and the need for emission reductions mean that it is time for an open-minded debate into the future of nuclear energy in Scotland; supports John Home Robertson MSP's proposal for a Cross Party Group on the civil nuclear industry, and calls on the Executive to work in partnership with the UK Government to create a long-term plan for Scotland's energy needs which balances renewable production with nuclear energy.

The Presiding Officer: Several members who I expect would want to speak in the debate have yet to press their request-to-speak buttons. I ask them to do so now, as that will let me do my sums.

09:44

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): I apologise to the Presiding Officer and all members in the chamber, especially colleagues on the Tory benches, for our tardy arrival.

I hope that this important debate will be conducted in a mature fashion, as I have indeed publicly called for it to be. The current electricity generation mix underpins a vibrant economy and provides both jobs and security of supply. Those two objectives are, I am sure, shared by all members, irrespective of their particular views on nuclear energy. However, nuclear energy is an important part of that equation, because it provides what amounts to—for the purposes of the debate, let us not go into too much detail—some 40 per cent of our electricity supply. I want to make it clear that our position on nuclear power is as stated in the Executive's programme for government. That means that we will not support new nuclear power stations while waste management issues remain unresolved.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): Does the minister appreciate the concern in the renewables energy industry about the fact that the minister with responsibility for promoting renewable energy has publicly stated that he supports nuclear energy? How can he reassure Scotland's renewables sector that he will not adopt a half-hearted approach to promoting renewables?

Allan Wilson: I see already that my plea for a mature debate has fallen on deaf ears. With great regularity—I met people from Pilot, which represents our oil and gas industry, in London only yesterday—I meet representatives of the energy sector, including those who are involved in renewable energy generation. Nobody has expressed those views to me because those views are not held within the sector. We need a mature debate—

Shiona Baird: Will the minister answer a mature question then?

Allan Wilson: I give way to Shiona Baird.

Shiona Baird: Will the minister consider the nuclear waste management issue to be resolved when the decision on how waste should be managed is made or when the waste facility is actually constructed?

Allan Wilson: As the member will know, the Government established the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management, which has the job of advising the Government on how best to dispose of legacy nuclear waste. That advice will be an important step along the road to determining how existing and future waste should be disposed of. Neither Shiona Baird nor anyone else in the chamber—with the possible exception of the nationalists—can be satisfied with the current situation, whereby our nuclear waste is simply shipped to England for storage. We all agree that the current state of affairs is unsatisfactory. However, I can assure Alex Johnstone and others that, in resolving the nuclear waste issue, we are determined to ensure that Scotland's electricity supply industry retains the mix that is best suited to our circumstances and economy.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I assure the minister that the prospect of shipping nuclear waste to England does not give any satisfaction to the nationalists either.

On the need to retain an energy mix, I ask the minister about the commitment that he gave in a parliamentary debate on 6 October, when he said that he would set up a forum to investigate, through greater dialogue among the different partners, how the balance of energy in relation to renewables technology might be developed. Will he give us an update on the conclusions that the forum has reached and say whether it has proposed any concrete changes to the planning

regime or any strategic guidance on the location of wind farms, which is an issue of concern to a great number of people throughout the country?

Allan Wilson: I welcome Mr Swinney's mature contribution to the debate. The forum met for the first time at the tail-end of last year and is in the process of examining its remit. In a minute, I will come on to the energy study that we commissioned at the end of last year to examine, among other things, Scotland's current and future energy use and the appropriate mix of the different forms of energy supply. I hope that its conclusions will put us in a position to produce more detailed locational guidance on the contribution that onshore wind should make to the mix.

Mr Swinney: Will the minister give way?

Allan Wilson: I have already given way on three occasions. I would like to make some progress, but I would be happy to give way on other issues.

As I have just explained to John Swinney, to establish a Scottish baseline we have commissioned a study of energy supply, flow and demand throughout Scotland. If we are to meet future challenges, we need information about how energy is produced and used here in Scotland, instead of relying on extrapolation from United Kingdom data. The study will be published this summer and its findings should provide a valuable source of data to inform future decisions by the Executive on the most appropriate energy mix.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con) *rose*—

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP) *rose*—

Allan Wilson: I will give way to Phil Gallie, as he indicated first that he wanted to intervene.

Phil Gallie: Given the concerns that have been expressed today about nuclear waste and, in the past, about nuclear decommissioning, will the minister join me in congratulating all at the Hunterston A site on the way in which they have gone about the task of decommissioning?

Allan Wilson: Very much so. I also congratulate staff at all sites in the rest of Scotland and the UK where decommissioning work is under way. That work is leading-edge technology that we in the UK have refined and developed to the extent that it is sought after across the globe.

Nuclear power accounts for 40 per cent of Scotland's electricity. If we did not have nuclear power, that energy would have to be generated from other sources, which would include fossil fuels. That could significantly increase carbon emissions, although the exact amount cannot be calculated without making assumptions about the mix of the replacement sources. It is important that the study that we have entered into considers a balanced mix of energy generation sources.

Alex Neil: I believe that the study is being carried out by AEA Technology, which is based at Glengarnock. What is the time horizon for the study? If it does not look 20, 30 or 40 years ahead, it will be of limited utility in planning our energy needs for the future.

Allan Wilson: The study will be required to look as far into the future as is feasible, taking into account the circumstances that must be predicted when we consider electricity generating sources. It will be ready in the summer, so there is a very short timescale for its production. We expect that it will help us to shape the future of energy policy in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

As members know, a number of our base-load generating stations will come off stream in the very near future. The real issue for Scotland is to put together an energy policy that takes account of that prospective change and of the two primary concerns of the Scottish people: security of supply and combating climate change.

Our response to climate change is focused not only on how energy is supplied. The UK Government's energy white paper also recognised that managing demand—energy efficiency—has a vital part to play in addressing future energy needs. Energy efficiency must be at the forefront of all our efforts; in a low-carbon future, it is every bit as important as the move towards renewable energy generation.

The Executive has a range of initiatives in place to improve energy efficiency in the public, private and domestic sectors. Last year, we announced £20 million to improve energy efficiency in the public sector. In addition, the Executive works with the Carbon Trust and the Energy Saving Trust, to which it provides £10 million a year in funding. In the immediate future and the period covered by the study that AEA Technology is undertaking, the option that is cleanest for the environment and most cost effective for the economy is for us to save the energy that we do not use. We must ensure that opportunities for saving energy are optimised.

Mr Ruskell: Will the minister give way?

Allan Wilson: I will take a final intervention.

The Presiding Officer: We are tight for time.

Mr Ruskell: Does the minister agree with the target set by the performance and innovation unit that is attached to Westminster, which suggested that by 2020 we could reduce energy demand in the domestic sector by 40 per cent—a huge saving that is possible and achievable?

Allan Wilson: Alongside the energy study that we are developing with AEA Technology, which will consider the situation in 2010, 2020 and 2050, we are developing an energy efficiency strategy

for Scotland, as I told the Enterprise and Culture Committee comparatively recently. That strategy will define our objectives and strengthen what is already a joined-up approach to demand-side management in Scotland.

I have not had enough time to discuss in great detail the vital role that we envisage for the range of renewable generation sources: marine, wind, biomass and hydrogen cell technology. I am sure that my Cabinet colleague Ross Finnie will refer to all those sources of renewable energy in his closing speech. In the short time that remains to me, I have much pleasure in commending to members the Executive amendment to Alex Johnstone's motion.

I move amendment S2M-2320.4, to leave out from "is concerned" to end and insert:

"welcomes the Scottish Executive's study into present and future energy supply and demand in Scotland; supports the Executive's position of not supporting the further development of nuclear power stations while waste management issues remain unresolved; supports the Executive's continuing commitment to the development of renewable energy in Scotland, including wind, wave, tidal, solar and biomass power, as a key element of a balanced energy supply portfolio; supports the Executive's commitment to achieving 40% renewable electricity generation by 2020, and welcomes the Executive's proposal in the Review of the Climate Change Programme to create an Energy Efficiency Strategy for Scotland."

09:57

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): It gives me pleasure to speak to the SNP's amendment and to respond to the Tory party's bizarre motion. I am not sure whether it helps or hinders the political careers of Allan Wilson and John Home Robertson to be commended in a Tory party motion. Perhaps that illustrates the convergence between the policies of the Labour party and the Conservatives these days.

In the blue corner, we have the flat earth society—the dinosaurs who are stuck in a past age. The Conservatives appear now to oppose wind energy in Scotland full stop. Only last week, Alex Johnstone's publicity in the Scottish press was calling for national guidelines for wind farms, which is a sensible proposal—many of us are calling for those.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I notice that the member's robust colleague Christine Grahame, who is at the forefront of campaigns against wind farm development, is not present on the SNP benches today. The SNP's position is one of complete hypocrisy and opportunism.

Richard Lochhead: The member is talking nonsense. The Conservatives have lodged a motion that makes no mention of the call for the

Scottish Executive to issue national guidelines. The Tory party is exploiting genuine concerns expressed by many in Scotland who are worried about a proliferation of wind turbines in their communities without their having a real say on the matter. There is a genuine issue, which the Government must address. That is why the Enterprise and Culture Committee called for national guidelines and why this week Highland Council has expressed sheer frustration about the lack of such guidelines.

Alex Johnstone: I hope that I am not frustrating the pre-written press release that will already have gone out to *The Press and Journal*, but the member will recall that two weeks ago today I put a question to the minister about national guidelines and he gave me a detailed answer on the subject. Richard Lochhead has missed the boat.

Richard Lochhead: The Conservatives have moved from a position of calling for national guidelines to a motion that says that they are opposed to wind farms and support nuclear power. They are hardening their position all the time to exploit the genuine concerns that are expressed by many communities around Scotland.

It is a pity that Alex Johnstone did not attend the meeting a couple of evenings ago of the cross-party renewable energy group, as he would have heard from some of the communities that have established community-owned wind farms about the tremendous benefits that they have gained. At that meeting, we heard from the Fintry renewable energy enterprise group, which has wind turbines that are owned and run by the people of Fintry. People there will have cheap energy and will be able to tackle fuel poverty in their community and to secure their income streams. They are getting the benefits that can arise from collective ownership when the wind turbines are owned by the local community. The community now wants to become carbon neutral. If Mr Johnstone lived in that community, he would be out with his sandwich board to protest against the establishment of local wind turbines.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I presume that Mr Lochhead, having attended the cross-party renewable energy group meeting, is not seriously suggesting that the whole energy strategy for the country should be based on community energy groups. The Fintry energy group has three wind turbines.

Richard Lochhead: I am trying to explain to the Conservatives why they should not oppose wind energy. It is blatantly obvious from the motion that that is their position.

The cross-party group heard from the Castlemilk and Carmunnock community urban wind farm

initiative. That fascinating initiative intends to exploit the tourism potential of the wind turbines in the community, to establish a visitors centre and to get an income stream for the community. We also heard from Gigha Renewable Energy Ltd, which hopes to make £75,000 profit every year from the wind turbines. That profit will go back into the local community. The community also hopes to supply two thirds of its own electricity needs.

Wind energy must be part of an energy mix. As other members have said, we must meet our international obligations. Currently, only four European Union countries have a worse per capita record than Scotland does on greenhouse gas emissions. That is an appalling record, so we must take some hard decisions. Wind energy may currently be the only commercially viable renewables sector, but we must ensure that others come on stream. There must be more Government support for marine renewables. Biomass and hydrogen must also be developed. Other countries are racing ahead of Scotland on hydrogen. BP has this week established its second hydrogen fuelling station in Singapore. The private sector gets no encouragement from the Scottish Executive to carry out similar initiatives in Scotland. That is very unfortunate, because it means that we are falling further and further behind.

I will now turn to the red and yellow corner. Once again, we are getting mixed messages about nuclear power and future support for nuclear technology from Labour and the Liberal Democrats. Allan Wilson, the minister responsible for promoting renewable energy in Scotland, has gone public with his support for nuclear energy, despite the fact that his amendment gives the impression that the Executive is sceptical about the issue. I do not see how the renewables sector in Scotland can have trust in the minister. Allan Wilson is not an average back-bench Labour MSP; he is the minister with responsibility for promoting renewables in Scotland. He should be throwing all his weight, his effort and his enthusiasm into promoting that sector, not the nuclear industry. The widespread consensus in Scotland is that nuclear power is costly and dangerous. International opinion is also moving against nuclear power: Belgium, Sweden and Germany are all phasing it out. Even the Kyoto protocol does not classify nuclear energy under its clean development mechanism.

Allan Wilson: Will the member expand, for the benefit of the Parliament, on his thesis that nuclear power is dangerous?

Richard Lochhead: I am sure that the minister is well aware of the widespread concerns about how we dispose of nuclear waste in Scotland. We do not want toxic dumps to be created in Scotland.

The Scottish National Party and many others in Scotland will oppose vigorously any proposal to establish nuclear power stations on Scottish soil.

It is not only the minister who is putting obstacles in the way of the renewable energy sector's efforts to become Scotland's main supplier of energy. There is also a ridiculous proposal from the UK Government to impose on Scottish renewables projects a charging scheme for access to the national grid. That will discriminate against Scottish projects and will pull the rug from under their feet. A proposal was on the table to charge Scottish projects £24 per kilowatt to access the grid, whereas renewables or other projects south of the border would be subsidised to the tune of £6 a kilowatt. The minister must give a commitment today that he will fight the proposals tooth and nail so that we can realise our renewables potential in Scotland.

It is bizarre that the Executive and the Tories are talking about supporting nuclear power when Scotland has the biggest potential among all European countries to become the leader in renewable energy. It has 25 per cent of the wind power potential.

Phil Gallie: Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but the member is in his last minute.

Richard Lochhead: I apologise for not being able to give way.

We must ensure that this time we do not miss the jackpot. We have already had an energy jackpot from oil and gas, but London has taken all the revenues—it even keeps some of the leading civil service jobs that deal with the North sea industry, rather than basing them where they belong, in Aberdeen. This time around, we must ensure that the Government and all of Scotland are on board so that we can claim the energy jackpot, which this time will be the renewable energy jackpot.

The oil and gas sector is not a lost cause in terms of revenues. This Parliament should have control over energy policy, just as Parliaments in other small countries have. I contrast Scotland with Norway. Norway has benefited from its oil resources and it has become a rich society as well as a rich country. The United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association will today say that it projects that it will give £6 billion to the London coffers in 2005. Let us try to get that money up here to Scotland. Let us transfer responsibility for energy policy and the revenues to this Parliament so that we can change Scotland for the better and meet our international obligations on cutting carbon emissions. I ask members to support the SNP amendment.

I move amendment S2M-2320.2, to leave out from “is concerned” to end and insert:

“believes that Scotland is well placed to be Europe’s energy powerhouse given our massive energy resources; believes that onshore and offshore wind energy is an important element in a balanced renewables policy but that the development of other renewables must be accelerated; shares the frustration expressed by many others, including Highland Council and the Parliament’s Enterprise and Culture Committee, who are calling for a national strategic framework for wind farm developments; calls on the Scottish Executive to ensure that the UK Government does not introduce any charging scheme for access to the grid that discriminates against renewables in Scotland; believes that no new nuclear power stations should be built in Scotland, and calls for the Scottish Parliament to have control over energy policy and oil and gas revenues.”

10:05

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): I declare an interest as the family firm of which I am a sleeping partner has submitted an application for one wind turbine on land that I own.

Perhaps the most important point that came out of last week’s debate on climate change was the overwhelming consensus among all parties that climate change poses a threat to Scotland and to the world and that non-fossil-fuel energy sources must be put in place to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Greens have been campaigning tirelessly on climate change for many years. It is encouraging to know that we are no longer alone.

It is obvious that our traditional dependence on coal and oil cannot go on, so what are the alternatives? We in the Green party are clear about the energy future that we would like to see develop over the coming years. The bottom line must be sustainability. Mark Ruskell spoke about that in the debate last week and Alex Johnstone said that:

“it would be wrong to ... pass heavy environmental costs on to”—[*Official Report*, 20 January 2005; c 13679.]

future generations. In the light of those comments it is disappointing, but not surprising, that the Tories would use climate change as a cynical excuse for new nuclear power. The Tories call for an open-minded debate on the issue, but we have been debating and assessing nuclear power for several decades.

Phil Gallie: Does the member not take some pride in the fact that the low levels of emissions from electricity generation in Scotland in the 1990s put us at the top of the European clean-air league? Was that not based on our high proportion of nuclear energy?

Shiona Baird: Phil Gallie is missing all the points that I will now raise.

Our opposition to nuclear energy is based on science and economics. An open mind would find

out that no one has yet worked out what to do with nuclear waste—managing it over the next 40 years will set the taxpayer back some £83 billion. An open mind would see the problems of nuclear proliferation, the terrorist threat and the inconvenient fact that uranium is fast running out. An open mind would see that nuclear power is not the carbon-free silver bullet that some misguided individuals would have us believe. Over the full nuclear life cycle, it is almost as carbon intensive as some fossil fuels. Only a closed mind would suggest that we can seriously address climate change by wasting public cash on expensive, dirty and unsustainable nuclear power.

I am happy to say that the genuine alternatives on our doorstep and off our coastline mean that we can invest in real solutions with an open mind. The only truly sustainable energy sources are renewable. They include onshore and offshore wind, marine, solar and biomass. Only with a stable mix of those technologies will we be able to meet the definition of sustainability. The renewables sector is currently dominated by onshore wind as that is the only technology that is mature enough to make a significant contribution to our energy supply. The Greens are keen for other technologies such as offshore wind, wave and tidal energy to play their part and fulfil their massive potential.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Does Shiona Baird agree that there is capacity to make the generation of energy from fossil fuels more sustainable by using part-renewable or non-carbon-intensive mixes? Should that not be encouraged by the Executive through research and development money?

Shiona Baird: I agree that we need to look at those options in the interim, but our long-term vision must be to generate energy from fully renewable sources.

The wave energy industry estimates that £500 million would kick-start the sector and make Scottish companies competitive worldwide. Remember that nuclear costs are all in the billions and that £500 million is the lowest estimate for the M74 extension of only 5 miles. Surely members agree that investment in marine renewables would make far more economic sense in the long term. After all, there are alternatives to road building.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): Can we put the member’s comments in context? Where will the base-load requirement come from in her plans? What about the consistent control of the base-load?

The Presiding Officer: Ms Baird has three minutes left.

Shiona Baird: I will cite research by Robert Gross of Imperial College London, which used

Department of Trade and Industry figures. Members should listen carefully, because the figures are astounding. They indicate a practicable potential for renewables to supply nearly 230 TWh per year by 2025—more than two thirds of our total current energy demand. Even more astounding, renewables have the technical potential to generate 4,483 TWh per year. The figures do not even take into account the reduction in demand that energy efficiency savings would bring. The figures are amazing.

Christine May: I am grateful to the member for giving way, because I know that her time is short.

I agree that the production capacity of renewables is as the member suggests. However, if intermittency problems cannot be overcome, what use is that potential?

Shiona Baird: That matter has been addressed; intermittency is not an issue.

Alex Johnstone: Come on!

Shiona Baird: Members should ask the people who are involved in generation. Tidal, hydro and biomass energy can all be brought in.

I must move on.

The Presiding Officer: You have a maximum of two minutes, I am afraid.

Shiona Baird: We are throwing money down the drain and pouring carbon into the atmosphere because we are not addressing energy efficiency. Surely saving energy makes sound economic sense. It is disappointing that the Tory motion does not mention energy efficiency. It is also depressing that the Tories misrepresent the Enterprise and Culture Committee's inquiry into renewable energy in Scotland, which concluded that more onshore wind is needed and that other renewable resources need to be fast-tracked.

I repeat the call for more energy policy powers to be devolved. Although we can take responsibility for some aspects of energy, including energy efficiency and the siting of renewables facilities, overall control remains at Whitehall. We can debate nuclear power until the cows come home, but the decision is not up to us. Our nascent wave energy industry depends on whether the DTI cares enough about Scotland. We should look after our own energy future. I urge members to support the amendment in my name.

I move amendment S2M-2320.3, to leave out from "is concerned" to end and insert:

"welcomes the political consensus that climate change is a reality and that alternatives to fossil fuel energy sources must be developed in order to curtail emissions of greenhouse gases; strongly believes that Scotland's energy future requires a wide range of environmentally-sustainable energy sources; agrees with the Enterprise and Culture Committee's Inquiry into renewable energy that Scotland

needs to develop urgently all forms of renewable energy including marine, on and off-shore wind and solar sources; believes that a much greater focus on energy efficiency across all sectors must be central to any energy policy; notes the International Atomic Energy Agency's view that nuclear power will be unable to halt climate change and considers that the case for nuclear power in Scotland's long-term energy future remains completely unconvincing, and calls for more powers over energy policy to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament."

10:13

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP): My initial reaction to the Tory motion was incredulity—that is the only word that I can use to describe it. How on earth can the Tories champion nuclear power and nuclear power stations? Their party spent the 1980s and 1990s saying that it was the party of efficiency. The Tories said that companies that could not compete in the marketplace should go to the wall and that companies must become efficient and productive. The Tories said that private companies should receive no state subsidies and privatised most of the utilities. However, here they are in 2004, arguing—

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): It is 2005.

Frances Curran: Thank you. I had a quiet new year.

The Tories, who would privatise their grannies given half a chance, had a really difficult time considering how to privatise—[*Interruption.*] British Energy is a private company, but British Nuclear Fuels is not and the two companies are tied together.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Is the member's granny state owned or is she private? My granny was always private.

Frances Curran: Luckily, my granny was born during a Labour Government, so she was not privatised. Thank God for history.

If British Energy had really been a private company, it would have gone bust in September 2002. A main reason for that was the cost of dealing with nuclear waste, which was spread across three organisations, including the private company British Energy. The company had to write to the minister to say, "We are in deep trouble. We do not have enough money to cover our liabilities. Unless you help us with our cash-flow problem, we will go bankrupt." That happened six months after the company had given £48 million to its shareholders. I do not remember that the Tories complained about that; it was all right to subsidise a private company such as British Energy, which was generous to its shareholders but to nobody else. Tory ideology went out of the window on the issue of nuclear power. Because the consequences of the bankruptcy of a company

that was running nuclear power stations would have been horrendous—as we know from examples throughout eastern Europe—the Government was forced to step in and give British Energy money. The company received an initial sum of £600 million, but that was not enough to bail it out, so it received a further £200 million later in the year.

What has become of Tory ideology on efficiency and productivity? If a company cannot sell its electricity at prices that enable it to cover its liability costs, it is hardly running an efficient system of energy generation.

Alex Johnstone: I have no particular answer to the member's question about ideologies, because we are a pragmatic party that manages situations as they are. However, I am concerned that in her speech so far she seems to be more concerned about money than she is about Scottish workers' jobs in the long term. We want to ensure stability of supply, to keep our economy growing and to keep our workers in jobs—that is our primary motivation.

Frances Curran: I hope that that argument will be applied across the board when the Parliament discusses other industries that are facing difficulties. The Tories agreed with the UK Electricity (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2003, which enables the Government to underwrite British Energy's nuclear fuel liabilities by between £150 million and £200 million per year—so Scottish workers' jobs are being subsidised. The 2003 act is an act after my own heart, because it changed the law to allow the Government to subsidise any part of the industry as it sees fit, including British Energy, which is a private company.

Phil Gallie: Will the member give way?

Frances Curran: I must finish. I had only six minutes, if I was lucky.

The 2003 act also gives ministers powers to renationalise British Energy if they think that that is appropriate. That approach should be applied across the utilities sector and I congratulate the Labour Government on passing legislation that confers such powers on ministers.

If the UK Government is prepared to subsidise nuclear power and to underwrite and renationalise the nuclear industry, what is the Executive's problem with renewables? Today's *Metro*—

Phil Gallie: Renewables are being subsidised.

Frances Curran: By how much? I cannot give way to the member, because I do not have enough time. Oil, gas and nuclear energy are not the future of energy generation, as speeches that have been made in the past day have indicated. Renewables are the future; they are the only

alternative. The Executive set a target of 40 per cent of electricity generation from renewables, but its approach is like that of a bride and groom who invite divorce solicitors to the wedding reception: they have taken the vow, but they are preparing for a big fight over the future maintenance payments. Some £6 billion has been invested in nuclear power—although that is a Westminster issue, the Executive has negotiating powers in relation to the matter—but the Executive is investing only £150 million of public money over 10 years in research into renewables, which is a pittance.

Who will pay for the upgrading of the national grid so that renewables can feed in and the 40 per cent target can be met? Where will the investment come from? We are told that the electricity companies will pay, but we will see whether that comes about. The only answer is to have Government control and a national energy framework. That is the only way in which we will reach the target of 40 per cent of energy from renewable sources. If public investment was on a par with investment in the nuclear industry—which must be decommissioned—we would move into the future in the lead, not on the coat tails of Denmark and other European countries. That is the vision that the Parliament needs, instead of the pitiful vision that we are given every time we debate the issue.

I move amendment S2M-2320.1, to leave out from “and to higher” to end and insert:

“; calls on the Executive to state categorically that no new nuclear power stations will be built in Scotland, bring forward the closure dates of all existing nuclear power stations in Scotland, initiate an immediate programme of investment in all aspects of renewable energy and create a publicly-owned, publicly-resourced renewable energy industry.”

10:20

Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): There is no doubt that the Conservative motion has more to do with political mischief than it has to do with addressing Scotland's energy needs, which is a pity. Last week, during the debate on climate change, Alex Johnstone proposed a nuclear power policy. This morning, he suggested in response to an intervention that the Conservatives have ideas about the places where new nuclear power stations would be developed, although none of them was close to his home in Stonehaven—not in Alex's back yard.

I am surprised that, as a former farmer, Alex Johnstone has forgotten the first rule of farming, which is that a farmer should always try to leave the land in a better condition than it was in when they inherited it. However, that cannot be done with nuclear power. There is no doubt that nuclear

energy provides a surge of power during a station's lifetime but leaves behind a dreadful glowing legacy for our children and grandchildren. However, Alex Johnstone forgot to mention nuclear waste.

The DTI has estimated that it will cost the country up to £47 billion to get rid of the radioactive waste that has been created. Alex Johnstone and his colleagues would like to add to that nuclear waste heap. For countries that are enthusiastic about nuclear power, the popular method of dealing with nuclear waste is to dump it on other countries, invariably poorer ones. It might have been better for the Conservatives to wait until next year, when the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management will report with its recommendations, rather than jump into the bubbling cauldron of nuclear waste.

The motion comes in a week when it has emerged that the German Government has decided to phase out nuclear energy as a source of power. If a major nation such as Germany can make that decision, surely smaller ones such as Scotland do not have to go down the nuclear road.

Phil Gallie: This is also a week in which China has announced that it will build nuclear reactors at an unprecedented rate. China has the most efficient and fastest-growing economy in the world. Why is China going for nuclear generation?

Mr Arbuckle: I am not sure whether Mr Gallie recommends that we follow the Chinese route but, personally, I do not. If Mr Gallie had better knowledge of that nation's economy, he would not recommend that either.

The Tory attack on the Executive's renewable energy policy is sad, because Scotland has tremendous natural features that allow us to benefit from wind, wave and tidal power. Scotland could also do with more sun. The solar panels on my house in north Fife paid their way within four years. In fact, it was not until the depths of the first winter after they had been installed that I discovered that my local plumber had failed to provide back-up to my solar panels—all the heating in my house had been coming from that renewable source. An estimated 50,000 houses in the UK already use solar power to provide heat. It is an example of power without waste and without harmful residues—that is renewable energy.

Local communities have criticised wind turbines, which is why, when projects are realised, it is important that the people who live in the area not only are involved but can benefit. As Richard Lochhead suggested, communities as far apart as Gigha and Castlemilk are already in on the idea and are set to benefit financially as a result. We have an opportunity to have more wind turbines for houses and rural businesses in remote areas.

Mr Ruskell: Does the member acknowledge that there are hot spots in Scotland, for example in Perth and Kinross, where multiple applications for renewable energy developments have been made? Does he agree that we need to reform the planning system to enable those applications to be assessed against one another rather than simply forming a long queue in the planning system?

Mr Arbuckle: As a local councillor, I agree that there are problems with the planning system in dealing with such applications. My answer is to get local communities involved in projects so that they benefit from them.

We do not have to destroy our natural landscape to develop renewable power sources. If the work is carried out sympathetically, it can form an attractive part of our scenery. A Danish friend told me that the many turbines in his country have had no adverse effect on the tourism industry there. It is worth pointing out that the Danish wind energy industry employs about 16,000 people.

We need courage to make progress with renewable energy projects in Scotland. More than 50 years ago, Tom Johnston, the Secretary of State for Scotland, had to fight hard to get hydro schemes under way but, nowadays, water dams contribute to the country's power needs and form part of the landscape. If we have courage, other countries will look to Scotland as an example of how a small country can harness natural resources to help fill its energy bill, not fill its bunkers with contaminated waste.

10:26

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Mr Arbuckle on his maiden speech; I was pleased with the content, because it placed the Liberal Democrats firmly in the camp of the Scottish Socialist Party, the Greens and the nationalists, as the parties that are not willing to seriously address the country's future energy needs.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

David Mundell: Not in the first minute, but I will come back to the member.

I have no difficulty with renewable energy, many forms of which have been discussed, but I have a serious difficulty with large-scale wind farms being concentrated in small areas, such as the M74 corridor. The astounding point about Shiona Baird's argument is that the amount of quarrying and environmental upheaval that would be required to construct the proposed wind farms in that corridor would be greater than that caused by constructing the M74. People are incredulous because the Greens are standing by and allowing

the mass industrialisation of our countryside on an unprecedented level. Mr Arbuckle talked about farms remaining the same, but they will not, because hundreds of tonnes of concrete and ballast go into the ground when wind turbines are built and remain when the turbines are taken down.

Mr Ruskell *rose*—

Mike Rumbles: Will the member say exactly where in the south of Scotland he advocates the dumping of our nuclear waste?

David Mundell: Nuclear dumping, as the member calls it, is decided at a United Kingdom level and I have no difficulty with a United Kingdom energy policy. I want a nuclear power station in my area on the large licensed site there. Rather than displaying opportunism, Mike Rumbles should come to my area and ask whether people want large-scale wind farms or real jobs through the nuclear industry. People would answer clearly that they want the nuclear industry.

Mr Ruskell *rose*—

David Mundell: I commend the efforts of workers in the nuclear industry.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Will the member give way?

David Mundell: I will come back to the member.

I wonder whether Mr Ruskell is familiar with the nuklear21 publication that states:

“Who wants a new nuclear power station on their doorstep? We do! say Chapelcross ... workers and communities”.

Those people know that, over the years, the nuclear industry has delivered millions of pounds as well as sustainable jobs to the area. Those people want the nuclear industry. That does not mean that I do not support the positive proposal for a biomass plant on the same site, provided that it does not infringe on the licensed site and prevent further nuclear development.

Mr Ruskell *rose*—

Alex Neil *rose*—

David Mundell: I should speak to the real Green member, not Alex Neil; let us hear what Mr Ruskell has to say.

Mr Ruskell: This is a clear example of the Tories trying to appear responsible, through the words of Alex Johnstone, then, when they get back into their regions and their constituencies, whipping up hysteria and talking about thousands of turbines marching across the countryside. I ask the Tories whether they could just as well be talking about asylum seekers.

David Mundell: Mr Ruskell is exactly the sort of person that Bishop Montefiore was referring to in the Catholic weekly, *The Tablet*—with which I am sure many members are familiar—when he wrote:

“The real reason why the Government has not taken up the nuclear option is because it lacks public acceptance, due to scare stories in the media and the stonewalling opposition of powerful environmental organisations. Most, if not all, of the objections do not stand up to objective assessment.”

The bishop believes that so strongly that he has left Friends of the Earth, which has tried to gag him when he has said it. He is not the only one. Professor David King and James Lovelock are changing their minds because they see the reality, which is that if we are to have sustainable energy, we will have to have new nuclear power stations. Those people who have opposed new nuclear power stations or who have come out with the kind of opportunist nonsense that we hear from the Scottish National Party will regret it because their credibility will be undermined. When the public realise that the energy debate is not about aesthetics but about whether people have electricity in their homes, they will understand the need for nuclear development.

Shiona Baird *rose*—

Richard Lochhead *rose*—

David Mundell: The point in the Executive amendment that I do not accept is where it indicates that we have to wait for the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management to report. Because of the length of time that is required for new nuclear development, we should be dual-tracking it. We should not be stonewalling.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): You are in your last minute. You must finish now, Mr Mundell.

David Mundell: I have no difficulty in standing up for the nuclear industry. I have done so even when it was not popular. I am pleased to say that the tide is turning. People have seen through the Liberals, the Greens, the Scottish socialists and the SNP, and they understand that new nuclear development is the only way forward for a sustainable energy policy for the United Kingdom.

10:32

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): I join David Mundell in congratulating Andrew Arbuckle on his first speech in the Parliament. I will simply say that Andrew Arbuckle has a lot to learn about the nuclear industry. He can see Torness power station across the Firth of Forth from Fife, and I invite him to come and see what the industry really does.

We are having a bit of a parliamentary groundhog day here, but some things are worth repeating, and this could hardly be more important. Briefly, there is now compelling evidence of climate change arising from environmental pollution in general and carbon dioxide emissions in particular, and there is an overwhelming case for implementing the Kyoto treaty to reduce the risk of catastrophic change to the climate of the planet. There is universal acceptance of those points. We must reduce CO₂, which means reducing our dependence on oil, gas and coal, and increasing energy efficiency by all possible means. Given the fact that half of Scotland's electricity generation plant will reach the end of its designed life in the coming decade, and given the long lead time to plan, construct and commission new generating stations, we should be considering all the options now if we want to avoid a real risk of shortages, blackouts and power cuts in just a few years' time. That is a serious point.

Mike Rumbles: John Home Robertson is obviously referring to nuclear power. I ask him the question that I asked David Mundell, who refused to answer. Where in Scotland would the nuclear waste be dumped?

Mr Home Robertson: That is not as clever a question as Mike Rumbles thinks it is. There is a United Kingdom nuclear industry. There is an overwhelming case for a national repository—a store not a dump—for nuclear waste. That is under consideration. It may be in England or it may be in Scotland, but it will be located wherever it is scientifically most appropriate. It is not whether it will be done; it is when it will be done. It has got to be done, because we have inherited waste that must be managed.

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Home Robertson: I am sorry. I must move on.

That is where we are. My contention is that we need a sensible and informed debate immediately about all the serious options, including the Executive's objectives on energy efficiency measures and on renewables accounting for 40 per cent of our energy. That is an ambitious target. I do not know whether it can be achieved, but it is worth striving towards. Our base-load electricity requirements—the remaining 60 per cent—could be generated using nuclear power and perhaps clean coal technology.

With great respect to Alex Johnstone, it is not sensible to start the debate by seeking to rubbish one of the options on entirely opportunistic grounds. I do not like to be churlish when the Tory motion makes flattering references to me and

Allan Wilson, but I am afraid that the Tories are taking liberties, and we cannot let them get away with it. I am happy to welcome Tory support for the powerful environmental case for nuclear power to replace polluting fossil fuel power stations, but the motion is something else altogether. Alex Johnstone did not say very much about the motion when he spoke, but it seems to be calling for nuclear power as an alternative to renewables. That is wrong. We need both nuclear and renewables, and I am happy to support the Executive amendment, in the certain knowledge that the United Kingdom will construct a safe, secure repository for nuclear waste, just as the Swedes have done and just as the Finns are doing. It is not a question of whether it is done but when it is done. When it is done, it can be made that bit bigger to accommodate the much-reduced volume of waste that will come from modern, more efficient nuclear power stations.

Shiona Baird: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Home Robertson: How are we doing for time? I am sorry. I cannot.

I apologise if I caused some offence last week when I suggested that it was silly for some environmentalists to perpetuate the anti-nuclear taboo regardless of the fact that nuclear power stations are cutting Britain's emissions of carbon dioxide by 50 million tonnes a year. Perhaps I can balance the case today by saying that it is just as silly for Tories to undermine the case for wind power, which could save a significant quantity of CO₂ emissions too. Four hundred years ago, Cervantes wrote about the foolishness of Don Quixote tilting at windmills. No doubt there were people in the Netherlands who objected to unsightly windmills draining their polders. We should never underestimate the ability of the Scottish Tories to repeat the mistakes of the past.

There are times in the life of nations when responsible Governments have to take difficult decisions for the greater good of society. I am well aware that there are legitimate objections to the siting and the scale of wind turbines in the Scottish landscape. The Crystal Rig wind farm straddles the boundary of my constituency in the Lammermuir hills, and I know that there are many people who do not like it. Reasonable concerns and objections must be considered fairly. Local and national planners should select sites carefully. However, at the end of the day, if we are going to get anywhere near to achieving the objective of 40 per cent of our power from renewables, we will need many renewable energy developments, including wind farms.

I have referred to the broad consensus on the need to address global warming, but on the fringes of that consensus there are signs of some

hypocrisy, and I suggest that Tory MSPs—and perhaps some others—are being at best disingenuous when they claim to be in favour of renewables, but back objections to onshore and offshore wind farms. Likewise, how can nationalists be taken seriously on the subject of CO₂ emissions when they are pledging to oppose the renewal of nuclear power plant in Scotland? Apart from sacrificing hundreds of jobs in Scotland, that could quite inevitably lead to more dependence on fossil fuels and more CO₂ emissions. That is worse than opportunism: it is fiddling while the planet burns.

I regret the fact that the motion has highlighted party-political differences. I hope that the proposed cross-party group on the civil nuclear industry will promote informed and thoughtful discussion on a subject that is of unparalleled importance. However, if the nationalists want to campaign against nuclear power, come and do it at Torness. Make my day.

10:39

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I intend to make John Home Robertson's day, because his day has come. Many people have campaigned for Scotland to be an energy powerhouse because it has enormous potential to produce renewable energy. Those people have also taken the view that we should look to a balanced energy policy, with a supply portfolio that plays to our strengths. We have inherited UK decisions to have a nuclear industry—I will come to that in a minute—but to lead us in the direction that John Home Robertson is suggesting is not only nonsense, but sells short those who have been forced to work in those large industries and who, if we had the vision, could be gainfully employed in many other industries around the country.

The motion suggests that people have been turned against wind farms by the Government's policy and that renewables technology has been given a bad name. If members examine how the Government has gone about its renewables policy they can see that it has not taken renewables to the heart of that policy, because it does not have the powers to create an energy policy. The Government has gone for the easy option of inviting large firms in to achieve a target that has been set from the top. In the Highlands, the real objection is that most wind farms are not owned by local people. We are lucky that in Tiree, Gigha and other places, small communities are taking the lead, but it is entirely possible that community industry could extend to large schemes in Lewis and other places, which would have local support if they were in local hands.

The potential for onshore wind could be matched by that for renewables offshore.

However, the Government has set a target for renewables that does not place them at the centre of energy generation. The target is to produce 40 per cent of our electricity from renewable sources by 2020, but the majority of our electricity—the other 60 per cent—also has to be produced. If the Government were serious, it would have said that it wanted the majority of our power to be produced by renewables. That could be the centrepiece of its policy, but it has not made it so.

Christine May: Will the member give way?

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: I will take an intervention from the minister.

Ross Finnie: I am always interested in ambitious targets. As Rob Gibson will be well aware, the target of 40 per cent was set after extensive consultation with all sectors—not just energy producers, but communities, energy groups and environmentalists. He has plucked another figure out of the air. We know the basis of our figure. What is the basis of his?

Rob Gibson: The basis of our target is that if we had been in power as long as the minister has, we would have been ahead of the game. Labour has been in power since 1997 and the coalition since 1999—

Karen Gillon: Will the member take an intervention?

Rob Gibson: No, thank you.

The Government has not put renewables at the heart of the industry.

The countries that are ahead in wind power—Denmark, Germany, Spain, the USA, Japan and India—are all producing the towers and equipment that are putting them to the fore. Where is Scotland, with one of the best wind energy resources? It is nowhere in that picture. We have to import the equipment.

Christine May: Will the member give way?

Phil Gallie: Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: No, thank you. I do not have the time.

People in Caithness have asked me to say to members that their area has been asked to take an extra large part of the burden of producing renewable energy. They say that the Highlands is already producing more renewable energy by percentage than the Government's target for the whole country. Caithness is providing its share, but is Perthshire? Is Renfrewshire? Is East Lothian? Are other parts of the country?

Of course, the rational point is that wind is more prevalent in some places than others, but the Highlands would accept more onshore and offshore wind power generation if they had their hands on the profits. However, the Government has set up a system that milks a resource and allows the money to be filched and taken elsewhere. It would be good for Scotland if wind energy were taxed and the profits used for the development of offshore marine energy, because far too many wind farms are owned outside our country and the profits taken away, just like we lost the profits from Scotland's oil.

Alex Johnstone: Does the member accept that the system of renewables obligation certificates, which milks money out of the consumer and passes it round the system, is the very subsidy system that he describes?

Rob Gibson: We are talking about the Labour-Liberal Democrat approach, which is wrong.

The problem with the nuclear argument is that it has always been tied to the production of nuclear weapons. Of course, Labour and the Tories between them both wish to do that. The product of Chapelcross is tritium, which is part of that process. That is what has employed people there. They could contribute to the peaceful use of natural resources that are not polluting.

Our country has an opportunity to exploit its resources to a far greater degree, but we do not have a Government that puts that at the heart of the process. When the voters see the means of production put into the hands of local people, they will gladly take up the challenge of producing enough energy here. In the meantime, we have not been convinced by the Tory motion, which favours nuclear energy, and we are not convinced that the Government takes renewable energy seriously. Support the SNP amendment.

10:45

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): First and foremost, I declare that I am no great supporter of nuclear power. Indeed, in my student days I actively campaigned against the building of Torness power station. I agree whole-heartedly that we cannot build any further nuclear power plants until the serious issue of waste is resolved. However, it is not only the issue of civil nuclear waste that remains unresolved. I remind the chamber—as I have done previously—that the final disposal of the seven decommissioned nuclear submarines that are anchored at Rosyth naval dockyard in my constituency remains unresolved.

We must be clear that the immediate closure of all nuclear power stations in Scotland—which Frances Curran seems to suggest in her

amendment and which other speakers have hinted at—implies the rationing of electricity. The current capacity of alternative generation in Scotland could not possibly meet our energy needs. I remind the chamber that, a year ago last summer, Torness power station was down for 17 weeks. If it had not been for Longannet power station in my constituency running three turbines constantly, Scotland's energy needs would not have been met. If Torness had been closed for that period during winter, we would have faced the prospect of power cuts. People should acknowledge the important contribution that nuclear power makes to our energy needs.

Shiona Baird: Is Scott Barrie suggesting that we would close down nuclear power tomorrow? Surely the most sensible option is to work towards the decommissioning of the nuclear power stations, while having a target for renewable generation to supply our needs. It is not just about a cut-off point. We must take a sensible approach.

Scott Barrie: Given that we are supposed to be having a debate, it is useful to examine the motion and amendments that we are discussing. I thought that Frances Curran was calling for the immediate closure of our nuclear capacity and I wanted to point out what that would mean for electricity generation in contemporary Scotland.

I fully accept that coal-fired generation is one of the principal causes of the greenhouse effect. We must clearly cut down the CO₂ emissions caused by the burning of coal and gas, but I do not believe that fossil fuels have no contribution to make to future energy generation. The debate on our energy needs must acknowledge the importance of supply continuity. The dash for gas has meant that we are a net importer of natural gas. Increasingly, the supplies of that fuel come from some of the most politically unstable parts of the world. Even if we ignore the environmental consequences of gas-fuelled generation, we are not guaranteed an uninterrupted supply of gas.

Mr Ruskell: Will the member take an intervention?

Scott Barrie: No, I have already taken one.

Shiona Baird totally ignored Christine May's salient point that although she had illustrated the potential of the renewables sector, she failed to inform us how she could guarantee uninterrupted supply. Nothing will better focus minds on future energy than if we end up reaching for the switch, only to find that our electricity is not there.

Longannet power station today and Kincardine power station before it have made valuable contributions to Scotland's energy needs. However, Longannet continues to be a major polluter and contributor to Scotland's toxic emissions. That does not mean that coal is a fuel

of only the 19th and 20th centuries. I appreciate that we will never return to coal as our only or principal or major source of generation, but it has a future. We need seriously to consider clean coal technology, which John Home Robertson mentioned. Scotland has some of the lowest-sulphur-content coal. Our indigenous coal industry, together with new technology in coal-burning stations, can contribute to our energy generation. Yes, we will still have CO₂ and NO₂ emissions, but the level of those pollutants could be reduced dramatically.

While we are on the subject of Longannet, I raise the issue of the burning of sewage sludge. Members might be aware that 40 per cent of the sewage processed at Daldowie in Glasgow is reduced to pellet form and transported to Longannet, where it is burned. Given the changes in European directives, there is doubt as to whether that will continue and the sewage might have to be either spread on land or disposed of in landfill. If we do not see the whole picture, there will be serious unforeseen consequences. The issues that members have raised about what we do with spent nuclear fuel are the issues that we would face if we had to do something about the sewage from Daldowie.

It is important that we think about energy in its widest context, rather than cherry picking issues according to the point that we are trying to make. For too long, debates about the energy needs of the UK and Scotland have been completely distorted by people saying what they are against, rather than saying what they are for. Even those who support the renewables sector are often those who campaign hardest against proposed developments in their own back yard. I am glad that we are at least beginning to have the debate and I would welcome an open debate so that we can seriously consider the alternatives for how Scotland could meet its future energy needs. If we do not consider all the alternatives we are in danger of stumbling into something, with unforeseen consequences.

10:52

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): The main reason why energy policy is high on the political agenda is climate change. It is generally accepted that climate change is happening because of the effects of human activity on the planet's natural carbon cycle. To slow down, halt or reverse those effects, we must curtail the activities that release the so-called greenhouse gases into the environment. We are concentrating chiefly on carbon.

Although nuclear power stations operate without emitting carbon, they create large volumes of dangerous radioactive waste—a problem to which

no safe and satisfactory solution has been found. Climate change will not give the nuclear industry a way back unless and until such a solution has been found.

The need to ensure security of supply has been seized on as an argument for commissioning new nuclear power stations, but I argue that base-load can be met from hydro, clean coal or gas technology with carbon sequestration, and eventually from predictable renewable sources such as tide or wind and technology such as hydrogen cells that can store electricity and even out the intermittency of other renewable sources.

The converse of supply is of course demand. Energy efficiency is usually mentioned in any debate on energy, but often only briefly. That belies the fundamental importance of eliminating the huge squandering of resources through energy waste with the concomitant release of greenhouse gases for no benefit.

Electricity is relatively cheap and business, industry and people with a reasonable income use it unthinkingly. We use it so unthinkingly that if we eliminated waste we would be halfway to meeting our greenhouse gas emission targets. I particularly welcome the Executive's commitment to creating an energy efficiency strategy for Scotland, to build on and formalise what is already happening. There is a double incentive to save energy. Although electricity is relatively cheap, we can save a lot of money by using less. The Scottish Executive investment fund of about £20 million for public sector energy efficiency is expected to produce savings of more than £70 million to the public purse over five years and £30 million a year thereafter. In the domestic sector, homeowners could save 30 per cent of their electricity bills and 70 per cent of their water heating bills by using solar cells. Domestic wind turbines could produce a 15 per cent reduction in electricity bills.

The energy debate tends to focus on electricity generation. I was struck by the observation one of the expert witnesses made at the Environment and Rural Development Committee round-table discussion yesterday: we turn energy into electricity, move it vast distances, losing about 70 per cent of it along the way, and turn the residue back into energy or heat. That is a strong argument for our giving much more priority to local district heating schemes and extending fiscal incentives such as renewables obligation certificates to cover heat as well as power.

Eliminating fuel poverty is a Government priority and is one justification for all the effort that has gone into keeping electricity prices as low as possible. However, I argue that tackling poor housing is a much better way of tackling fuel poverty. Well-built, well-insulated houses are warm, dry homes that cost very little to keep at a

reasonable temperature. Government initiatives are in place to help vulnerable people install insulation and central heating and to give advice to the general public on how to improve the energy efficiency of their houses and install solar heating and other ways of exploiting renewable resources. I would like to see much more spent on continuing and expanding those programmes.

Social surveys have shown a strong acknowledgement that we are squandering the planet's resources, but a weak sense of personal responsibility. The only way to affect permanently the human activity that fuels climate change is to win hearts and minds. Governments do not do anything; they create the fiscal and legal frameworks within which individuals, employers or employees do things.

I urge members to support the Executive amendment, which acknowledges that there is not one way forward but many, and to reject the apparent attraction of nuclear energy as the big single answer, which it is not.

10:56

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): Energy policy is reserved, but the Scottish Executive has responsibility for renewable energy policy and has in effect already created a de facto Scottish energy policy through the introduction of the renewables obligation (Scotland) scheme.

There is a Tory motion before us. I come from a former mining community and I will always remember the energy policy of the Tories, which was to destroy coal as a fuel and give us blackouts and the three-day week, which was devastating to businesses and the economy. That is the legacy of the Tories and I never want to return to such a situation.

Rob Gibson accused the Government of not taking energy policy and climate change seriously. The Government has set out a range of measures that will provide support to the renewables industry of around £1 billion every year by 2010. The Government is firmly focused on reducing CO₂ emissions by 60 per cent by 2050.

Rob Gibson: Will the member take an intervention?

Helen Eadie: In a moment.

We all agree that it is vital constantly to review and develop energy policy. Despite the improvements that have been made over the past five years, today's policy will not meet tomorrow's challenges. We need to address the threat of climate change, despite the fact that UK emissions of carbon dioxide make up only about 2 per cent of the global total. As others have said, a concerted international effort is needed; it is not just about

what we do here in Scotland. Scotland has its place on the global scene and I welcome immensely the real efforts that the Scottish Executive is making to ensure that we punch our weight on the world stage. We must deal with the implications of reduced UK oil, gas and coal production, which will make us a net energy importer rather than an energy exporter.

We need over the next 20 years or so to replace or update much of our energy infrastructure. With those challenges come new opportunities to shift Scotland decisively towards becoming a low-carbon economy; to develop, apply and export leading-edge technology, creating new businesses and jobs; and to lead the way in Europe and internationally in developing environmentally sustainable, reliable and competitive energy markets that will support economic growth in every part of the world.

Energy is fundamental to almost everything we do. We expect it to be available whenever we want it and we expect it to be affordable, safe and environmentally sustainable. Only when something goes wrong do we realise how much modern industrialised countries depend on extremely complicated energy systems. We have an opportunity this year not just to contribute in a big way to the Scottish energy debate, but to impact significantly on one of the countries that is most neglectful in relation to the energy challenges that the world faces.

Scotland acknowledges that energy security is one of the major challenges facing the UK. The G8 summit in Gleneagles will give the Scottish Executive, along with the rest of the UK, the opportunity to affect climate change and global energy policy by bringing the United States of America closer to the rest of the world on climate change. That is likely to be a key aim of the G8 strategy under the UK presidency of the Prime Minister, Tony Blair. We have said, over and over again, that the Americans have a core role to play in the shaping of energy policy. However, what is done by other major nations, such as China and India, is also important. If President Bush hesitates yet again to demonstrate the political will to engage, I hope that our Prime Minister will reflect on how he might use his leadership of the European Union. Scotland has its place in that discussion. For the second half of this year, the presidency of the EU will be held by the UK and there will be a focus on developing a powerful, investment-driven relationship with China on energy, security and climate change, which will benefit Scotland too. The Prime Minister knows the economic clout that the EU has and, if he can persuade President Chirac of France and Chancellor Schroeder of Germany, he should use that clout.

The Chinese Government increasingly understands that it is between a rock and a hard place on climate change. It must maintain its rate of economic growth if it is to avoid social turmoil. To keep that rate of growth, it must expand its electricity supply. To do that securely, it must burn a lot of coal. If it burns a lot of coal, however, the climate will change and the Chinese environment is particularly vulnerable to a changing climate. An unstable climate will quickly lead to social turmoil in China.

Phil Gallie: I agree with what Helen Eadie says about China and coal. However, does she recognise that China has recently announced a massive increase in the development of nuclear power in the next 20 years?

Helen Eadie: I recognise that, but at the same time I question it. I am open-minded on the nuclear debate. However, I can say that, faced with certain trouble today or likely trouble tomorrow, the Chinese Government—like every other Government—will deal with today's problem first and hope that something turns up for tomorrow. That matters for the rest of the world because China is already planning to build more than 500 coal-fired power stations between now and 2030. If they are built with current technology, there is no prospect that we will stabilise carbon dioxide concentrations at a safe level. A strong EU-China partnership on rapidly deploying advanced coal gasification and carbon sequestration technologies, wind power and other forms of renewable energy, and on harmonising high technical standards for vehicles and appliances, would alter the political landscape on climate change substantially.

Anything that China can do, India can do. Such a strong and potentially trade-promoting relationship between Europe and two of the most powerful growth engines of the global economy would certainly catch the attention of the US business community. Only Americans will eventually persuade America to do more on climate and the prospect of lost markets will carry more weight in America than even the best science.

11:03

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I begin by making a couple of points on the work of the European and External Relations Committee, which are relevant to this debate. Scott Barrie talked about Longannet; I inform him that the committee has decided to seek information on the difficulties that are faced by Scottish Power in relation to its eminently sensible approach to burning sewage sludge at Longannet. On Tuesday, the committee will receive information that will help us to identify whether the Scottish

Executive or the Scottish Parliament could do more to assist in seeking derogations in that area.

On Helen Eadie's point about the G8 summit, I can say that the European and External Relations Committee has decided to embark on an inquiry to establish the preparedness of the Scottish Executive for the G8 summit and the UK presidency of the European Union, recognising that 2005 presents the UK Government with a unique opportunity to make major progress on vital areas of policy, particularly development aid and climate change. We also intend to establish whether the Scottish Executive is playing its full part in the preparations. The committee will report on those issues in due course.

It was a pleasure to hear Andrew Arbuckle's first speech and I wish him well in his contribution to our deliberations. He said that the Conservative motion did not mention nuclear waste; indeed, although the Conservative motion mentions quite a lot of things, it omits a number of others. It makes absolutely no mention of the tremendous energy resource that Scotland has had in the past 30 years in the shape of North sea oil. Perhaps the Conservatives are too embarrassed to mention that because that oil made a substantial contribution to propping up their discredited Governments of the 1980s and 1990s and to filling the black hole of their failed economic policies. Regardless of their dreadful record, North sea oil has since 1997 put £38 billion into the Treasury of the Labour Government.

I will pose questions about investment in the methods of generating power in our country. Why do we not have something to show for the tremendous value of revenue that has come from North sea oil? Why have we been unable to take a leaf out of Norway's book? Norway has salted away the revenues from North sea oil into a fund that is now valued at £76 billion and is able to fund revenue expenditure in that country. What if we had a similar amount of money to invest in new technology to replace some of the capacity that we have for energy generation that has passed its sell-by date and is no longer compatible with our climate change obligations? The Government makes a great deal of the £50 million that is being invested in new renewables capacity in terms of development, but every form of electricity generation requires a great deal more investment than that to make it a practical reality.

The debate has prompted the revelation by the Government of an important element in what the Scottish Executive is doing. In its report last year, the Enterprise and Culture Committee called on the Executive to formulate a coherent energy policy for Scotland. In his introductory remarks, the minister made it clear that the Government is intent on forming that energy policy. I welcome

that development of the Executive's position because there will be different circumstances north and south of the border. We already have a much greater propensity to generate renewable energy than exists south of the border, which must be reflected in the policy that is developed. We also have particular and greater challenges in relation to fuel poverty and energy efficiency so I hope that those, too, will be reflected in the Executive's energy policy.

I have raised on many occasions the core point that I want the Executive to address and about which I hope Mr Finnie can say more in his concluding remarks. It is important that the Government recognise the problem that exists in pursuing renewable energy as a central part of its energy strategy, which is that there is greater need for strategic guidance on the framework for renewable energy in Scotland. There are people in the Strathbraan and Strathmore areas in my constituency who feel that they are under siege by wind farm applications. I consider it highly unlikely that all of the huge number of applications will get the go-ahead, but reassurance from me is not sufficient replacement for a strategic guidance framework that would reassure people on the point that Mr Ruskell made about congestion of applications in certain parts of the country.

Mr Ruskell: Will the member give way?

Mr Swinney: I am sorry—I do not have time.

As far as I can see, there is absolutely nothing in the Government's policy that relates to congestion of applications.

I appreciate what the minister said in his opening remarks and in response to my intervention on the question of the Scottish Renewables Forum's study. However, while that study is being undertaken and the forum is deliberating, we need to know what decisions will be made on the applications for major wind farm developments that are currently with ministers. The problems of congestion and process need to be resolved. The feedback from all sorts of organisations—Friends of the Earth, WWF, RSPB Scotland—shows that, like the Enterprise and Culture Committee, they want the Government to come up with a better strategic planning framework. I hope that the minister can confirm that that is being developed.

Much has been said about the great white hope that is nuclear technology. Let us not forget that that industry is massively subsidised by the public purse. We must recognise that it has dangers. It would be folly for us to take an early step in that direction.

11:09

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): There are some aspects of the Tory motion with which I agree. I, too, commend the political leadership that has been shown by the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Allan Wilson, in his pursuit of a mature debate on the future of nuclear energy in Scotland. To those who held up their hands in horror at his views, I point out that Allan Wilson has promoted that argument for many years. It was his view before he was appointed to the Scottish Executive, so nobody should have been surprised that he supported his constituents in the nuclear industry. Likewise, I support my colleague John Home Robertson's desire to establish a cross-party group to examine many of the issues in much greater detail.

I disagree with the motion's initial premise, which is

"that the Scottish Executive's renewable energy policy is unduly biased in favour of wind power to the detriment of other renewable technologies".

An issue arises over how the power companies have reacted to the Executive's challenging targets on energy generation from renewable sources, in that they have been over-reliant on onshore wind power, which has produced a plethora of planning applications for wind farms, particularly in areas that are accessible for connection to the national grid. Some proposed locations, such as Ae forest in my constituency, are highly inappropriate. I do not oppose wind farms per se; they will have a part to play provided that they are situated in suitable locations and have most of the local community's support. I accept that some nimbys will always want nothing in their back yards at any cost, but what matters is what the majority of a community believes.

Many reasons are possible for the flurry of onshore wind farm applications. The obvious reason—to which Shiona Baird referred—is that wind technology is far further advanced than other renewables technologies are, so it is quicker and easier to develop. Of course, there could be more devious reasons. Stirring up of public reaction to vast numbers of applications might persuade public and political opinion to support other forms of energy generation, such as other renewables or nuclear power. If the outcry is sufficient against proliferation of large-scale wind turbines, Governments might be persuaded to subsidise other alternatives more. Perhaps we cannot blame the power companies if they have that at the back of their minds.

I had the good fortune to discuss with Allan Wilson's predecessor, Lewis Macdonald, my concerns about the number of wind farm applications in Dumfries and Galloway. I was relieved to learn that councils can take a

cumulative view of such applications. I believe that after that discussion, the Executive wrote to councils to ensure that they knew that they could do that.

The Executive supports research and development in tidal and wave power and in marine and solar technology. It is committed to achieving a diverse spread of renewable energy sources. For example, I recently wrote to the energy minister to support a potentially very large biomass power generation plant in my constituency—David Mundell referred to that. I received an extremely supportive and helpful reply that left me in no doubt about the minister's commitment to developing other forms of renewable power generation. Moreover, he said that he expected the forthcoming forum for renewable energy development in Scotland report to address the different subsidies for biomass crops north and south of the border, to which Alex Johnstone referred.

Allan Wilson: I welcome what I think is the first mention in the debate of biomass as a reliable source of renewable electricity generation. Does the member agree that it meets the twin aims of being renewable and providing base-load supply?

Dr Murray: I am happy to agree with the minister. Biomass also has great potential in areas such as Dumfries and Galloway, which has a concentration of forestry and great potential for growth in biomass crops. That is one future for us. I say that despite being one of several Scottish Labour Party members who support a balanced UK power generation policy that includes second-generation nuclear power. I accept that waste disposal is an issue, but once we have the scientific evidence about the potential for disposal not only of existing waste, but of the waste that second-generation nuclear power will produce—which will be in much smaller amounts, as John Home Robertson said—we must not run away from the fact that differences of opinion exist not only between parties, but within parties. The argument will be difficult, but we must have it.

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): Will the member give way?

Dr Murray: No. I am sorry; I am nearly in my last minute.

I question to an extent the Tory party's motivation in lodging the motion for the debate fewer than 100 days before the likely date for the next UK general election. It is notable that two speakers so far happen to be candidates for that election. I suspect the possibility of some political motivation in lodging the motion at this time.

However, I am grateful for the clarification of the SNP and Liberal Democrat positions on nuclear power and wind energy. I am sure that some of my

constituents in areas such as Annan will be very interested to hear David Mundell and the Labour candidate Councillor Sean Marshall—who works at Chapelcross power station—point out those views to their potential constituents. I am sure that, when he is the Labour member of Parliament for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale, Sean Marshall will argue for future nuclear generation persuasively and with deep knowledge from his previous career. He will be an excellent successor to Russell Brown.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): I call Ted Brocklebank, who has four minutes.

11:15

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): As I have only four minutes for my speech, I will take no interventions.

Energy debates are typically characterised by protagonists who represent the good, the bad and the ugly. The good—or should that be the unco guid in Burns week?—are the Greens and large swathes of the SNP and the Executive, who believe that the answers to our power requirements are blowing in the wind or washing in with the tide. The bad and the ugly are those of us who are hell-bent on lining the oil companies' pockets or destroying the planet with a mix of global warming and pollution.

My views about onshore wind farms are well known. I was pleased to play a part in the campaign to block the proposed wind farm at Clatto hill in north-east Fife. Wind farms are costly, inefficient and usually visually polluting. Offshore wind farms are even more costly, but at least they are less inefficient and less visually polluting.

Richard Lochhead: Will the member give way?

Mr Brocklebank: No.

Offshore wind farms have a place in the eventual renewable energy mix. Hydro, solar and biomass power will also play parts as the world tries to wean itself off oil and gas. I am not as pessimistic as some, who say that oil will start to run out in the next two decades. The Athabasca tar sands of Canada probably have as much oil as does Saudi Arabia. However, it is true that the end of the age of cheap oil is in sight.

In the UK, gas is also running out. The price of imported Norwegian gas, for example, will be the deciding factor in how long the ethylene cracker at Mossmorran in Fife survives.

Richard Lochhead: Will the member give way?

Mr Brocklebank: No.

In the medium term, the case for traditional nuclear power is overwhelming. According to the

Royal Academy of Engineering, the cost of nuclear power is less than half that of wind power. The uranium that is used in our nuclear power stations is at least 97 per cent renewable. Nuclear power's environmental and health impact is one tenth that of coal.

Even sectors of the Greens are having to rethink their antipathy to nuclear power. Dr James Lovelock, the renowned high priest of the self-regulatory Gaian theory, has recently called for a massive expansion of nuclear power to counteract the effect of greenhouse gas emissions. The UK nuclear industry's contribution to our energy needs saves the pumping of about 17 million tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every year. That is the equivalent of five car-free days a month. How else do the Greens expect that to be achieved?

John Swinney talked about North sea oil. The European Commission's MARINA II study concluded that North sea oil and gas operations contribute more man-made radioactivity to the seas of northern Europe than does anything that emanates from the nuclear industry.

What about nuclear power's safety record? In the past 35 years, nuclear generation has caused no quantifiable deaths in the UK. How many have died in our mines and North sea oil rigs in the same time? I was in Finland when the Chernobyl disaster happened. Chernobyl accounted for the immediate deaths of 31 people. It is estimated that the number of deaths throughout Europe from cancer that was possibly related to Chernobyl was in the low thousands. That is a sobering and concerning figure, but it is comparable to the number of miners' deaths in the old Soviet Union alone in the same period. During that time, two people were killed in a nuclear plant in Japan. That is it. What about Three Mile Island back in 1979? That incident attracted lurid press headlines and many speeches by Ralph Nader, but nobody was killed or hurt. As far as we can see, all that was damaged was the industry's reputation.

Roll-out of a programme of new nuclear power stations will have little immediate effect as the age of cheap oil draws to a close, so we will surely need renewables to help to bridge the gap. As we have heard, Scotland is ideally placed for sources such as tidal and hydro power and for strategically placed offshore wind farms, which might use existing oil platforms.

Renewables should always be part of a sensible energy mix. As Allan Wilson said, efficiency in the sector has a vital role to play. We should not kid ourselves: the only long-term answer to the coming energy crisis is new investment in the cleanest, cheapest and safest power supply around. If we in the Conservatives are labelled bad and ugly for saying that, so be it. When

people such as James Lovelock—who is no less than an honorary visiting fellow of Green College—say the same thing, surely it is better to be bad, ugly and right than unco guid and plain wrong.

11:19

Frances Curran: The essence of the debate is the statement by the Scottish Executive in 2002, which said:

"Scotland has the capacity to be self-sufficient in electricity from renewable energy and have plenty left over for the rest of the UK."—[*Official Report*, 14 March 2002; c 10237.]

I am not sure which minister said that, but it was a mission statement with which nobody in Parliament, except perhaps the Tories, would disagree. We could be self-sufficient in renewable energy. It is possible; we have wind power—23 per cent of the resource in Europe—hydroelectricity, wave power, biomass and all the other technologies. The question that the Scottish Parliament needs to address in the next decade or more is how that can be achieved. That is where the future lies. The future is not in gas, oil or nuclear power, despite Phil Gallie's defence of China. Nowhere else in the world are people rapidly moving to build nuclear power stations. We have to believe in renewable energy.

The problem is that, although a mission statement has been made by the Executive that is currently in power, and although renewable energy is a devolved issue, there is a question mark over whether the commitment exists to hit that target. To Scott Barrie, who distorted the matter, I say that the SSP's amendment does not call for nuclear power stations to close tomorrow. He knows, because he can read it, that the amendment says that we should bring forward the decommissioning and closure dates for nuclear power stations.

It is a fact that 50 per cent of the energy that is generated in Scotland is produced by nuclear power stations, although much of it is exported to England. The Executive is committed to achieving 40 per cent energy production from renewable sources by 2020. What is the problem with bringing forward the decommissioning dates on the basis that the renewables target will be met? The problem is that nobody believes that we are going to meet that target of 40 per cent. I am not sure that even the Scottish Executive believes it, although we hear about it in press releases every now and again.

Why will we not meet that target? What will it take to meet it? It will require investment, it will require the strategic framework that John Swinney talked about and it will require control over where

wind farms are sited and the pace at which we develop wave-power technology. Because private companies believe that onshore wind farms are the best way forward, that has become—by default, because the matter has been left in the hands of the market—the main source of renewable energy in Scotland. Should it be the main source of renewable energy? What about wave-power technology? What about offshore wind farms? Unless there is a political commitment to developing that technology, the market and the private companies will decide what kind of renewable energy we get. If that happens, the Executive and the Scottish Parliament, on behalf of the Scottish people, will have very little say in how we reach the target of 40 per cent.

Alex Johnstone talked about keeping people in jobs. It is projected that 24,000 new jobs will be created in Scotland as a result of the move towards the renewables target. There also exists the potential to export the energy. The European Union already imports 50 per cent of its energy, and that figure will rise to 70 per cent over the next 20 or 30 years. However, we would not be importing the technology for renewable energy; it would be based in Scotland. There would also be huge potential for us to export that technology, if we were far enough ahead of the field. I am surprised that the Tories have not cottoned on to the fact that renewables technology could be a huge boost to the economy, as countries such as Denmark have found.

The national grid is central to the debate on renewables. We will not be able to bring renewable energy on stream without updating the national grid. Recently, the electricity market in Scotland has been opened up to many more electricity companies. The question is who will invest in updating the national grid. The minister nodded his head when I asked whether it was going to be the electricity companies. Which companies? Will it be those that are buying the electricity or those that need the connections—the private companies that are involved in the production of renewable energy? Do we have an estimate of how much that is going to cost? If the work is to be funded by private companies, where will the cost be handed on? How far down the line will that cost go? Will it be passed on to Scotland or to England? Will there be one price for everyone, as a result of that huge investment throughout the country, or will there be different prices depending on how far down the grid the electricity has to travel? That is a key question but, so far, we have not had any satisfactory answer from the Executive.

The nuclear power stations are coming to the end of their lives, which is why we are having the debate. The 50 per cent of our energy that they produce is under threat as those power stations

come to the end of their lives and they break down—although the one that broke down was only halfway through its life. How are we going to meet the renewables target? Let us have the vision of the Executive's 2002 statement instead of mealy-mouthed apologies for the fact that we are not going to meet the target.

11:26

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): This has been a good debate about nuclear power and the role that it could play in the future. I welcome the fact that a cross-party group on nuclear energy has recently been established. The Greens will play a full, if sceptical, part in that cross-party group.

The key point that the Tories are making is that we can somehow tackle climate change through nuclear power. That view is not shared by the International Atomic Energy Authority; therefore, it must be viewed critically and unpicked a little. It is true that nuclear power produces less carbon than some fossil fuels that we continue to use, such as coal. Nevertheless, over time, the level of emissions that come from the whole life cycle of nuclear fuel—from mining and use of uranium to the waste that is associated with it—will rise. Uranium is a finite resource that will run out in the next 60 years, during which crucial time the level of CO₂ emissions from our attempts to source an increasingly scarce fuel will increase as we try to tackle climate change. Therefore, nuclear power is simply not a practical alternative to renewable energy in the context of trying to reduce CO₂ emissions.

Nuclear power is not cost effective, either. Shiona Baird cited the figure of £83 billion that Nirex says will be needed to deal with the waste from nuclear power stations over the next 40 years—that is just what will be needed to deal with the existing waste. Are we honestly saying to the 136 countries that have signed up to the Kyoto treaty that they should go down the nuclear power route because it is a cheap and cost-effective option that uses appropriate technology and which will not bankrupt their economies? Clearly, it will not be cost effective and will not be a real option for countries from Antigua to the Yemen that are trying to reduce CO₂ emissions and that are investing in technologies that will reduce their contribution to climate change.

As the Executive has acknowledged, the key issue is waste. The minister was unable earlier to answer our question about when the waste issue will be resolved. Will it be when the minister has identified a strategy, which could be soon? Will it be when the depository is in place? Nirex estimates that it will take 25 to 40 years for us to get a waste depository in place. If we are serious

about tackling climate change, we must start taking action now. We cannot wait for 20 to 40-year programmes to take effect; we must start investing now in renewables technologies that can reduce our emissions and which are not dependent on finite fuels such as uranium.

I will suggest what should be in the Executive's energy policy. Nora Radcliffe talked about energy efficiency, which is the Cinderella in any UK energy policy at the moment. The performance and innovation unit suggests that we can reduce domestic energy consumption by 40 per cent by 2020. In this country, we waste a vast amount of money through energy inefficiency—£5 billion every year. We could build the Scottish Parliament 12 times over every year with the money that is lost to our economy through wasted energy.

I welcome the fact that the Executive is making the right noises about energy efficiency, but we need a ramped-up strategy that goes for the PIU target. The Executive should look to what the German Government is doing with renewables. The German minister who is responsible for the environment has a programme to build 1 million solar roofs similar to the one that Mr Arbuckle has. That is the kind of micro renewable energy efficiency strategy that we need to make a dent of more than a couple of per cent in our energy needs.

Base-load is clearly a difficult and technical issue. In the medium-term future, we are going to need a real mixture of renewables. We know that hydro power can provide some of the base-load, but at the moment it is generating only 11 per cent of our power. No doubt there is a limit to how much we can expand hydro power in Scotland.

However, there are predictable technologies. The Tories will deny this, but the tides are predictable for hundreds of years in advance. To a certain extent, waves are also predictable. However, at the moment we do not have the cost-effective technology to harness those predictable resources. That is where we need Government investment, but £50 million pales into insignificance when it is compared to the £83 billion that we are spending on dealing with waste. We need to consider investing serious amounts of money. We should listen to the industry, which is saying that we need to invest £500 million. That is not a lot of money when we consider that it will make renewables more cost effective.

We have also had a debate about wind farm planning and some communities have genuine concerns about specific applications and proposals. The minister needs to address the cumulative issue because that is the real issue, not the hysteria that is generated by the Tories at constituency level and which Mr Brocklebank feeds off.

The real issues are congestion in the planning system, the need to assess applications against one another and the need to ensure that we can, on behalf of developers and communities, progress the right wind farm applications in the right places.

11:32

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): As I gathered up my papers to come to the chamber, I thought how tattered they were getting, because they have been produced so many times for debates on energy. That is not a bad thing, as this is an important debate to have, and I and other members of my group welcome the opportunity to debate energy policy once again. Unlike the SNP's tired old clichés, we have new ideas and thinking to bring to the debate and my colleagues have shown that this morning.

I heard from my colleagues and the minister a well-argued defence of a well-researched, well-thought-out and well-supported Executive energy policy. It is well supported by communities, think tanks and other groups and by many of the companies that my Tory colleagues support. They know that it presents the best opportunity for sustaining jobs and developing a policy that will create jobs and improve Scotland's contribution to the proposals on climate change.

Scott Barrie was one of those who spoke about his past difficulty with nuclear power and about the problems that exist. However, he then promoted solutions. As John Home Robertson says, there is little point in discussing problems and then promoting one solution while rubbishing some of the others.

John Swinburne: Does the member not find it hypocritical of some of the members of her party to be so stringently against nuclear power but so much in favour of Trident nuclear submarines at Faslane? They seem to be on both sides at the one time.

Christine May: No, I do not.

We need to retain a mix that gives us a greater element of renewables, while maintaining and creating jobs and helping to achieve our climate change goals. The minister indicated that although there are problems with the current planning system, it is sufficiently robust to deal with the challenges, and the forum that he has established is considering the possibility of the Executive issuing locational guidance, as the Enterprise and Culture Committee asked for. I am sure that Mr Finnie will deal with that when he winds up.

We have heard relatively little about the other side of the coin, or energy efficiency, and what the Executive is doing on that. The do a little, change

a lot scheme announced last week shows what domestic customers can do to reduce overall energy use. We also need to consider what is being invested to help the public sector to make its buildings and processes more efficient, or to develop biofuels so that industry can use more energy-efficient and cheaper forms of fuel.

Helen Eadie properly set the debate in its global and national context and indicated where Scotland can make a significant contribution to the aims of the UK Government. We will be able to demonstrate how Scotland is playing its part during the G8 summit later this year.

One issue that I found difficult to hear dealt with adequately is intermittency. The potential of renewable energy generating sources to provide a volume of energy cannot be gainsaid.

Rob Gibson: Will the member give way?

Christine May: I will come back to Mr Gibson in a moment.

The difficulty is in dealing with the intermittency argument. I might have some sympathy with what Frances Curran said, but she did not mention how the SSP's energy policy would deal with the issue.

In a maiden speech on which I congratulate him, Andrew Arbuckle showed that he has a lot to learn about the need for balance in our energy provision. I am sure that we will clash on the matter more than once.

What are my views? Members have heard me talk about biomass and the need for support for it, and I acknowledge what the Executive is doing. On CO₂ sequestration and storage, the Environment and Rural Development Committee heard yesterday from Scottish Power that there is the potential for the entire CO₂ output of a coal-fired power station to be pumped back underground, perhaps increasing the volume of oil that can be produced.

I urge members to support the Executive's amendment today and not to be blown off course by a demand for nuclear power now. Let us have the debate.

11:38

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Scotland is a nation blessed with massive energy resources. First, we had coal, which fulfilled our energy needs for hundreds of years. In fact, the coal reserve at Canonbie in Dumfriesshire is reputedly even bigger than the Selby coal field down south and it potentially has low-sulphur coal.

Despite all the propaganda, 34 billion barrels of oil have been produced during the past 30 years, but another 28 billion barrels are left in the North sea and could be available during the next 30

years. As John Swinney pointed out, the great tragedy is that despite having contributed £150 billion in oil revenue to the UK Treasury, Scotland has barely seen a penny of that money and certainly very little has been reinvested in our infrastructure during the past 30 years.

When it comes to gas, about 50 per cent of the UK's total gas reserves are in Scottish waters. Although the UK will become a net importer of gas this year or next, we still have a substantial gas reserve. In addition, on renewable energies, the EU has declared Scotland the wind capital of Europe. Certainly, from listening to Alex Johnstone, I can believe that.

Ross Finnie: I am delighted to hear Alex Neil telling us that Scotland has the potential to be the wind capital of Europe. Will he explain to members the interesting policy announcement that his colleague Rob Gibson made, in which he advocated a wind tax and criticised the existence of subsistence through the renewables obligation certificates that are given to renewable energy providers? It was an interesting statement. If we are to be the renewables capital of Europe, I think that Mr Neil needs to clarify Mr Gibson's statement.

Alex Neil: That is a disingenuous misinterpretation of what Mr Gibson said, which was that if we had our own treasury in Scotland, the profit from wind, like the profit from oil and gas, would be circulated back into the Scottish economy instead of going to subsidise London and south-east England.

In some ways, this debate is six months early, because the study to which Allan Wilson referred is the one that should inform the debate and the Executive's and the Parliament's decision making. The study that is being undertaken by AEA Technology—a company, by the way, that is withdrawing from the nuclear industry—will point out when and where we might face an energy gap in Scotland. The energy gap will probably occur between around 2025 and 2030. Once we get that study and get an indication from present trends of whether there will be an energy gap and, if so, its scale, we will have to decide. I take the point that the decisions have to be made sooner rather than later. No matter which option or mix we go for, we will have to start the process in the next few years, because we will have to go through planning, getting the capital investment and getting any new capacity up and running. We cannot wait for a decade or more.

Phil Gallie: I agree with much of what Alex Neil said about the wealth of Scotland's assets and I agree also about the importance of the report on future development. However, it is unfortunate that he and his party seem to have closed their minds to the nuclear issue. Does he not feel shame

about that, given Scotland's record on nuclear generation? Is not it the case that the SNP are faint-hearts rather than bravehearts?

Alex Neil: The SNP's policy decision on nuclear power is based, like its other policy decisions, on objective analysis. The analysis of nuclear power is, first, that it is dangerous. There is no answer to the problem of nuclear waste. As Mark Ruskell pointed out, it will probably be 30 or 40 years before we have a national depository. It is disgraceful that we in Scotland have to land our waste on people south of the border. In my view, every country that produces nuclear waste should have to recycle its own waste.

The waste argument is not the only one, because, secondly, nuclear energy is uneconomic. If the money that it took to bail out British Energy had been invested instead in renewables or the other technologies that Christine May mentioned, we would be much further ahead of the game than we are.

Alex Johnstone: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, the member is in his last minute.

Christine May *rose*—

Alex Neil: I would love to take an intervention—come, come, come—but I am in my last minute and I do not think that I am allowed to take one.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I cannot give you any more time.

Alex Neil: No, that is a pity.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have six seconds left, Mr Neil—use them well.

Alex Neil: Okay. On that basis, I ask members to support the SNP amendment, which is the only sensible one in the *Business Bulletin* today.

11:44

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): The debate has been interesting and I, too, congratulate Andrew Arbuckle on making his maiden speech in the midst of the debate. I note with interest that, even in his maiden speech, Andrew Arbuckle was able to take and deal with interventions, which was in stark contrast to Mr Brocklebank, who lectured us yet again, which added to a difficult week for him. I understand that he was asked to give a speech at a Burns supper, but failed to do so. He then gave us a lecture during the debate instead of a speech, in which he might have taken interventions.

By and large, the debate has been good and it has raised a number of issues about which we are all concerned. In the Executive's contribution to

the debate, my colleague Allan Wilson was right to put the issue in the context of our imperative need to address and answer the challenge of climate change. It is within that context that the Executive is taking a broad-based approach to energy and energy supply. Allan Wilson was also right to tackle the issue to which Mark Ruskell and many other members referred, which is that the question is not just about energy generation but about tackling energy efficiency, which can contribute equally to how we tackle the whole energy issue.

Many members raised interesting questions about the prospects for renewables. On wind, I think that there was a misunderstanding about the number of applications. John Swinney has rightly and persistently asked about addressing the strategic issue not just within local authorities but on a broader base. On individual applications, which Elaine Murray and others raised, we are disappointed about the current situation, because national planning policy guideline 6 entitles a local authority to take a strategic view of how it wants to allocate applications within its area. Current planning law entitles local authorities to take a view on the cumulative effect of applications. It is not good enough to say that if an application for a particular piece of ground is suitable, it will be granted. John Swinney and others made interesting points about that. Local authorities are not utilising the planning powers and the guidance to their full. As my colleague Allan Wilson said, we are considering the issue of whether applications are being viewed more strategically Scotland-wide in the context of our energy policy.

Mr Swinney: The minister is going some way towards addressing the issue that concerns me. However, the specific applications in my constituency will be resolved predominantly by the Scottish Executive rather than by the local authority. Therefore, the minister's point about the entitlement under planning law to take a cumulative view might apply to the Executive, but it does not apply to the local authorities. Members of the public would appreciate a clearer statement of how the ability to take a cumulative view applies, and I hope that that will come from the study to which the minister referred. Finally, what will happen to applications while the review is being undertaken?

Ross Finnie: Regrettably, we have to deal with the law as it stands. We cannot intervene. The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 is in place. We have written to local authorities to try to explain to them the powers that they have. We understand the pressures on local authorities. On John Swinney's point about the Executive needing to take a broader view to ensure that, irrespective of where applications go, they are dealt with in a more ordered way, there are powers that help

local authorities and we are trying to point that out to them.

There is no question but that the drive for wind energy comes from the mature state of that technology and its cost base. However, the Executive is not actively promoting only a single response to renewable energy. We are extremely concerned to see the development of wave, tidal, biomass, solar and hydrogen energy; indeed, we even want extensions to our existing hydro energy.

Murdo Fraser: I am grateful to Mr Finnie for giving way. He did not mention hydro, but I hope that hydro will be part of the portfolio.

Ross Finnie: I did mention hydro.

Murdo Fraser: Well, in that case, will the minister answer this question? Why is the Executive promoting new rating rules from 1 April this year that will result in a 400 per cent increase in the rates bills paid by some small-scale hydro schemes? How does that help the renewables industry?

Ross Finnie: It is interesting that Mr Fraser's intervention was based on my not having mentioned hydro when I had. However, I will try to deal with his question.

There will be no economic impact on small hydro schemes, because they will still come under the ROCs scheme. Small developments can apply for ROCs as well, so there are still incentives for small-scale schemes to take place.

The major issue, about which we became overly obsessed, is the nuclear debate. David Mundell told us "to seriously address" the issue. Leaving aside the rather grotesque split infinitive in that injunction, I believe that it is a major issue for us to consider. However, I put one point to Mr Mundell: it is not good enough simply to say that he has evidence of how nuclear power might be addressed efficiently. If he is concerned about sustainable development, he must also be prepared to address waste. He cannot simply ignore it, and it is not good enough to say that he has spoken to the workers and asked them whether they want to keep working in the industry.

Richard Lochhead: The minister's amendment suggests that any decision on nuclear power will be taken only on the basis of waste management issues. Will he confirm that economics and other dangers must also be taken into account before any decision is taken?

Ross Finnie: That is fairly self-evident. What we are saying is that the Executive's energy policy is ambitious, balanced and realistic. We are supporting the development of a range of renewables technologies. Our 40 per cent targets will make a significant contribution and they are

based on evidence from a long period of consultation. Our proposed energy efficiency strategy will have a significant impact on reducing carbon emissions.

I am in no doubt about the importance of advancing and developing renewables technologies and of promoting increased energy efficiency. I believe that, in both areas, we have set attainable targets, and I believe that the policies that we have put in place and the investment that we are making in new technology will help us to achieve that. I commend our amendment to the Parliament. It is a balanced and fair approach to renewable energy.

11:52

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): This has been a good debate, with measured and well-informed contributions from all sides of the chamber. I congratulate Andrew Arbuckle on his maiden speech, which was delivered in excellent fashion, and I am sure that he will be an adornment to the chamber. On the substance of his speech, all I can say is that he is keeping up the tradition of his predecessor, Mr Raffan, with a strange detachment from reality.

The Scottish Executive claims to have a strategy for our future energy needs. In reality, it is little more than headlines about meeting renewable energy targets. Members will be aware that I have raised in the chamber on numerous occasions my concern about the overdevelopment of onshore wind farms. According to the Scottish Wind Assessment Project, there are nearly 400 either current or proposed planning applications for wind turbines. Rural communities in areas such as Perthshire feel under threat from wind farm developers. I cannot believe that it is in the long-term interests of our vital tourism industry to be seeking to overdevelop onshore wind capacity.

Alex Neil: Will Murdo Fraser clarify the Tories' policy? Is it what Mr Johnstone said, which is that they accept some wind farms, or is what Mr Brocklebank said, which is that they do not accept any wind farms?

Murdo Fraser: If Mr Neil had been listening, he would have heard that we accept the need for onshore wind farms, but in a very limited number of situations. There is an overemphasis on onshore wind at the moment.

Christine May: Will Murdo Fraser give way?

Mr Swinney: Will Murdo Fraser give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Murdo Fraser: I will not give way at the moment; I need to make progress.

The fundamental problem is the lack of national strategic guidance about the siting of wind farms. The Enterprise and Culture Committee's report on the matter was unanimous. It said that such guidance is essential, as local councils up and down the land are crying out for assistance. The Executive has now said that it will consider the matter and review the planning guidance, but not until 2006. Therefore, we need a moratorium on locally opposed wind farms until the new planning guidance is in place. Otherwise, the 400 applications that I referred to will be determined on the basis of the current planning guidance, which it is accepted is inadequate. That cannot be in anyone's interests.

Mr Swinney: We know what Mr Fraser is opposed to. He wants a moratorium. Will he tell us in what circumstances he would approve a wind farm and in what circumstances he would support a wind farm, and which parts of the country he thinks should have them?

Murdo Fraser: Our proposal is that we should have a moratorium where there is substantial local opposition—a concept that is accepted in planning law—to a specific proposal. Where there is substantial local opposition, I will oppose a wind farm.

While presiding over a free-for-all for onshore wind, the Executive is woefully inadequate when it comes to encouraging other types of renewable energy. There is great potential for small-scale hydro schemes in Scotland, yet Executive policy discriminates against such producers. Small hydro generators that sell power to neighbouring properties or to third parties within their own estates are not entitled to ROCs, because the power is supplied through what is known as an exempt supplier system. The Executive must consider that. In addition, as I pointed out to Ross Finnie, the impact of new rules that will come in from 1 April this year will mean huge increases of up to 400 per cent in rates bills for small hydro generators. Why? Because they will be assessed on the ROCs that they have received. The Executive's own policy is damaging the growth of the renewables sector. Whatever happened to joined-up government?

Another example of the failure of Executive policy, which other members have raised, concerns the burning of waste-derived fuel at Longannet power station. I appreciate that it is rather too near lunch time to go into the detail of all that, but waste is a renewable resource. By burning it, burning of coal is displaced, and that has to be good for emissions and the environment. If the waste were not burned, it would have to go to landfill, yet the Scottish Environment Protection Agency has just stopped the burning of waste-derived fuel at Longannet by taking court action

against Scottish Power and Scottish Water. We have the bizarre concept of two public agencies employing Queen's counsel at the taxpayer's expense to fight it out in a court action in the Court of Session, and both of them report to the same minister—Mr Finnie. For goodness' sake, can we not get a grip on that and try to pursue a coherent renewables policy, instead of allowing two agencies to fight it out?

If Executive policy on renewables is flawed, SNP policy is foolish. The SNP wants to increase the percentage of electricity generated in Scotland from renewable sources by 2010 from the Scottish Executive's target of 18 per cent to 25 per cent, but that increase can come only from additional wind capacity. It was interesting to see Alex Salmond on Tuesday talking up wind generation, as Richard Lochhead has done today. At the same time, SNP representatives in areas such as Perthshire and the Borders are going round telling local communities that they oppose this or that wind farm development. The SNP cannot have it both ways.

Stewart Stevenson: Will Murdo Fraser give way?

Murdo Fraser: If the SNP supports an increase in wind power, it needs to be open about that and tell us and local communities on which sites it intends to develop wind farms. The message to people in Perthshire and elsewhere is clear: "Vote SNP. There will be a wind farm coming to a hill near you very soon." If Mr Stevenson wants to tell us which wind farms he will support, I will give way to him.

Stewart Stevenson: I think that the member should consider whether the SNP is entirely consistent. We support wind farms—as I do in my constituency—in appropriate locations, and we oppose them in inappropriate locations. We need national guidelines that give consistency.

Murdo Fraser: I look forward to SNP representatives in Perthshire and the Borders telling us which applications for which hills they are going to support. I await that with interest.

We have used the debate to raise also the question of the future of nuclear energy in Scotland—a question that hardly anyone but the Conservatives has dared to raise in recent years. We are starting to see a consensus develop. As David Mundell said, people such as Professor David Simpson, Sir Alec Broers and even the green guru, Professor James Lovelock, now believe that it is essential that we start expanding our nuclear capacity.

We recognise the problems with nuclear power, in particular the question of waste, but it is only by having a debate about the issues that we will start to find solutions. It is instructive that, in countries

such as Finland, public opinion has been won over by the Government leading on the issue. That is what we must do.

“does it make sense, at the very time when climate change and the reduction of greenhouse gases have shot up the political agenda, to be planning the elimination of nuclear power?”

Those are not my words, but the words of the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Allan Wilson, writing in the *Sunday Herald* on 26 December. I could not agree more.

It is not just Allan Wilson on the Executive benches who thinks like that, thank goodness. I pay tribute to John Home Robertson's long support for the nuclear industry, and I wish him well with his new cross-party group on the civil nuclear industry. I hope that that helps the debate to move along. We should not be like the sheep in “Animal Farm” chanting, “Nuclear bad, renewables good.” We need a well-informed debate about the issues.

Current Executive policy on renewable energy is driving a massive expansion in onshore wind, to the detriment of new technologies. Furthermore, Executive policies are prejudicing existing renewable production through small-scale hydro schemes and the burning of waste-derived fuel. It is time for us to stop swamping our countryside with wind turbines and to take a more measured and responsible approach. Above all, it is time for us to start considering seriously the nuclear option before time runs out. Thank goodness that we have visionary figures such as Allan Wilson and John Home Robertson on the Executive benches, who are prepared to raise the issues, and thank goodness that we have an effective and responsible Opposition in the Scottish Conservatives, who are prepared to allow those issues to be debated.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Cabinet (Meetings)

1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-1380)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): At the next meeting of the Scottish Cabinet, we will discuss our progress in building a better Scotland.

Nicola Sturgeon: Does the First Minister recall that, exactly two years ago today, the Parliament passed the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003? That act guaranteed the public a right of access to land, including—this was a deliberate decision—land that is owned by the Queen. Why is the First Minister letting Westminster overturn that democratic decision of the Scottish Parliament?

The First Minister: Nothing could be further from the truth. If I remember rightly, the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill was changed two years ago by an amendment that was lodged by Dennis Canavan. That happened after I became First Minister and with my whole-hearted support; I gave my absolute support to Dennis Canavan's objective on that occasion. The Executive would do nothing whatsoever to undermine the provision.

The proposals that will be put before the Parliament next week, as a result of the United Kingdom Parliament's Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill, will not at all cut across the land reform that was agreed by the Scottish Parliament or the rights of access that the Executive has established for people in Scotland.

It is expected that any new provisions will apply only to the three royal residences in Scotland and not to any surrounding estates. The absolutely crucial point to make is that the Scottish Parliament will have the final say in any decisions that are taken on the matter. That is why the proposal is being put to the Parliament next week.

I understand why some members may perhaps have genuinely misunderstood the situation, and the Executive is happy to clarify the matter for them. Others, perhaps, are less genuine in their misunderstanding. The reality is that the proposals that will be put before the Scottish Parliament next week will extend the powers of the Parliament and ensure that the Parliament remains in control of the situation. Ultimately, the proposals will ensure that decisions are not made by the UK Parliament in London.

Nicola Sturgeon: I appreciate that I have the advantage over the First Minister of having had a

legal education. If he were to read the Westminster bill, even he would understand that it makes a criminal offence of simply being on land that is owned by the Queen. In other words, it makes a criminal offence of someone walking their dog on the Balmoral estate, for goodness' sake! Clearly, that overturns the will of the Scottish Parliament. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: The Executive has told us that the Queen has no problem with the right of access. The police have sufficient powers to deal with anyone who acts criminally on royal land. Why is the First Minister letting Westminster ride roughshod over the decisions of the Scottish Parliament?

The First Minister: That is simply untrue. Given the provisions that will come before the Parliament next week, it is either mischievous or seriously malevolent to make those suggestions. The provisions will not allow the Westminster Parliament or the UK Government to establish new laws in that way. They will allow the Scottish Parliament, and only the Scottish Parliament, to establish an order to designate specific sites in Scotland on a restricted basis in order, in particular, to ensure the security of our head of state.

It is absolutely right and proper that, through the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill and through the decision of the Scottish Parliament, we will ensure the existence of those provisions. Ultimately, given that the decision to implement any of those provisions will be a decision of the Scottish Parliament, we need to ensure that the law in this instance is as tight as it possibly can be. The law will be controlled in Scotland; the orders will be established in Scotland and not elsewhere.

Nicola Sturgeon: The First Minister should go away and read the Westminster bill. It is clear that the bill takes away a right that was bestowed on the people of Scotland by the Scottish Parliament. The First Minister has got so used to handing back power to London that he cannot recognise when he is going too far. Surely it is bad enough that Sewel motions are used repeatedly to pass the buck on issues that members of the Scottish Parliament are paid to deal with but which the First Minister thinks are too hot to handle, without a Sewel motion now being used to give London the power to overturn a decision of the Scottish Parliament. Will the First Minister concede that this is a Sewel motion too far? Will he stand up for the powers of the Scottish Parliament and withdraw it immediately?

The First Minister: That is complete rubbish. If the Parliament rejects the motion next week, it will

hand back the power to the Westminster Parliament to make those decisions without even consulting this Parliament, never mind with the agreement of this Parliament. That is a fundamental point.

The Railways Bill, the Sewel motion on which was agreed yesterday, gives new powers to the Scottish Parliament. The Gambling Bill, the Sewel motion on which was agreed to last week, gives new powers to the Scottish Parliament. The National Lottery Bill, the Sewel motion on which will be decided on by the Parliament this afternoon, gives new powers to Scottish ministers and the Scottish Parliament. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 gave new powers to the Scottish Parliament and to Scottish ministers, and the Energy Act 2004 gave the Parliament new powers and a new role in nuclear decommissioning.

All five of those areas involve new powers for this Parliament being agreed in partnership with the Westminster Government. That is where the nub of the matter lies. This is not about the individual Sewel motion on the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill and not about any attempt by Ms Sturgeon to deceive people about what that might mean. This is about the Scottish National Party—and unfortunately on this occasion its allies, the Tories—and its opposition to partnership working with the United Kingdom Government. The SNP does not want the Scottish Parliament to have more powers in order to work better with the Westminster Parliament. Ultimately, the SNP would prefer to debate the constitution than to protect our head of state.

Nicola Sturgeon: The First Minister mentioned five Sewel motions, but has he not forgotten to mention the other 51, which took powers away from this Parliament and gave them back to London? The Sewel motion on the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill goes even further, because it gives Westminster the power to overturn democratic decisions that the Scottish Parliament has already made. Is it not time for the First Minister to accept that he has got it wrong, to stand up for the Parliament and to remove the Sewel motion? He should do that now.

The First Minister: Some of the best legislation that has been implemented in the United Kingdom and has had a good impact in Scotland has come through the Sewel process during the past five and a half years. The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, for example, is making a huge difference in the fight against drugs and serious crime in Scotland. It, too, was agreed through the Sewel process, and I remember the complaints from the Scottish National Party. I even remember the Scottish National Party voting against a Sewel motion on a bill that would allow blind people to take their dogs

into taxis, just because it disagrees with the so-called constitutional principle that is at stake.

Ultimately, the process is about working in partnership with the UK Government, ensuring that the right decisions are made here in Scotland and not in London, and ensuring that the Scottish Parliament has more powers and not fewer. Ultimately, it is about ensuring that rather than debating on a constitutional pinhead, we protect our head of state in Scotland, where she belongs.

The Presiding Officer: Before question 2, members will wish to welcome His Excellency Jean-Louis Wolzfeld, the ambassador of Luxembourg. [*Applause.*]

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues will be discussed. (S2F-1381)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I have no plans for a formal meeting with the Prime Minister.

David McLetchie: As the First Minister will be aware, the Conservatives in this Parliament supported the Executive in yesterday's debate on the Sewel motion on the Railways Bill, which will devolve further powers to the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive. However, as the First Minister will also be aware, Lord Sewel himself has pointed out that Sewel motions were supposed to be an occasional device for use when matters would be more appropriately legislated for on a UK basis. Since 1999, such motions have been used in this Parliament 56 times and there is more than a hint that they are being used for political expediency and in an inconsistent manner. Does the First Minister agree that the extensive use of Sewel motions in this Parliament, coupled with the experience of the Railways Bill yesterday, demonstrates that there is a need for an overview of the respective responsibilities of Westminster and the Scottish Parliament, and that the Scotland Act 1998 might be far from perfect in that regard?

The First Minister: That is an interesting question, coming from Mr McLetchie. One benefit of the Sewel process during the past five and a half years has been that, far from taking powers away from this Parliament—on not one occasion has the Sewel process been used to do that—it has ensured that this Parliament makes the decisions on those matters. In a number of cases over the past five and a half years, additional powers have been delegated and devolved to this Parliament and to Scottish ministers under the Sewel process.

Perhaps that underlines Mr McLetchie's point that there are areas in the Scotland Act 1998 that

need to be reviewed as time goes on. There are areas in which the line can become blurred and further responsibilities need to be devolved to this Parliament and to Scottish ministers. The Sewel process is one way—but only one way—in which that can be achieved and it has been achieved with this Parliament's consent on each and every occasion. The process ensures that the Westminster Parliament does not make decisions that this Parliament would oppose. That benefit is the reason that the Sewel convention was set up.

David McLetchie: I welcome the First Minister's recognition of the need for review in light of the experience of the operation of this Parliament. Is he aware that Lord Sewel, who has said that the Scottish Executive's use of such motions can be construed as a means of avoiding political debate and controversy, has called for a radical review of the way in which the process operates? We need to establish a clear set of principles as a basis for progress. For example, why do we need a Scottish wing of the proposed UK serious organised crime agency when we already have a Scottish serious crime squad—the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency—which was established by the Executive? The SDEA is accountable to Scottish ministers and it already works perfectly well with other forces and agencies both in Britain and abroad.

The First Minister: Mr McLetchie raises a serious issue, which will be debated along with a number of other serious issues in the debate on the Sewel motion next week. The motion will seek agreement not only that appropriate powers should be given to ensure that the new serious organised crime agency can work properly with our Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency, which has made such a difference to tackling drug crime in Scotland, but that new compulsory investigative powers should be granted to enhance police investigations of serious organised crime. The Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill will ensure that those powers are appropriate under Scots law as well as in the United Kingdom context.

In addition, the bill will introduce new financial reporting orders to ensure that those who are convicted of serious financial crimes can be pursued. It will also ensure timely Scottish implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, the UN Convention against Corruption and the European Union framework decision on asset freezing. Those are all critical aspects in the international battle against serious organised crime.

The bill will introduce regulation of the private security industry in Scotland. Members from all parties have called for action on that for some time. Crucially, as I pointed out earlier, the bill will also give this Parliament the right to designate

limited sites to protect our head of state and it will ensure that those provisions are similar across the UK but appropriate to Scots law. It will allow those matters to be decided by this Parliament rather than by Westminster.

In all those areas, the Sewel procedure will allow proper working between the serious organised crime agency and the law enforcement agencies and courts of Scotland. It will ensure that this Parliament has the powers over the areas for which it should be responsible. It will also allow this Parliament to protect the land reform legislation and the right of access to land that all of us—I agree with Dennis Canavan—hold dear.

David McLetchie: The First Minister may say that the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill has all those worthy features, but the key issue is not whether the bill has those features but who should exercise the legislative competence for introducing the provisions. On the specific aspect of whether we need a UK serious organised crime agency, the First Minister will be aware that the Scottish Police Federation has expressed the view of Scotland's police officers, who ask why we should change a system that, in their view, is working perfectly satisfactorily. Now and again, is it not sensible to take the position that, if it ain't broke, don't fix it? There is no need to move forward in a way that disregards the views of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Police Federation.

The First Minister: If I remember rightly, the Conservatives made exactly the same point about the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill last year. They might even have used the phrase, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." In Christine May's Central Fife constituency, a number of neighbours in Leven are very grateful for that new law, as a result of which they will enjoy peace and quiet this weekend. That was an example of the Conservatives getting it wrong on crime and the Executive getting it right. I am sure that the same will be true of the plans for the serious organised crime agency.

The Presiding Officer: We move to constituency questions.

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): The First Minister will appreciate the fear that has been generated in Paisley as a result of yesterday's horrific stabbings. Will he assure members that the efforts of Strathclyde police to apprehend the attacker will have his full support? In light of the stabbings, will he also redouble his genuine commitment to tackle the menace of knife crime in our communities?

The First Minister: Our starting point on these issues should always be to share sympathy with the victims, to wish them a speedy recovery and to

wish the forces of law and order great speed in tracking down the attacker or attackers responsible. The police will have our full support in doing that.

Such incidents reinforce the need for new measures to tackle knife crime in Scotland and to strengthen the law and the operational provisions that are available to our police forces. We will continue with our plan. Just before Christmas, five key points were announced: a new licensing scheme covering those who sell knives and offensive weapons; an increase in the minimum age of purchase from 16 to 18; a ban on the sale of samurai swords; more stop-and-search powers for the police; and a doubling of the sentence for possession of a knife from two to four years. All those measures will be taken forward by ministers this year.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Will the First Minister join me in congratulating Fife constabulary and Fife Council on their innovative and successful use of powers under the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004 to obtain a closure order on a flat in Leven? Does he agree with Mr Richard Martin that that act of Parliament was required to deal with his intolerable situation? What lesson does he believe that the Parliament and the people of Scotland can learn from the case?

The First Minister: I welcome the action and hope that the neighbours to whom Christine May refers will enjoy a more peaceful time in the weeks and months to come than they have had recently. I am glad that the action that we took in the Parliament last year has resulted in prompt action by Fife Council and the police in Fife.

I have no idea how Christine May's constituent votes, and I am sure that the way in which he votes would never influence the police or Fife Council to take action to support his cause. However, I hope that he remembers that, if people had voted SNP or Conservative in bigger numbers at the 2003 election, the provisions of the 2004 act would not exist, less action would have been taken across Scotland against antisocial behaviour and those parties that are weak on crime would have taken to the floor.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

3. Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues he intends to discuss. (S2F-1398)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I have no plans for a formal meeting with the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Shiona Baird: Does the First Minister recognise the huge benefits to Edinburgh of reduced

congestion, air quality improvements and funding for world-class public transport that will come from the City of Edinburgh Council's plans for traffic improvement, including the £2 congestion charge? Will he condemn Edinburgh politicians, such as David McLetchie, who are scaremongering on the impact of congestion charging?

The First Minister: Shiona Baird will understand that I cannot comment specifically on the Edinburgh scheme, because ultimately ministers will have a role in agreeing the orders to implement it, if there is a yes vote in the referendum and the proposals are submitted to us in due course. However, I will make a couple of points.

First, Edinburgh needs better public transport, which it will get in part through improved Government funding and city council funding. However, if the citizens of Edinburgh vote for congestion charging, that will provide another revenue stream; that is the choice that is before them. Secondly, congestion charging has worked in other parts of the world and other parts of the United Kingdom, so people should consider examples from elsewhere. I hope that those who advocate a no vote in the referendum will be as honest as those who advocate a yes vote and spell out the implications of a no vote, both for pollution in Edinburgh in the years to come and for the transport systems that may or may not be available.

Shiona Baird: I thank the First Minister for his positive comments. Will he support Friends of the Earth Edinburgh's protest this week against the Edinburgh Liberal Democrat councillors' hypocritical opposition to the council's transport plans?

The First Minister: That would be an act of extreme folly on my part. I have no intention of supporting that demonstration. This is an important moment for transport policy in Scotland. I hope that there is a serious, mature and informed debate on the issue in Edinburgh over the next few weeks. I hope that the people of Edinburgh will consider the matter seriously before they vote and take account of all the factors that they must consider. Ultimately, I hope that the decision will be taken for the future of Edinburgh rather than in the immediate short-term interests of the few.

Liberation of Auschwitz (Anniversary)

4. Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the First Minister how Scotland will commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the end of world war two. (S2F-1393)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): A number of events will be held throughout Scotland

to commemorate Holocaust memorial day, which this year—as I think everyone knows—is the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. I and other ministers will attend a national memorial service in Hamilton tonight.

Holocaust memorial day gives us the chance to remember the innocent people who were massacred and those whose bravery enabled thousands of people to survive the horror of the camps. It is important that future generations never forget the evil that took place during the Holocaust and at camps such as Auschwitz. That is why Peter Peacock has this morning launched an education pack for schoolchildren, which will be available to Scottish schools.

We intend to commemorate the end of the second world war in a number of ways, details of which will be announced in due course.

Mr Macintosh: I thank the First Minister for his comments and for the announcement from the Minister for Education and Young People, Mr Peacock. I look forward to attending this evening's event along with the First Minister, my colleague Michael McMahon and others.

Will the First Minister join me in paying tribute to the many survivors of Auschwitz and the Holocaust who made their home here in Scotland following the second world war? They include Mrs Marianne Grant and the Rev Ernest Levy, who live in East Renfrewshire and who brought with them not bitterness or hatred but warmth, compassion and humanity. Does the First Minister share my pride in Scotland and in the values of tolerance and understanding that we showed, which allowed those survivors to make their home here? Does he agree that Holocaust memorial day is a timely reminder to us all of the need to treasure those values, which we hold most dear?

The First Minister: I thank Ken Macintosh for that question and for the chance today for our Parliament to associate itself with democratic politicians and people all over the world who should never forget the horrors of the Holocaust and, in particular, the horror that took place at the Auschwitz camp. I do not think that anyone who has visited the Holocaust Memorial Museum in the USA can be untouched by the experience and by the personal reflections of those who survived the camps and can speak about it today.

As Ken Macintosh says, we have survivors of the camps here in Scotland and it is vital that young Scots do not forget and are not allowed to forget what happened in the worst massacre, the greatest evil, of the 20th century. It is a scar on the history of Europe and one that we must ensure never happens again.

Affordable Homes (First-time Buyers)

5. Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether any new measures will be introduced to assist first-time buyers. (S2F-1386)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Yes. We announced last autumn that there would be investment of £1.2 billion in affordable homes over the next three years, including an 80 per cent expansion in the low-cost home ownership programme and other innovative schemes. That investment will support the provision of nearly 5,000 new homes for low-cost home ownership throughout Scotland by 2008.

We have discussed with stakeholders new proposals for supporting low-cost home ownership based on shared equity and we will announce shortly the new measures that we will introduce.

Richard Lochhead: Does the First Minister accept that the affordable housing crisis in Scotland is not only about accommodation for rent, but about the fact that many first-time buyers, who are mainly young people, are unable to get a foothold on the property ladder? Will he express concern in response to last week's report by the Bank of Scotland, which shows that in four out of five towns in Scotland first-time buyers—mainly young people, who are the lifeblood of those communities—are often unable to afford property in their communities, where they were raised and where they want to continue to live and work? Will he comment on the potential role of publicly owned land in addressing the problem, so that first-time buyers can afford to purchase property in their own communities?

The First Minister: Those are very important issues and we are taking a number of steps to tackle them. Not only have we introduced significant new investment over the next three years in low-cost affordable housing, but we are reforming the planning system and investing in new low-cost home ownership units over the next three years. We are developing new and improved funding instruments, particularly based on shared equity, and a planning advice note, which will set a 25 per cent benchmark for affordable housing contributions by private developers in Scotland. We are pursuing measures to increase the land supply for affordable housing, particularly in rural Scotland. Other measures are also proposed.

The issue in Scotland is serious and I am delighted that, contrary to some of the rubbish that was reported in our national press earlier this week, a number of schemes in Scotland are ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom. In addition to house prices being cheaper in Scotland, more additional housing is planned in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK. That should

not only encourage young Scots to stay in this country to set up home and establish a family, but encourage other people to come here to live and work.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Does the First Minister acknowledge that more than 350,000 families in Scotland achieved their aspiration to be first-time home owners through the Tory right-to-buy policy? Will the First Minister give a long-term commitment to the policy, to assist families in the future?

The First Minister: Again, contrary to some of the rubbish that we read, there are no plans to end the right-to-buy scheme. Of course, there is the legislative commitment of the Parliament to review the scheme's operation, which the Parliament will undertake with the involvement of ministers in the normal way.

Marches and Parades (Review)

6. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Executive will deliver the recommendations in the "Review of Marches and Parades in Scotland". (S2F-1396)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The Executive has accepted and will take forward all 38 recommendations in the "Review of Marches and Parades in Scotland". I thank Sir John Orr for his well-considered and thoughtful report, which was published earlier this week.

Some of the recommendations will require primary legislation and will be included in the police bill consultation paper, which will be published next month. Subject to parliamentary debate and the responses to the consultation, changes could be in place for marches that take place in 2007. Other recommendations can be taken forward without legislation. We will work with local authorities and the police to co-ordinate activity and I hope that the communities that are the most affected by marches will begin to see improvements in the arrangements for marches that take place this summer.

Donald Gorrie: Will the First Minister give an assurance that the necessary resources will be provided? As he indicated, there is a real opportunity to go forward by consensus on the basis of Sir John Orr's well-balanced report—I think that almost everyone who is involved has signed up to the process. If the approach is to work properly, some councils will need to undertake extensive consultation to ensure that the community is properly involved. It would be a pity if such work were thwarted because councils did not have enough money. A huge amount of money will not be needed. Will the First Minister give a guarantee that lack of resources will not hinder proper consultation?

The First Minister: As Cathy Jamieson confirmed the other day, we will want to discuss the matter with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and with the local authorities that are the most affected. The important thing for us to do now is to secure support for the changes that are required, but we will build discussions about resources into that process. We must ensure that we build a broad consensus that includes the people who are most affected on the streets, as well as the people who live in the communities, so that we can take the matter forward and ensure that in Scotland we have better managed and far more orderly parades and marches in the summers to come.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): Like Donald Gorrie, I welcome Sir John Orr's report. I recognise the sensitivity of the issues, partly because the headquarters of the Orange Order are located within half a mile of St Mary's Roman Catholic church. The issue is of great sensitivity in the community that I represent.

Does the First Minister agree that although local authorities should respect the right to march and to express political opinion when they consider the matter, the burden on communities in relation to inconvenience, frequency of marches and public safety should not be disproportionate?

The First Minister: The member puts the point very reasonably. Of course there is a right to march, parade and express opinion in this country. We live in a democracy and that freedom is important to us. However, communities also have the right to live in peace. It is vital that we strike the right balance between people who want to march and be involved, particularly in parades that might be offensive to others, and people in communities, who have a right to wander the streets in peace on some weekends of the year without fear and without an offensive march taking place.

12:30

Meeting suspended until 14.00.

14:00

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Education and Young People, Tourism, Culture and Sport

Sports Grounds (Racism and Bigotry)

1. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to eradicate instances of racism and bigotry in Scottish sports grounds. (S20-5138)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): The Executive is committed to tackling all forms of racist or bigoted behaviour wherever it manifests itself. We seek to work with a range of sports organisations, and our support for the Show Racism the Red Card campaign is a good example of our work to eradicate racist behaviour in football.

Richard Baker: Does the minister agree that to combat instances of racism and bigotry in football, continued support for initiatives such as the Show Racism the Red Card campaign is vital, particularly in the light of the successful education event at Aberdeen Football Club in December? That event was run by Show Racism the Red Card, hosted by Aberdeen Football Club and attended by 100 young people. How will the Executive ensure that racism is countered not only in football grounds, but in every sporting arena?

Patricia Ferguson: Richard Baker makes a valid point when he talks about other sporting activities and not only football. We need to keep our momentum going in that area and to observe carefully what is happening. He is also right to highlight the initiative in his local area, as such initiatives will help to make racism in sport a thing of the past. The Executive has supported the work of Show Racism the Red Card and has demonstrated that support by contributing some £75,000 over three years to help the organisation to develop its campaign and promote its work in Scotland.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Is the minister aware that I have been in correspondence with the First Minister about correspondence that I have had with Premier League club managers on an awards scheme that is based on the Investors in People model? Awards would be made to clubs that take a lead in removing racism and sectarianism from the terraces. I know that a summit is coming up, but will the minister look favourably on the suggestion,

as I have received favourable responses from Premier League managers?

Patricia Ferguson: I am aware that Christine Grahame has been in correspondence with the First Minister about her idea of an awards scheme. We must consider any opportunity to promote the issue in all sports in Scotland, which Richard Baker rightly mentioned. I am certainly happy to consider the idea and, if appropriate, to discuss it with any footballing or other organisation in the sporting world that has an interest in the matter.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Does the minister agree that one of the main causes of aggravation in football stadia is the sale of sectarian flags, tee-shirts and other mementos, and that more tactful control could and should be exercised over the sale of such products?

Patricia Ferguson: Jamie McGrigor is right to identify such items as part of the problem, but I would not by any means say that they are the whole problem. Obviously, we want to try to change the attitudes of those who display those items, many of which are sold at a distance from grounds—as a result, it can be difficult for the authorities to do very much about things. However, they are part of what must be addressed.

Tourism Funding (Edinburgh)

2. Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what dedicated funding is available to market Edinburgh as a tourist destination. (S20-5143)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): The share of VisitScotland's budget for marketing Edinburgh this year is around £2.6 million, which includes £668,000 for business tourism marketing. Edinburgh will also benefit from VisitScotland's new city/rural campaign, which will equate to a further £2 million of marketing spend on Edinburgh and the surrounding area.

Mr MacAskill: I am grateful for the minister's answer and am aware of the written answer that she has previously given that confirms those figures.

Perhaps the minister will clarify why the principal organisation that is responsible for marketing Edinburgh—Edinburgh and Lothians Tourist Board—disclosed only £367,000 received from VisitScotland in grant in aid. Given the proposed abolition of that organisation, will she assure me and other city of Edinburgh representatives that the missing millions will be found so that the city, which is a major draw and gateway, is fully marketed?

Patricia Ferguson: I would not for a moment want to underestimate the effect and impact that

Edinburgh has as a gateway to the rest of Scotland, and we are keen to ensure that account is taken of the area. However, funding goes to the particular organisation that Mr MacAskill highlighted from a variety of sources. Tourism is not just about what VisitScotland does; it is about what a number of other partners and, indeed, all of us do to welcome people to our country. The money that I am talking about is that which VisitScotland is using to market Edinburgh. I think that that was the information that Mr MacAskill asked for.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Will the minister kindly give an assurance to the Parliament that the network of local tourist information centres in Edinburgh and the Lothians will be maintained and enhanced following the reorganisation of VisitScotland in April?

Patricia Ferguson: We are working hard with all the partner organisations to make sure that the moneys available are maintained at their present level. So far, the indications that we have are very good. A number of local authorities have indicated that they plan to increase the amount of their contribution to the partnerships that will evolve. I am heartened by that and I hope that other local authorities will work in a similar manner.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Has the Scottish Executive received any recommendations from the so-called welcome tsar, Councillor Eric Milligan, about the promotion of Edinburgh as a tourist destination? Will the minister tell us how much that initiative cost and when the report will be published?

Patricia Ferguson: The initiative to which Mr Swinney refers is not within my remit entirely; it is shared across a number of portfolios, as Mr Swinney will be aware from previous questions and answers. I am not aware of whether that particular report has been submitted yet. I understand that Mr Milligan will not look at Edinburgh alone, but that he will look at how Scotland is perceived on first impression. I reiterate that it is not just Mr Milligan's responsibility to be aware of that; the responsibility rests with all of us.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Rural Schools (Sports Co-ordinators)

4. Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to support sports co-ordinators serving rural schools. (S20-5115)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): I apologise for the delay in answering; I feel slightly schizophrenic jumping from one part of my portfolio to another.

Sportscotland, on behalf of the Executive, is working with local authorities throughout Scotland to develop, support and monitor the active schools staffing network across Scotland.

Richard Lochhead: I understand that schoolchildren in Aberdeenshire and other rural areas of Scotland are losing out because of the cost implications of delivering that service in rural areas. As the minister will appreciate, there are two extra factors to consider in rural areas. First, the cost of transporting children is higher. Secondly, the sports co-ordinators have to spend extra time travelling between schools because they serve a cluster of schools at one time. Will the minister tell the chamber whether those factors have been taken into account? If not, I would be grateful if she would do so, because schoolchildren in rural areas are losing out.

Patricia Ferguson: We have taken the issues into account. The way in which allocations were calculated for each local authority was not based on school population alone, but on the geography of the local authority area. That has meant that rural local authorities, such as Aberdeenshire, which the member mentioned, have received a proportionately bigger allocation than they would have done if school population alone were taken into account. In addition, every co-ordinator has a budget that can be used to assist with transport facilities and I hope that it will be used in that way in those particular areas.

The Presiding Officer: Question 5 is from Wendy Alexander. Members are aware that I am required to call the question if the member is not here.

Scottish Opera

6. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will ensure the sustainability of the Scottish Opera chorus. (S2O-5128)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): The employment of performers, including future contractual arrangements for chorus members, is a matter for the management of the company.

Pauline McNeill: The minister will be aware that Scottish Opera's headquarters are in my constituency and that a number of my constituents are employed in the chorus. She will also be aware that there is an agreement to sustain 20 chorus jobs until June 2005. Given that Scottish Opera has had excellent reviews this season, will she assure me that she understands the importance of retaining a full-time chorus? I hope that she is willing to work with the company to ensure that all options to retain the full-time chorus, including lifting the redundancy option in June 2005, will be considered.

Patricia Ferguson: I am sorry, Presiding Officer—I missed the very end of Ms McNeill's supplementary. However, I will say that, over the past year, I have attended several of the performances that she referred to and she is absolutely right to mention their quality. Indeed, not only were the performances of the greatest quality but the audiences found them greatly enjoyable.

I understand that, to date, Scottish Opera has achieved approximately 50 per cent of its planned staffing reductions and that a number of posts have been identified for redundancy in 2005. However, the first stage of the redundancy process, which has been agreed by the company and Equity, is now complete. At the end of the day, this is a matter for the company itself.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): If Scottish Opera were able to find commercial, charitable or other funding that would allow it to put on shows at a time when it is making such great cuts, would the minister be able to co-operate and provide some funds to supplement that? That could help the company to keep going more actively and to find more work for the chorus and other interested people.

Patricia Ferguson: I repeat that Scottish Opera's operation and management are matters for the company's team of managers. The current situation is of Scottish Opera's own design; after all, it has agreed that way forward after discussions with the Scottish Arts Council. That said, the SAC has established a monitoring group that will examine the progress that has been made over this period and which will obviously take all relevant matters into account.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Does the minister recall that the Edinburgh International Festival was initially based on opera? Indeed, does she acknowledge that Scottish Opera has been an icon of excellence for Scotland for a long time? Furthermore, is she aware that it languishes at the bottom of western league tables as far as funding for opera is concerned? Will she free up some of the money that has been ring fenced for arts in Scotland to ensure that it receives more funding in the way that the Jonas report identified?

Patricia Ferguson: I am not sure that the Jonas report said that. In any case, if Mr McGrigor is suggesting that money should be taken away from other areas of arts and culture in Scotland, I do not think that such a proposal would meet with much interest or applause in other parts of the artistic world.

It is possible that Scottish Opera could come out of its current situation in better form than it went into it. I think that it is an absolutely valuable part

of Scotland's artistic life; I certainly take a very keen interest in it and will continue to do so. However, at the moment, I do not intend to interfere in the company's management.

Olympic Games 2012

7. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what independent assessment has been made of the costs and benefits to Scotland of holding the 2012 Olympics in London. (S2O-5049)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): The Scottish Executive has not commissioned an independent assessment of the likely costs and benefits to Scotland of a London games. However, we are committed to working with the United Kingdom Government and others to maximise the potential benefits in areas such as sport, tourism and business.

Alex Neil: I draw the minister's attention to the document "Scotland backs the bid", which has been published by the Scottish Executive and its agencies and focuses on the advantages to Scotland of a London games. However, if no assessment has been made of the likely costs or advantages, is the Scottish Executive literally ignorant of what those benefits and costs to Scotland would be? Is the document's premise totally false?

Patricia Ferguson: I find Mr Neil's inconsistency on this matter particularly interesting. Indeed, on Wednesday, he assured me and the members of his own Enterprise and Culture Committee that he personally very much backed London's bid for a UK Olympic games.

Alex Neil: But not at any cost.

Patricia Ferguson: I am sorry, but Mr Neil did not qualify his comment at the time. I am more than happy to pass on Mr Neil's endorsement to Lord Coe and the bid committee in London; I am sure that they would be happy to use his endorsement in future. Perhaps if we produce a refresh of the document that Mr Neil referred to, we could have a quote from him to explain his views exactly.

I draw Mr Neil's attention to the fact that, when Sydney hosted the Olympic games, the training camp used by the British team was some 500 miles from Sydney. That is the kind of opportunity that we should not forget. I also draw his attention to the fact that a very small company, also based some hundreds of miles from Sydney, gained a very important engineering contract. Four years later, when Athens was carrying out a similar exercise, it also took advantage of that company's strengths.

In the document that Mr Neil refers to, there is a quote from Iain McMillan, the director of the

Confederation of British Industry Scotland, who says:

"I wholeheartedly support London's Olympic bid. Bringing the biggest sporting event in the world to the UK will benefit the whole of the UK—including Scotland."

If Mr Neil has read the document, he will know that that could be said not only for business but for arts and culture, for education and, of course, for sport. Not least—given my portfolio interest—it could be said for tourism. We should all be working to take those opportunities. That is what the Executive is doing.

Education (Science and Mathematics)

8. Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that sufficient numbers of pupils are taking science and mathematics courses in senior 4 to senior 6. (S2O-5105)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson): As Mr Morgan will know, the school curriculum is non-statutory. It is therefore for schools and students themselves to decide on the courses studied from S4 to S6. One priority area of school science education identified in the Executive's science strategy is to promote science as a career option.

Alasdair Morgan: The minister may be aware of a recent report by the Save British Science Society, which highlighted the cancellation of a worrying number of practical lessons in Scottish schools because of poor resources. It also highlighted the fact that a large number of teachers of science subjects are saying that their budgets for laboratory equipment are inadequate.

Will the minister concede that, if we are to attract sufficient pupils into science subjects, we certainly do not want to be downgrading the practical side of science lessons? What action will he take in that regard?

Euan Robson: I am well aware of that survey and its results. Since January 2002, the Scottish Executive has provided education authorities with £16 million to enable primary and secondary schools to buy science equipment and to allow teachers to update their skills. A further £2 million will be provided in 2005-06. That money, I think, will be ring fenced. We have made it clear to education authorities that the funding is to help schools to achieve the aims of the science strategy.

Under the McCrone agreement, opportunities exist for continuing professional development for science teachers. Opportunities also exist in the announcements that we have made in "Better Behaviour—Better Learning"; in the money that was recently made available to local authorities for

school assistants; and in the recent announcements on school discipline. That will allow us to address the specific issue of practical lessons being cancelled, as mentioned in the survey.

In addition, we are investing substantially in the school estate. Recent school fund announcements—additional to that investment—will enable, for example, specific attention to be given to connectivity for broadband and to science laboratories and other similar facilities, if local authorities so require.

Sport (National Governing Bodies)

9. Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to improve the funding of sports' national governing bodies. (S2O-5052)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): Executive funding for sports' governing bodies is routed through sportscotland, the national agency for the development of sport in Scotland. Funding is awarded against a development plan for each sport and its ability to deliver across the three aims of sport 21: widening opportunities; developing potential; and achieving excellence.

Michael Matheson: Will the minister explain why, since 1999, a major national governing body such as the Scottish Rugby Union has experienced a real-terms reduction of some 25 per cent in the development grant aid that it receives from sportscotland, while equestrian sport has experienced a real-terms increase of some 71 per cent over the same timescale? Will she also explain why it is that when members ask written questions on the issue, she refuses to answer them and instead refers them to sportscotland, but when sportscotland has an announcement to make on a spending initiative, she is more than happy to make it?

Patricia Ferguson: If sportscotland wished me to be involved in an announcement that it wished to make, it would be churlish of me to turn down such an invitation. Similarly, it is entirely appropriate—as I am sure that the Parliament's guidelines indicate—for members' attention to be drawn to the existence of bodies such as sportscotland when they ask questions.

I point out to Mr Matheson that, since 1997, the Scottish Rugby Union has received directly almost £5 million in development grant aid and that, under the current four-year agreement, which ends on 31 March, future funding will be set against that sport's plan for taking the game forward. In addition, Scottish rugby has benefited directly by almost £1.5 million through a number of other programmes run by sportscotland.

Finance and Public Services and Communities

Small Businesses (Payment of Bills)

1. Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to ensure the timeous payment of bills to small businesses. (S2O-5093)

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Tavish Scott): The Scottish Executive seeks to pay all invoices promptly. We are constantly improving our procedures to speed up our invoice processing. Our e-procurement Scotland system and our use of the Government procurement card offer particular benefits to small and medium-sized businesses.

Mr Maxwell: I am sure that the minister is aware that small businesses suffer greatly from the curse of the late payment of invoices. Indeed, there are reports that some of them have even gone out of business because of that problem. He will also be aware that local authorities and the Executive are regular offenders and that the percentage of invoices that are paid on time varies from 64 per cent to 95 per cent. What action will he take to ensure that the Executive improves its current rate, whereby 77.5 per cent of invoices are paid on time? What plans does he have to ensure that all local authorities live up to their responsibilities to small business and that authorities such as Inverclyde Council are no longer allowed to get away with paying only 64 per cent of their invoices on time?

Tavish Scott: I accept that the figure that Mr Maxwell gave for our performance on payment in 2003-04 was unacceptable. The Executive has taken steps to make a substantial improvement in performance. Overall, we are now paying more than 90 per cent of invoices on time. That contrasts with the figure of 77 per cent, which Mr Maxwell was right to mention. I expect the performance of the Executive and its agencies to get even better by the end of the current financial year. We want ministers to be clear about the need to ensure that, in future, timeous payment rates get back to the level at which they were before the change in the system that took place some years ago. We also expect local authorities to achieve the targets that we achieve.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I welcome the minister's comments on the public sector, but I wonder whether there is anything that he could do to ensure that the partner companies that are involved with the public sector in private finance initiatives meet their invoice commitments and pay their smaller contractors. Does he feel that he could have an influence on that? In particular, I am thinking of the situation that arose

in relation to East Lothian's schools, when many small businesses went bankrupt because of a failure to pay.

Tavish Scott: I accept that late payment is a serious issue in the private sector as well as in the public sector. If Mr Gallie wants to raise a specific example, we would be more than happy to consider it on his behalf. It is certainly our intention that, in all the areas in which we have influence with regard to the payment of invoices, we will seek to achieve the standard that we achieve internally across all our responsibilities.

Community Planning (Allotments)

2. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to encourage local authorities to include the provision of allotments in their community planning strategies. (S2O-5066)

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): The provision of allotments is a matter for individual local authorities rather than the Executive. Those authorities are best placed to deal with the specific needs of their communities and the development of allotment policy and management. Powers already exist for local authorities to provide allotments where there is a proven need for them.

Donald Gorrie: Will the minister talk to some of his colleagues and explore what scope exists for encouraging councils to develop a good policy on allotments as part of the community planning process? Allotments help to develop community life. They are tended by individuals, but those individuals work alongside other individuals in the community to provide something of general benefit. Allotments improve health through exercise, improve diet through fresh fruit and provide fresh flowers. They have a lot things going for them but, for some historical reason, some areas in the country do not have allotments. They are especially good in areas with lots of housing and little ground. Will he encourage councils to use their powers to encourage allotments?

Mr McCabe: When the previous session's Local Government Committee examined that issue some time ago, it recommended the creation of good practice guidance. The Executive has been liaising with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the development of that guidance, although I understand that the City of Edinburgh Council has developed its own internal guidance. I also understand that the council's guidance has been warmly received by other authorities and there is a possibility that other authorities throughout Scotland could pick it up.

I will make a brief comment on community planning. Community plans are not submitted to

the Scottish Executive. The aim of community planning is to promote and engender local decision making, and the system, by its nature, would not be working properly if the Executive tried to exert undue influence on it.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Petition PE280, on allotments, was lodged in October 2000 but, although the protection of allotments has been batted about for the past four and a half years, we still have no result—not even a set of guidelines worked out between the Executive and COSLA. I am aware of what the City of Edinburgh Council has done, and I am happy about that. Does the minister accept that, considering that the Allotments (Scotland) Act 1892 would allow allotment holders to set up pigsties and to farm pigs on their allotments, the legislation on allotments is in need of review and should contain some protection for allotments?

Mr McCabe: I do not have any principled objection to the farming of pigs on allotments, and I am extremely surprised that Mr Harper would have. I stress that decisions about allotments are properly to be taken locally. Since the advent of our new constitutional arrangements, there has been a worry that the Executive would involve itself in matters that are properly the domain of local government, and we in the Executive are conscious that we should not unnecessarily disrupt arrangements that have stood the test of time and are still in place today.

Housing Stock Transfer

3. Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how stock transfer has benefited the communities where it has been implemented. (S2O-5117)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont): Community ownership of the housing stock is bringing a huge range of benefits in those areas where it is being implemented. Not only is it leading to an unparalleled level of investment in new and better-quality housing, but crucially, it is putting tenants at the centre of the decision-making process. We are delighted that those benefits are being recognised by a number of other local authorities that have successfully joined the Executive's community ownership programme.

Maureen Macmillan: Will the minister outline the advantages that she believes there will be for tenants in the Highland Council area if they agree to a stock transfer going ahead? Will she also assure me that the Executive will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the pressured area provisions and the social housing exemption from the Title Conditions (Scotland) Act 2003 to determine whether those measures give sufficient long-term protection to community housing that is

under severe pressure from the second-home market?

Johann Lamont: There would, of course, be significant benefits to the Highlands if the community ownership programme was agreed to, and we welcome Highland Council's decision in that regard. Community ownership would offer the opportunity for significant investment to modernise houses, provide tenants with guarantees about future rent increases and, crucially, involve tenants in decisions about their homes, which makes it far more likely that investment will stick in the longer term and create the benefit that we want. However, I emphasise that community ownership is not the only thing that we are doing on housing in the Highlands and elsewhere. There is £79.2 million in the development programme for rural housing investment, £24.2 million of which is available to the Highlands and Islands.

The point that Maureen Macmillan makes about sustaining the social rented sector is important, and I assure her that we will monitor closely whatever levers exist. Local authorities already have opportunities through the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to take action in cases where they feel that social rented housing is vulnerable. We are investing in a range of opportunities in rural housing—and in non-rural housing in parts of the Highlands, of course—and the community ownership programme is a significant part of that.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Will the minister consider how communities that have rejected stock transfer might also gain the benefits of the writing off of capital debt, as happens where stock transfer has taken place?

Johann Lamont: People must make an informed decision and a judgment. They know that one of the benefits of transfer to community ownership is the writing off of debt. Will they opt for a transfer, with the benefits and the opportunity for increased investment that that brings, or will they opt for an alternative, with retention, the use of the prudential borrowing scheme or a combination of partial transfer and some retention? People have to make that decision on an informed basis. Because of its other benefits—not just those associated with the writing off of debt—including tenant involvement at the centre of the process, the community ownership option is a serious one, which a number of authorities have already taken.

Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Bill

4. Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what the financial impact of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Bill will be on the funding of non-departmental public bodies. (S2O-5062)

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): The financial memorandum accompanying the bill included an estimate of £10 million a year as the potential cost, excluding donations, to those non-departmental public bodies that currently hold charity status, were they to lose it. The five cultural national collections NDPBs estimate that some £10 million per annum of projected funding for special projects is dependent on charitable funding over the next 10 years. The total average financial impact is now estimated to be some £20 million a year.

Alasdair Morgan: I thank the minister for clarifying that if those bodies lose their charitable status as a result of the legislation, many millions of pounds of charitable donations will be lost—they will either go elsewhere or they will no longer be subject to tax relief. That loss would be disastrous and unacceptable. Does he think that a formula will be found to allow those bodies to retain their charitable status? That has apparently been the case with the bodies' sister organisations south of the border.

Malcolm Chisholm: Johann Lamont and I are considering the issue seriously and in detail. I have met representatives of the national collections NDPBs within the past two weeks to discuss the matter and I have also been discussing it with Patricia Ferguson. The issue is complex. There was a recommendation in the McFadden commission's review about the independence of charities, which raised questions about NDPBs. I of course recognise the serious issues at stake and assure the member that we want to find a way out of the present difficulty. Johann Lamont will be giving details of our plans when she goes before the Communities Committee on Wednesday.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): Is the minister aware that that issue has exercised the Communities Committee in particular? Is he also aware that the concerns of the national collections bodies relate not solely to philanthropic donations, but to the possibility of losing Government indemnity in hosting exhibitions comprising artwork brought from outside the United Kingdom? We might lose out on pieces of artwork or on contributions that would be of merit to Scotland, which would be not only a financial loss, but a cultural loss.

Malcolm Chisholm: I thank Karen Whitefield for drawing that to the attention of the Parliament. The national collections bodies described some of those matters to me in detail when I met some of their representatives recently. We are determined to take action to address the problem. We have one or two options before us and Johann Lamont will give details of our plans when she appears before the Communities Committee next week.

National Health Service (Pensions)

5. Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP):

To ask the Scottish Executive what action it will take to protect the pension rights of national health service workers. (S2O-5076)

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Tavish Scott): In line with United Kingdom Government policy—pension policy is reserved—the NHS pension scheme in Scotland is currently under review. The review is being conducted by the Scottish pensions review group, which is a partnership between NHS employers and trade unions. A public consultation on options for the scheme was launched on Monday of this week. The consultation period ends on 25 April 2005.

Carolyn Leckie: Given the link between low pensions and early death, will the Executive acknowledge that increasing the retiral age is a cynical exploitation of people who are most at risk of dying younger? Dave Prentis, the general secretary of Unison and a member of the Labour Party said:

“To suggest that NHS workers should be forced to work until they are 65 is living in cloud cuckoo land. 73% of paramedics are forced to retire through ill-health before they reach the age of 60, let alone carry on until they are 65. Forcing staff to work longer will simply raise the level of ill-health retirements and end up costing the NHS more.”

Does the minister agree? Will the Executive use its powers and state now that NHS workers in Scotland will not have to work until they are 65 or until they drop, whichever comes soonest?

The Presiding Officer: Close, please.

Carolyn Leckie: That would be the most effective way of putting pressure on Labour MPs—who have very pretty pensions, thank you very much—to protect the pension rights of NHS workers in England and Wales, too.

Tavish Scott: I am pleased that the trade unions in Scotland will be part of the review and the consultation. They will have a considerable opportunity, as will other interested parties and individuals, to make representations as part of that consultation. Overall pension policy is reserved. Ministers are strongly of the view that there is a logic to maintaining reasonable continuity in pension arrangements throughout the United Kingdom. That remains the position, but the consultation will clearly raise issues on that matter.

Eco-friendly and Self-build Housing

6. Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what support it is giving to the provision of eco-friendly and self-build housing. (S2O-5088)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont): Our investment in affordable

housing is underpinned by Communities Scotland's sustainable development policy and its “Sustainable Housing Design Guide for Scotland”, which provides advice on design, materials and the use of energy and physical resources. In this financial year, Communities Scotland investment of £2.6 million in rural home ownership grants is expected to support 90 houses, mainly through self-build.

Rob Gibson: The minister will be aware of the imperative as a result of climate change for a step change in the way in which we construct houses in this country. That was instanced in the Western Isles with the problems during the recent storm, but it is writ large throughout the country. Does she agree that, on a large scale and on an individual basis, encouraging a greater percentage of eco-friendly houses will be a necessity and that the sooner instructions and guidelines are produced to help with that, the better?

Johann Lamont: I do not think that anything that Rob Gibson said conflicts with the general thrust of Scottish Executive policy. Since 2002, all houses funded by Communities Scotland have required to achieve an energy efficiency standard that is higher than that required by building regulations. Ninety-seven per cent of new-build houses funded by Communities Scotland in the past financial year achieved its energy efficiency target. In 2003-04, average CO₂ emissions in new-build properties funded by housing association grants were down from 2.9 tonnes to 1.7 tonnes.

All the key identifiers in the Communities Scotland programme—the use of brownfield sites, energy efficiency and average energy costs—tend in the right direction in achieving our policy aims. There is a lesson to be learned from that. It is important that we continue dialogue with those who have an interest in the different things that we can do to achieve those aims. Because its funding from the Scottish Executive is so significant, Communities Scotland has an important role to play in securing the energy efficient and eco-friendly buildings that Rob Gibson mentions.

Borders Railway (Funding)

7. Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform has had with the Minister for Transport regarding the funding for the Borders railway, when those discussions took place, and whether they have been concluded. (S2O-5081)

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Tavish Scott): Finance ministers discussed the funding for the Borders railway as part of the spending review 2004 and have regular discussions with the Minister for Transport about all the Executive's major transport

capital projects. A final decision on that particular project will be made in the next few weeks.

Christine Grahame: The minister will appreciate people's concerns, because it has been requested that the business case be reviewed not to take account of the number of people travelling and travel times, but to examine the revenue from the line. Will he assure me that that is not a negative step in relation to funding the line, as the Borders rail forum is greatly concerned that it is?

Tavish Scott: I confirm that it is not a negative issue whatsoever.

General Questions

Fife Council (Meetings)

1. Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met Fife Council to discuss rail and road infrastructure in the Dunfermline travel-to-work area. (S2O-5097)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): My officials and I meet representatives of Fife Council on a regular basis to discuss various subjects, including road and rail projects. The most recent meetings were in the later part of 2004.

Scott Barrie: The minister might be aware of the forthcoming major road works on the A985 Torryburn bypass at the bridge over the Bluther burn, which will result in the total closure of the road for a fortnight and a further 30 weeks of traffic-signalled single-lane traffic. The road is the main route in and out of Dunfermline via the Kincardine bridge. Does he agree that the road works will be a major disruption for local people? Does he also agree that the road and rail infrastructure in south Fife must be improved if those in the Dunfermline travel-to-work area are to be able to maximise their employment opportunities?

Nicol Stephen: I certainly understand that there will be disruption. The work is due to start on 31 January. No traffic management measures are proposed; in other words, the road will be used in its current form until 14 February. After that, the central section of the bridge is due to be jacked up so that work can proceed. In order to let traffic use the route, the contractor will erect a temporary bridge. There will be four overnight closures between 10 pm and 5 am when the bridge is erected and four overnight closures to remove the bridge. The contract period is 26 weeks. When the temporary bridge is in place, traffic will be reduced to a single lane controlled by traffic signals. We will do everything that we can to minimise the disruption, but the work is clearly necessary.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I would like to ask the minister about disabled access at train stations—not for the first time in this chamber—with particular regard to stations at Cowdenbeath, Lochgelly and Cardenden. The constituency that I have the privilege to represent has the highest level of disability shown in the health profiles that the Scottish Executive produced. Despite my numerous requests to the minister, Fife Council, the train operators and Network Rail, we are not making any progress on the issue. Will the minister either tell me when he thinks progress will be made on the issue or agree to meet me to discuss it as a matter of urgency?

Nicol Stephen: There will be investment in our rail stations as a result of the ScotRail franchise. We are investing in improvements at Waverley station now that the phase 1 project is going ahead. We will introduce more lifts there and there will be improved disabled access. There will also be improvements at Haymarket.

The primary responsibility for disability access and all disability issues remains with the United Kingdom Government, which is responsible for disability legislation. It also remains responsible for safety issues and disability access issues in relation to the UK rail network, even after the settlement that was agreed yesterday.

First ScotRail (Meetings)

2. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will next meet First ScotRail. (S2O-5043)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): Officials are due to meet the managing director of First ScotRail next week.

Iain Smith: Will the minister ask his officials when they meet First ScotRail to raise two issues of concern to my constituents in North East Fife and to people in other parts of Fife? One is the relatively poor performance of First ScotRail in relation to overcrowding and punctuality since it took over the franchise in the Fife rail network. The second is on the information that is available to passengers about what services are or are not running during periods of severe weather. During the recent severe weather, there was a terrible lack of updated information, even on the websites, about which trains were running, where they were running to and which stations were open. That caused great concern and confusion to passengers. I hope that the minister will ask his officials to take up those matters with First ScotRail as a matter of urgency.

Nicol Stephen: I refer first to the second issue. There were serious problems throughout Scotland's transport network as a result of the recent severe weather and I have asked for a

meeting with officials from all the relevant sections of the Enterprise, Transport & Lifelong Learning Department—not only those dealing with rail, but those dealing with our road network, our ferry network and our air network—to ensure that we are addressing the points that Iain Smith raised. If we are going to have severe weather in Scotland more often, we have to get geared up to tackling such problems and to responding with good-quality information to passengers.

On the first part of the question, there have been difficulties for rail passengers over the past few months. Some of those problems have been caused by the severe weather. Not all of them have been caused by First ScotRail; there have been continuing issues involving Network Rail. However, First ScotRail accepts its share of the responsibility for some of the difficulties in Fife. That is one of the reasons why we intend to have regular meetings with First ScotRail, particularly during the early stage of the franchise. It is vital that service levels improve.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Since 1999, all the Fife MSPs have repeatedly raised the issue of the appalling service that rail passengers in Fife get. I agree with Iain Smith that the service has not improved one whit since First ScotRail took over the franchise—in fact, it has got worse. Can the minister knock heads together in First ScotRail to ensure that the passengers in Fife, who are paying an absolute fortune to travel by public transport, get the kind of deal that they deserve?

Nicol Stephen: The first thing to emphasise is that it is in nobody's interest to have poor-quality rail services. If the services are poor, the franchisee faces significant penalties under the contract. Poor services are bad news for passengers and for the reputation of the rail industry at a time when we are trying to expand rail. We are extending platforms and introducing new trains with higher capacity for the Fife circle services. The improvements at Waverley will have an impact, as services across the Forth rail bridge will increase. The work that is being done to introduce the Stirling-Alloa-Kinross line will also bring benefits. I give the improvement of rail services in Scotland a high priority and will meet regularly First ScotRail, Network Rail and everyone else who is involved in rail provision in Scotland to ensure that standards improve.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I thank the minister for meeting me, my colleague Euan Robson and the Waverley rail partnership to discuss the progress of the Borders rail link project. When he meets First ScotRail next week, will he impress on it the importance of the Borders rail link as an integral part of the ScotRail franchise and the fact that,

once the proposals receive parliamentary approval and the project is constructed, the line will benefit the Borders area by connecting it to the rest of the UK rail network?

Nicol Stephen: I compliment my colleague for getting in a reference to the Borders rail link on the back of this question. Officials from my department will meet First ScotRail next week; I will not have that opportunity. However, as Mr Purvis well knows, my colleagues in the Finance and Central Services Department and I are paying close attention to the Borders rail link business case and we expect to be able to reach a decision on it in the next few weeks.

Roads (Maintenance)

3. Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will reconsider spending levels in respect of the maintenance of roads, in light of the view of the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland that a 10-year programme costing £3.87 billion is required to bring them up to a reasonable standard. (S20-5040)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): We have already announced that grant-aided expenditure provision to local authorities for roads maintenance will increase by £60 million a year in 2006-07 and 2007-08. That represents an increase of 23 per cent on the current allocation.

Fergus Ewing: Although that increase is welcome, the minister will be aware that SCOTS also said that the

“additional £60 million ... falls well short of the funding needed to redress the current backlog”

over a 10-year period. Can he continue to earn the high opinion that I hold of him as an intelligent individual by agreeing with me that, unless the work is done this year to maintain our road network, this year's pothole will become next year's crater and the cost of dealing with it will escalate? Does he agree that priorities should be reassessed and higher priority should be given to the state of our roads, which are in a state of decay and disrepair that borders on decrepitude?

Nicol Stephen: Follow that.

I urge all local authorities to spend the extra £60 million that they will receive each year from 2006 on road repairs and maintenance. It is vital that that additional investment is made. Road investment should not be seen as a Cinderella service; it is crucial to business, to the economy throughout Scotland and to local communities.

Each of the 32 local authority areas is expressing to me huge interest in the quality of our roads, but I cannot make the investment decisions

for local authorities. This is a vital time of year for setting budgets and making allocations. As Fergus Ewing well knows, because of the area that he comes from, a significant number of local authorities underspend their GAE allocation. Without centrally directing those resources, we can do little. However, we are allocating significant extra expenditure for local authorities to invest in roads maintenance and repair.

Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): Recent surveys of local authority spend on roads have shown West Lothian Council to be responsible and high performing. The minister may be aware that, this morning, a jackknifed lorry on the A801, which is known locally as the Avon gorge road, caused great chaos and blocked what is not only a local road, but a road that has major strategic resonance between the M8 and the M9. Will he agree to continue discussions with West Lothian Council, Falkirk Council, Cathy Peattie and me to ensure that the necessary works on that road are undertaken as quickly as possible?

Nicol Stephen: Yes. I am aware of the incident this morning and the disruption that it caused. The Avon gorge scheme is one to which high priority should be given. It is one scheme that regional transport partnerships will be able to focus on and invest in. We will give those partnerships £35 million a year from April 2006, when they will be established in a statutory form. I want a higher priority to be given to such projects, which we must deliver in the next few years.

Electricity Generation (Greenhouse Gases)

4. Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment it has made of emissions of greenhouse gases from the electricity generating stations at Hunterston and Torness. (S2O-5061)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): It will come as no surprise to participants in this morning's energy debate that nuclear power generation produces no significant greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr Home Robertson: That means that Torness and Hunterston generate more than 40 per cent of Scotland's electricity and export energy to other parts of the United Kingdom without emitting significant quantities of CO₂. Will the minister join me in congratulating his constituents and mine on that remarkable contribution to the Kyoto agenda to save the planet from global warming? Can he think of words to describe a political party that claims to be concerned about global warming but also calls for the early closure of Torness and Hunterston? Incidentally, how soon can we start work on Torness B and Hunterston C?

Allan Wilson: I pay tribute to electricity generator workers wherever they are in the United

Kingdom whose work contributes to low greenhouse gas emissions. As well as affecting greenhouse gas emissions, any policy of early closure would jeopardise the security of the power supply to our two great cities—Glasgow and Edinburgh—and therefore their significant contribution to jobs and prosperity in the east and west of Scotland. In that context, "imbecilic" is the word that springs to mind.

Haymarket Station (Disabled Access)

5. Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made in providing disabled access at Haymarket station. (S2O-5119)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): The Scottish Executive has recently announced funding of £750,000 for the City of Edinburgh Council to examine options for upgrading Haymarket. Those will include proposals for better disabled access.

Sarah Boyack: I very much welcome the minister's commitment to help that work to proceed. He may be aware that last week the First Minister kindly offered me a meeting with him to discuss the detailed timescale for the work. Can he announce today a timescale, to avoid the problems that occurred last year when Waverley station was shut for essential works and people were diverted miles from Haymarket? We have waited more than 20 years for lifts at Haymarket. I am glad that the money is coming, but will the minister give us a much firmer timescale, so that we can get the work done?

Nicol Stephen: I agree with Sarah Boyack that it is important that we get moving with projects of that scale and importance. That is why the go-ahead for phase 1 of the Waverley redevelopment is so important. It will be the first project of its scale to be delivered in Scotland for some significant time. The Haymarket project is also ambitious and considers that station as a future interchange for rail, bus, cars and trams. The project is big and the feasibility study will take around two years to complete. If we can fast-track any of the issues during that period, I would like that to be done—issues such as disability access are high on my priority list. One of the key reasons for the feasibility study is the need to look at the issues around the timetable for the completion and the phasing of the work. Throughout my time as Minister for Transport, I will ensure that projects of that scale and importance are progressed as quickly as possible.

Dumfries and Galloway (Radioactivity)

6. Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any concerns in respect of levels of

radioactivity in the environment in Dumfries and Galloway. (S2O-5164)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): The Executive takes a close interest in the work that is undertaken by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Food Standards Agency on monitoring and reporting the levels of radioactivity in the environment. Results in SEPA's and the FSA's latest report, "Radioactivity in Food and the Environment, 2003", show that the levels of radioactivity are well below currently acceptable levels.

Chris Ballance: Indeed, at 0.37mSv. However, is the minister aware that the Committee Examining Radiation Risks of Internal Emitters has reported "uncertainties" about the risks, meaning that, in some cases, we might be exposed to 10 times the risk that was previously thought to exist? A minority report has suggested that the true figure is 100 times the risk. Given that the level of reprocessing at Sellafield is currently being stepped up, will he ask SEPA to report on pathways for plutonium entering the bodies of people who live around the Solway coast?

Ross Finnie: I can only repeat to Chris Ballance that we take the matter very seriously. That is why SEPA and the FSA undertake a regular series of tests to enable them to monitor and report on the levels of radioactivity in that area. Chris Ballance refers to a minority report. Both those agencies are aware of the work that goes on. I do not think that we should necessarily found our concerns on a minority report; although we cannot entirely dismiss it, that is not the basis on which we would call for additional work to be done. SEPA and the FSA continue to monitor the situation and we continue to examine the results closely.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister concede that the major contributor to enhanced radioactivity in marine life on the Solway is nuclear emissions from the Sellafield plant? Is he surprised that that aspect of the nuclear power industry was not mentioned in Mr Home Robertson's earlier question?

Ross Finnie: That is a matter that Mr Morgan and Mr Home Robertson can discuss more beneficially than I can.

Air Quality

7. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will ensure that local authorities meet the targets on air quality. (S2O-5166)

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Lewis Macdonald): Local authorities have a duty under the Environment Act 1995 regularly to review and assess air quality in

their areas against the objectives that are contained in the air quality strategy. When an objective is unlikely to be met by the required date, the authority concerned must declare an air quality management area and draw up an action plan outlining how it intends to work towards achieving that objective.

Patrick Harvie: The minister might like to agree with me that Glasgow City Council's air quality action plan is somewhat curiously named, as it does not propose any actions to improve air quality and to reduce pollution to below the safe target levels. What action can the Executive take to ensure that city councils have a continuing programme of improvement that will bring air quality within the targets?

Lewis Macdonald: Glasgow City Council has prepared an air quality management area for part of the city centre. The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency have engaged closely with the council on that plan and we are confident that what the council proposes will allow it to take action and make progress towards reducing nitrogen dioxide and other pollutants during the next few years.

Sexual Health Strategy

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a statement by Andy Kerr on "Respect and Responsibility: Strategy and Action Plan for Improving Sexual Health". The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions.

15:00

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr): I am grateful to Parliament for the opportunity to make this statement.

We have published our strategy on sexual health today and copies are available in the Scottish Parliament information centre. In line with our convention, I made copies available to party leaders earlier today.

It is well known that sexual health in Scotland is poor. Sexually transmitted infections, such as chlamydia, are widespread and increasing. Teenage conceptions are among the highest in western Europe. Between 2002 and 2003, the reported incidence of chlamydia rose by 39 per cent to 9,066 cases among people under 25, and by 36 per cent to 4,160 cases among those over 25. According to the latest available worldwide comparative figures, Scotland's birth rate among those under 20 was 30.6 per 1,000, compared to 6.2 in the Netherlands, 8.1 in Denmark and 9.3 in France. The situation is also worse in some parts of the country than in others.

Improving our sexual health is central to our public health agenda. It is not something to be embarrassed about or to shrug off as someone else's responsibility. It is a problem for all of us—the young and the not so young. Among the over-40s, for example, the incidence of chlamydia and genital herpes doubled in the four years up to 2003.

The answers to improving sexual health lie with us. We can do something about it. Accurate and accessible information will help us to understand where the risks lie and how to prevent them. Access to medical and support services will help to counteract the spread of infection and support the decisions that have to be taken when someone is faced with an unplanned pregnancy. There should be encouragement to take personal responsibility for our own health and the health of those with whom we are having a relationship. Critically, we have to have the confidence to make our own individual and very personal decisions about how we will behave without the stigma or the accusation of not being in with the in crowd.

Sexual health can be a controversial subject. It touches on deeply held views on moral issues, it

challenges us on cultural and lifestyle diversity and it tests the strength of our tolerance. Our thinking has been informed by the work of the expert reference group, which we set up to look at those issues and I want to thank it for the important work that it did on our behalf. Not surprisingly, the extensive consultation exercise on its recommendations produced a diversity of strongly held and often opposing views. However, alongside that diversity of opinion there was a strong vein of support for the values of respect and responsibility.

The concepts of respect and responsibility are exemplified in strong and stable relationships, with marriage remaining a key pillar of our national life. Throughout the country there are differing views on the place of marriage as the touchstone of a strong and mature relationship, but the right focus for us in the Scottish Government and in the action that we take to promote sexual health is on the quality of relationships, whatever form they may take.

The strategy and action plan that I have published today are firmly based on the principles of self-respect, respect for others and strong relationships. The strategy recognises the diversity of lifestyles in Scotland today and the range of personal choices that people are making about how to live their lives and who to live them with. However, it is not value free. We support taking the approach of abstinence or choosing to delay sexual activity until a mature, respectful and loving relationship has been established. We support the right of people to have the self-respect and confidence to say no as well as yes and to have that choice respected.

Parents and carers will continue to be consulted on the sex and relationships education programmes and materials that are provided for their children. Young people will be encouraged to build respect for themselves and others, to have the confidence to make the right choices and to delay sexual activity until they are mature enough to have a mutually respectful and loving relationship.

In nursery and the early years of primary school, the emphasis will continue to be on family relationships and friendships and on developing an understanding of how we care for one another. All of us—young adults and older adults—are expected to take responsibility for making our own choices and protecting our health and the health of those with whom we have a relationship. However, making choices is possible only when people have the information that they need to help them to decide. Expecting personal responsibility to be exercised means that we have to give people the means to make their decisions. Therefore, accurate and accessible information is critical.

Respecting the right of each individual to have such information and to make their choice must not be limited by whether we like the choice that they make.

Our strategy sets out a coherent framework for improving sexual health in a way that is respectful of children's rights and of parental and personal responsibility. However, above all, the strategy is about improving Scotland's health. Our aim is to prevent sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancy through education, service provision and support; to provide better sexual health services, which are safe, local and appropriate; and to promote respect and responsibility through an approach that recognises cultural and religious diversity, challenges stereotypes and encourages a more open and mature view of sexual relationships.

Our action plan sets out the steps that we will take and those that we expect others to take to provide high-quality and accessible information and services equitably throughout Scotland. The plan does not promote sexual relationships among children; it does not bypass or dismiss the critical role and responsibilities of parents and carers; and it does not diminish or dismiss the importance of stable family relationships. However, the plan promotes the values of self-respect and respect for others; supports those who want to delay sexual activity until they are ready; and recognises the importance of having accurate information, the right skills and the knowledge to understand where the risks lie and how to prevent them. In essence, the message is, "Delay until you're ready, but be safe when you are active."

The best time and place to begin nurturing respect and responsibility are at an early age and in a stable and loving environment. Parents and carers have a major role to play in all aspects of their children's lives. It is they who offer a child stability, security and love. They have a critical role to play in their child's education and it is essential that parents and carers are involved and consulted on the sex and relationships education that is offered to their child.

Schools have a vital contribution to make. We will seek to work with the McCabe report's widely welcomed principles. That report had the agreement of all key stakeholders and it established the framework for the development and delivery of sex and relationships education here in Scotland. It is a framework in which pupils are

"encouraged to appreciate the value of stable family life ... the value of commitment in relationships and partnerships"

and to

"understand the importance of ... dignity, respect for themselves and the views of others."

Sex and relationships education programmes will take the form of abstinence-plus education, which aims to delay sexual activity, in combination with communication skills development and information about services.

All schools are expected to provide sex and relationships education of a high quality and to deliver it with sensitivity in a way that complements the role of parents and carers, is consistent with the principles and aims of the national guidance, and is linked to other relevant parts of the curriculum, such as religious and moral guidance and personal and social education.

Across our education service, denominational and non-denominational schools have made considerable progress in developing and delivering sex and relationships programmes. This strategy reinforces and supports their work. It is important that that work is supported by accessible health services. There is no single model for the development of links between health services and schools. Good and effective practice will involve collaboration between education authorities and health boards, in close consultation with the school community and in line with national guidance. The aim here is to ensure that pupils across Scotland have similar information about sexual health services and how to access them. Furthermore, we reaffirm our policy that the morning-after pill will not be available in schools.

Therefore, my clear message to young people is, "If you have got a question about your sexual health and you go and see a teacher, they will either offer you the help that you require or direct you to the appropriate service."

Our challenge is to secure a cohesive, seamless approach to clinical services. The fundamental principle that we are setting out is that every person should have a choice when accessing sexual health services and should be able to self-refer. Service redesign will be required to make best use of resources, with geographical outreach and extended opening becoming the norm. In particular, there must be a greater focus on rapid access to community-based care. To help to drive that process, each national health service board will be required to appoint a lead clinician to integrate sexual health services within their communities.

I believe that that is the right strategy for improving Scotland's sexual health, but it will be the quality and determination of our leadership that will be crucial to its success. There will be leadership at national level through the national advisory committee, which I will chair. At local level, there will be leadership through the work of health boards—an executive director will be nominated at board level and a lead clinician will

be appointed to drive forward the practical action that we have set out in our strategy. For NHS Quality Improvement Scotland, leadership means developing the right clinical standards to ensure consistency and quality in services across the country. There must also be leadership in the home, through the responsibility of parents and carers to support and guide their children as they grow in maturity and confidence.

Leadership and action are important, but resources are significant too. I am pleased to announce £15 million additional investment to deliver front-line services over the next three years.

Improving sexual health is about valuing and promoting respect for ourselves and for others and about nurturing our young people so that they grow up with the information that they need and with the confidence to make the choices that are right for them. For us adults, it is about taking responsibility for our actions and for our health. Today we have the opportunity to make a difference, but it demands the collective effort of everyone—parents, teachers, local authorities, health boards, ministers and indeed the media—to face up to that challenge and to turn the past months of debate and discussion into action. I believe that we can meet that challenge.

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): I thank the minister for providing me with an advance copy of his statement. Given the poor state of Scotland's sexual health, as outlined by the minister, it is disappointing that we have had to wait such a long time for the statement. In fact, it is five years since it was first mooted by Susan Deacon, when she was Minister for Health and Community Care. However, we welcome it now that it is here. In particular, we welcome the fact that the minister is prepared personally to oversee the national sexual health advisory committee and to chair it.

What are the timescales for implementation of the strategy? It appears that no timescales at all are given in the action plan. For example, when will health boards and local authorities be expected to have their local strategies in place? Does the minister believe that the £15 million additional investment for the next three years will be adequate to deliver the strategy, particularly given that John Reid announced £300 million for the sexual health strategy in England and Wales? Will the minister keep the level of funding under review as the strategy is implemented?

Mr Kerr: I welcome Shona Robison's comments. On the delay, as I have said frequently, the real task for the Government is to get it right and I believe that the comprehensive measures that we have taken to ensure extensive consultation will allow us to get the buy-in that we

need collectively to ensure the strategy's success. Although I want any Executive strategy to develop quickly, it is more important to ensure that it is developed properly. I believe that the extensive consultation and the work of the expert group have been significant in allowing us to reach the point that we have reached today, where I think that we will get community buy-in for the Executive's approach.

I am happy to oversee the work that we are doing personally, because sexual health clinicians have advised me that they sometimes feel as if they are the Cinderella part of our health service. I want to ensure that my personal involvement in overseeing the strategy gives it added weight and determination for delivery. I shall, of course, point out to health boards that they must provide professionals at local level to deliver the strategy.

I have to say that we have not been doing nothing in the meantime, and some of our statistics on teenage pregnancies and other such indicators have been improving. Nonetheless, we now have a comprehensive strategy. I have indicated in the strategy that we intend to use the centre for change and innovation, which is a successful part of the Executive, to bring clinicians together to develop the very point that Shona Robison made about implementation. It will not happen overnight, but within the next month the centre for change and innovation will get all the clinicians and experts in the field together to ensure that we can roll out the strategy and deliver it. As soon as that event has been held, we will begin to work to a reasonable timescale.

There is no point in me as a minister saying, "Let's have the strategy in place within six months." Issues of recruitment and training are involved and other aspects have to be dealt with. I also want the Executive's performance statistics to reflect the work that we will do on the strategy. Although there are a number of aspects to this work, the member can rest assured that we will not delay it. We want to deliver the strategy as quickly as we can, but we want to do it in a way that allows us to harness the support of the clinicians who are involved and, indeed, the wider community.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank the minister for providing us with an advance copy of his statement. I am particularly pleased to hear his comments about the encouragement of personal responsibility for one's own health and the need to have respect for the care and health of those for whom one has a responsibility. I appreciate the comments that he made about the family. I also appreciate the assurance that the minister gave that the morning-after pill will not be distributed like sweets in a

school—[*Interruption.*]—because of the danger to long-term health, I should add.

The minister said that parents and carers will be consulted. Surely the role of parents and carers is stronger than that. Will he assure them that they have the right to decide what their children should be taught, by whom and at what age? I am not arguing with the right of parents to buy into a school model; they have the choice to do so. Will the minister assure parents that if, having made that choice, they do not like the options that they are given in school, they can take action on the matter?

The minister said a little about abstinence-plus. I understand the role of abstinence in this area. It may not be an option that everyone can follow, which is fine, but when the minister talks of abstinence-plus, is he talking about the risks that someone takes in getting involved in what is a serious relationship step in their life as they grow up as a child or is he simply talking about mechanics?

Mr Kerr: As I said to the previous member, I say to David Davidson that he does professional colleagues in the health service a great disservice when he uses the sort of language that he used at the beginning of his question when he referred to the distribution of the morning-after pill as being like the distribution of “sweeties”. That was an incredibly inappropriate remark. That does not happen in the real world and the member should refrain from using such language.

Parents and carers are an integral part of the strategy, particularly in terms of the work that we do in education. If we could get past some of the headlines to some of the facts, we would find that parents can inspect all the materials that are being used and discuss the content of programmes with teachers. I recommend the useful guide “Sex Education in Scottish Schools: A Guide for Parents and Carers”—the member should read it closely. The guide tells parents and carers what will be taught in the school environment and gives them details of how to speak to head teachers and guidance teachers on these matters. It is absolutely the case that parents and carers are built into the strategy. Parents also contribute by the work that they do in schools through representative bodies.

It is clear that the rights and responsibilities of parents are set out in the strategy. Sometimes I wish that parents would take more interest in these matters. Parents should use the available resources and influence the process that happens in the community as a whole as well as in the school. As the member rightly said, at the end of the day, the parent has the right to decide on the education of their child.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The Scottish Liberal Democrats welcome the minister’s statement. The key issue for us is the confirmation that he made that the Executive is determined to ensure that access to sexual health advice and services for all our young people, whichever state school they attend, will be available on an equitable basis right across the nation.

In practical terms, it is clear that many young people are reluctant to go to their general practitioner or hospital clinic for sexual health advice or contraception because of their fear of a lack of confidentiality. Will the minister confirm that, under the Age of Legal Capacity (Scotland) Act 1991, a person under the age of 16 has the legal capacity to consent to their own medical treatment? Will he also confirm that with that right comes the right to confidentiality for that young person on the same basis as for an adult?

Mr Kerr: That is absolutely the case. Under section 2(4) of the 1991 act, such a guarantee is given in absolute terms to young people who are “capable of understanding the nature and possible consequences of procedure or treatments”.

Minor exceptions are made, but only in cases where there is the suspicion of abuse or criminal exploitation. With those exceptions, the right to confidentiality should be respected absolutely.

Of course, we are talking about confidentiality not only in the school environment but in rural communities across Scotland where the GP is well known and a young person may not feel comfortable about going to see them—the GP may be a family friend who may see the family in the community. Therefore, we are putting resources into the system to ensure that we get a good geographic spread of services.

I was remiss not to address David Davidson’s point about abstinence-plus, which is designed simply to ensure that young people make the choices that they want to make. It addresses the needs of young people to understand their bodies and their sexual health and to have the negotiating skills, confidence and ability to say no and feel comfortable about saying no. The Executive wants to ensure that it supports them. However, as I said earlier, the message is, “Delay until you’re ready, but be safe when you are active.”

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): I, too, am grateful to the minister for his statement, but will he say which of the expert reference group’s recommendations will not be taken forward by the Scottish Executive?

Mr Kerr: I spoke to the chair of the expert group just before I came to the chamber and firmly believe that the Executive has taken on the vast

majority of the group's recommendations. However, perhaps we differ in one area—the one-week issue relating to abortion. The expert reference group said that the maximum time should be one week, but we have stayed with the three-week guideline. Keeping the maximum time between the first appointment and termination to three weeks is proposed by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and the Executive thought that that was appropriate. There may be differences as the discussion unfolds, but I would argue that we have taken on board the vast majority of the expert group's recommendations.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Like other members, I welcome the opportunity to see the final draft of the Executive's strategy and look forward to having a full debate in the Parliament on the topic—I hope that the Executive will give us that opportunity once we have had time to read the full document.

The minister knows that I have concerns about the language of abstinence-plus and the risk that some groups that are promoting what is often called “abstinence-based” sex education may gain greater competence to deliver what I regard as ineffective and sexist material. I hope that the minister will take this opportunity to rule out the use of such material.

I do not know whether the minister listened to BBC Radio Scotland at lunch time, but I was involved in a discussion on it in which it was made clear that a campaign group had been given access in advance to the final draft of the document. Will he clearly confirm or deny whether that is true, and whether groups that campaign against sex education were given it before the expert group and the Parliament?

Mr Kerr: I am unaware of any documents having been given out to any campaign groups prior to this debate and I would be interested to know the details. I did not hear the programme, but there have been many misreports, including a claim that I was holding private meetings with the Catholic Church and everybody else involved in the matter. I have never held private meetings—I hold open meetings. If someone in a dog-collar turns up at the door and says, “I'm the cardinal and I'm here to meet Andy Kerr,” I hardly consider the meeting to be private. When we have meetings in the garden meeting rooms and there is glass on all sides, such meetings are hardly private. I am happy to be clear about whom I have met and with whom I have discussed matters. The fact that we need to talk more about such matters in Scotland is at the heart of the debate. Our inability and lack of maturity to discuss such important issues are a real problem in Scotland.

I move on to the more substantive part of Patrick Harvie's question—the language that is being

used. We are talking about abstinence-plus and comprehensive sex and relationships education. That is what we mean and what we have made clear in the strategy, and that is what we expect to be delivered as a result of our efforts.

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): I welcome the publication of Scotland's first national strategy and action plan for improving sexual health and am sure that the minister shares my concern that it is vital that aspirations are translated into action.

In that context, why has the minister decided not to accept the expert group's recommendation to appoint a national co-ordinator? The mechanism of a national co-ordinator or dedicated staff has been used to progress matters relating to changing diets, smoking and physical activity. Why is there no such mechanism for sexual health? I am sure that the minister would agree that committees—even committees that are led by ministers—are not enough in themselves to drive change throughout Scotland.

Secondly, I ask for an assurance that when the minister has the meeting that he described earlier and targets and timescales are produced, those targets and timescales will be not only for more strategies and plans but for changes and results on the ground.

Finally, what measures will the minister put in place to monitor resources that are targeted at the strategy to ensure that they end up in sexual health and are not diverted into other areas of spend?

Mr Kerr: I am more than happy to seek a debate in the Parliament on our sexual health strategy. We did not go for the position that the expert reference group adopted because we wanted to ensure that all our efforts went into front-line delivery. The less bureaucracy we have, the more action there will be on the front line. We are delivering more services in communities, as members have mentioned. I wanted to ensure not just that the money goes to the front line instead of into bureaucracy, but that we have the added weight of the minister being directly accountable to this Parliament and responsible for the delivery of the strategy, rather than getting someone else to do that on our behalf. Nonetheless, that is appropriate on other occasions.

As regards targets and timescales, it is clear that the centre for change and innovation event will get the clinicians together with the wider clinical community and lay out the action that we should take. I wrote today to all health board chiefs and local authority leaders to tell them that we want to get that work going. At the heart of the matter is our desire to ensure that we set appropriate targets and timescales for Scotland. The sexual

health issues in Glasgow to do with access to services, population profile and needs are radically different from those in other parts of Scotland, such as Lothian and Highland.

We want to ensure that we build the clinicians into the process as well as users of the service in order to get it right. The process will be monitored through changes that we will make to the health service performance assessment framework so that targets can be set. The work of NHS Quality Improvement Scotland, which will set out a regime of monitoring the performance of health boards as they deliver the strategy, will give us some reassurance that the strategy will achieve the results that we seek.

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): I welcome the publication of the strategy and the opportunity to debate it when we have had time to digest all its implications. I have a couple of specific questions for the minister after reading both his statement and the strategy. He said in the statement:

“The aim here is to make sure that pupils across Scotland have similar information about sexual health services and how to access them.”

Will the minister tell me about the difference in access to information between schools? I am sure that he agrees—if he does not, he will contradict me—that there should be an equal right of access to sexual health information and services. With that principle in mind, I draw attention to concerns about an area of the strategy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): Come to your question quickly.

Carolyn Leckie: The last bullet point on page 18 of the strategy talks about supporting school nursing teams by providing opportunities for them to update their skills. Surely if there is equal access to information, school nursing teams must have updated sexual health skills and should not have to opt in or out. Will the minister reassure me that all school nursing teams will have equal education and information and will provide equal services?

Mr Kerr: The word that I used in my statement was “similar”. We are taking a child-centred approach based on individual children and classes and the way that the school works. As long as the framework that was set out in the McCabe report—which was widely welcomed and is being implemented successfully throughout Scotland—is addressed, there is no need to be prescriptive. One cannot dictate from the centre the maturity of pupils, the difference in approach or the location of any school. I put trust and faith in the professionals in the service to work within the framework that we set to ensure that the services are delivered in an appropriate fashion.

I expect every school in Scotland to ensure that the McCabe principles and framework are delivered. Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education also looks into these matters. At the end of the day, it is right that there are differences in the decisions that are made by individual schools about teaching materials and that there is no absolute prescription from the centre. At the heart of the matter lies a fundamental principle: if a young person in any school in Scotland needs to get advice about their sexual health, either they can get it from a teacher in the school environment in a way that is appropriate to that school, or they will be directed to another source of advice in the community. That is what the strategy says.

There are issues to do with the recruitment of new staff, training and the updating of skills. I understand that the training of school nurses is on-going, but I am more than happy to address Carolyn Leckie’s specific point in correspondence later.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I, too, welcome the strategy and commend the Executive for encouraging the Scottish Civic Forum to become involved in carrying out consultation meetings throughout the country. I also welcome the minister’s comments about monitoring. However, will he consider introducing stakeholder monitoring to ensure that people in communities and young people feel the effects of the strategy? Will he provide some idea of how monitoring will be carried out? Will organisations such as the Scottish Civic Forum be involved in future to ensure that this welcome strategy does not end up in a drawer somewhere without making the difference that it is intended to make?

Mr Kerr: It is clear that we need to make a real difference to the improvement in health in Scotland, and sexual health is a significant aspect of that.

The resources that we have set aside for the strategy include money to continue research on the matter. Since I became the Minister for Health and Community Care, I have been pleased to find out how much the NHS involves user groups, patients and other service users in developing services. As far as this strategy is concerned, that approach will not change. The member should rest assured that all the organisations that have taken the time to become involved in developing the strategy—for which I thank them—will be written to either today or very soon with the results of their involvement. We want an on-going dialogue. Of course, we use all the different aspects of Scotland in different ways. For example, we have involved the Executive-supported Young Scot, the Scottish Youth Parliament and other forums to ensure that young people continue to play a significant role in developing these services.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I thank the minister for displaying good faith in his statement and by taking on the leadership of the national committee. However, does he still think that £15 million is a sufficient amount of funding for all local authorities?

Secondly, how will the strategy be implemented in our schools? After all, the Minister for Education and Young People has indicated that all schools are to become community schools, with access to health and social services. What role would HMIE play in carrying out joint inspections with social work and health? How will the Minister for Health and Community Care ensure that local authorities provide all pupils with equal access to services and who will judge whether any similar information on such services should be used to ensure that access?

Mr Kerr: The member has raised many questions. I will do my best to deal with all of them, but I will be very happy to correspond with her about any that I forget to address.

HMIE, NHS QIS, the performance assessment framework indicators—in other words, the health service's accountability framework—and the accountability reviews that Rhona Brankin and I will carry out and that will hold local health chiefs to account about the strategy's delivery will all play a role in addressing the issue that the member has raised.

As with any aspect of public expenditure, we must ensure that we are using our existing resources as effectively as possible. The work that we will carry out with the centre for change and innovation will help us in that process. The current budget for specific sexual health initiatives is about £10 million, and health board budgets also contain a general allocation. Therefore, an additional £5 million represents 50 per cent more funding going into the system. My worry is that we will not organise things quickly enough to ensure that the money makes a difference in the front line.

As I should have said in response to Shona Robison, we must get the money into the system and ensure that it starts making a difference to the scope and the geographical aspects of the services that we provide. We need more specialists, consultants, general practice specialists and nurse specialists in the front line. Furthermore, we must enhance our testing capability. That is a significant element of the strategy and resources will also be used to improve drop-in facilities.

I think that the member is comparing us with another part of the United Kingdom that has also announced a sexual health strategy. We decide here on the appropriate measures for Scotland and our decisions are based on feedback from

clinicians and other parts of the country about what we need to do. The Executive has focused on what it thinks is needed and will make a difference. By chairing the national committee, I will ensure that that work continues. If targets are not being met and more resources are needed, we will obviously review the situation.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I, too, thank the minister for his comments, especially on the central role that parents and teachers will continue to play. However, is he aware that, despite what he has said, some people will misinterpret or misunderstand the Government's strategy and that misinformation about the material that circulates in our schools continues to create unnecessary anxiety in families? Will he reassure me and parents, families and pupils throughout Scotland about the content of the material in our schools and about the safeguards that are in place for parents and teachers?

Mr Kerr: Teachers in schools have a statutory responsibility to ensure that their teaching materials are appropriate. I have personally gone through the teaching pack for teachers to see what it said and what images were used. I was quite comfortable with it.

I want to go back to the fundamental point: we want to reassure parents that they have access to all this information if they want it. They can discuss these matters with the head teacher and the guidance teachers responsible. I give an absolute reassurance that there should be no inappropriate materials in our schools. I am confident that there are not.

The way in which the media present these issues is a big challenge for us. I want to ensure that editors take a responsible approach to the issues and do not flare up over claims that are unfounded or inaccurate. We want to work with the media to ensure that we do not cause parents unnecessary concern. I have every faith in the media that we can work in that way.

Power rests with the parents. As I said to David Davidson earlier, parents can access the information and can speak to the teachers. If they wish to, they can withdraw their child from the teaching. I would not recommend that course of action, but the power exists.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have allowed the clock to run on, but I am afraid that I cannot let it run on any further. I express my regrets to the two members who wished to speak but were unable to. We could have called everyone, but we have had a degree of multiple questioning, which is unfortunate.

Budget (Scotland) (No 2) Bill: Stage 1

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

We come now to a debate on motion S2M-2291, in the name of Tom McCabe, that the general principles of the Budget (Scotland) (No 2) Bill be agreed.

15:37

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): Today we reach the start of the final stage of the 2005-06 budget process—the culmination of nine months' hard work by parliamentary committees, by Executive officials and, of course, by ministers.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): Ha!

Mr McCabe: Mr Morgan nearly missed that one.

There have been many hours of work to ensure that we are spending our money in the right places. The Budget (Scotland) (No 2) Bill is, perhaps, the most important bill in the parliamentary calendar. It is at the heart of everything that the Executive does. It provides the means to implement all of our policies and programmes: funding our universities and colleges; paying our doctors and nurses; building new railways; and meeting the commitments that we made in the partnership agreement.

The formal subject of today's debate is consideration of the general principles of the bill. I hope that we all agree on the fundamental principle that, in a democratic system, Parliament should approve the spending plans of the Government that is in power. There is also, I hope, no disagreement that the principles of openness, transparency and accountability should underpin the bill and the processes surrounding it.

Of course, within the Executive, we must always be open to possibilities for improvement, so I commend the Finance Committee for its continued work in suggesting where we can shed light and improve understanding.

I think that we can be rightly proud that our process is uniquely tailored to ensure that as many people as possible can contribute to the debate, which ensures that our budget is spent as efficiently and effectively as possible for the benefit of all Scots. However, we also need to acknowledge that, for all the improvements that we have made, this is not necessarily an easy process to understand.

The origins of our spending plans for 2005-06 go back to the spending review in 2002. The 2005-06 process began with the publication of an annual

evaluation report nine long months ago. The document allowed for consultation of the public and of parliamentary committees. Its purpose was to present the Executive's priorities and high-level strategy. All committee responses were pulled together in the Finance Committee's report, which we debated in June last year.

Following the 2004 spending review, the draft budget for 2005-06 was published, setting out our detailed proposals. Again, that process was scrutinised by the public and by parliamentary committees and—again—the responses of all the subject committees of the Parliament were pulled together in another report by the Finance Committee, which we debated just before Christmas. That is the point at which changes to our spending plans can be proposed. None was proposed, which indicated broad support for our proposals.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Does the minister agree that, given the spirit of working to progress the Executive's proposals, the process militates against the production of alternative proposals?

Mr McCabe: I disagree with that. I have just explained—I will explain further—the process that we use in Scotland and of which we can be justly proud. The point that I am making is that the Executive and the Parliament must both be always vigilant and must ensure that we continually do more to open up the process and make it accessible to the maximum number of people.

As part of our engagement with individuals and organisations throughout Scotland, we distributed more than 1,500 copies of our budget documents and, of course, we posted them on the internet. In previous years, finance ministers have held roadshows in Lerwick, Dumfries, Fort William and Aberdeen. This year, my deputy Tavish Scott and I have continued those valuable efforts by holding roadshows in Arbroath, Dumbarton and Musselburgh. Later this month, there will be another such event in Falkirk. The roadshows attract a wide range of people from business organisations, councils and the health and voluntary sectors. Their main purpose is to allow the public to play a part in setting our budget plans, but they also allow ministers to hear at first hand concerns and ideas about how to adopt a slightly different approach in the future.

Since 1999, we have achieved significant progress in improving our budget process but, as I have said, there is no doubt that it is still complex. There is a challenge not just for the Executive and the Parliament, but for all organisations that take an interest in such matters to continue their involvement in the search for a budget process with which people can genuinely engage. I am sure that all members would support that and

would want to ensure that the budget process in Scotland is meaningful.

Our budget scrutiny process is one of the most open of any Parliament, but I acknowledge that there is no room for complacency. In conjunction with Parliament, the Executive will always work hard to promote transparency. We have always tried to respond positively to the Finance Committee's recommendations and we will continue to do so. We will actively seek to involve the people of Scotland in our processes and decision making.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Budget (Scotland) (No.2) Bill.

15:42

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): What progress have we seen in management of the budget? There have been some moves aimed at streamlining and improving the accountability of what is—and, for me, always will be—a mere spending exercise. We have a national spending plan that contains no macro targets and has no credible sense of purpose, so the likelihood of the budget being able to transform Scotland is limited.

In the spending plan, the Executive must spend heavily on many of the symptoms of the relative decline into which we have been led. The plan attempts to keep alive the false hope that Scotland's potential and resurgence can be triggered by a magic spending formula—a formula that has yet to be found after 50 years of trying.

Last year, Andy Kerr told us that he would change stage 1 of the budget process

"into a more strategic look at the Executive's performance."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 2004; c 5376.]

However, the fact that the Executive does not have top-level targets makes it clear that it does not understand the word "strategic". I have found two definitions of the word "strategic", only one of which I favour. Although the other is also true, it talks of a culture that I despise. The first definition says:

"Strategic: Implies that the focus is on improving and sustaining overall performance".

That is the definition that I like. The second definition says:

"Strategic: A word people often use to make their pet project sound important".

That definition hits the bull's-eye. The Executive does not have top-level strategic targets for growth, so the budget looks like a national spending list that patently does not do enough to re-energise Scotland and make us more competitive. In Andy Kerr's mouth, the word

"strategic" meets the second definition. We realise how true that is when we consider the fact that the Executive has now formally rejected the Finance Committee's call for strategic targets or a strategic forecast for economic growth.

In his response to the Finance Committee of 18 January, the minister wrote that the Executive did

"not consider that it would be appropriate to set a spending review target for a specific level of GDP growth".

So there it is: there are no targets, there is no joint and several responsibility with Westminster for economic growth in Scotland and there is no genuine concerted focus on Scottish growth. Why? Ministers obviously know that the current powers will simply not crack the problem and will not close the persistent gap in growth between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

The data that we now have for the year to the third quarter of 2004 say that Scotland grew at 1.8 per cent, but the rest of the UK grew at 3.2 per cent. The gap widens, but the Executive will not publicly acknowledge that and will do nothing to reverse the trend, but instead seems to be willing to let Scottish people live with the consequences. Happily, that is so apparent that everyone will, sooner or later, realise what is happening. Then there will be an electoral price to pay, especially as the current lack of a target is an indirect attack on the people of Scotland because the absence of an economic growth target allows all our competitors to claim correctly that the Executive is not serious about growth. Thus the Executive is indirectly creating downward pressure on the number of available jobs and on incomes in Scotland, as well as upward pressure on migration out of Scotland.

Mr McCabe: How can Jim Mather possibly square his frankly outrageous statements with the record levels of investment in our infrastructure, in business skills and in education in Scotland, or with the employment levels in Scotland, which are the highest for a generation?

Jim Mather: The minister's whole package is not enough. I advise him to look at the International Institute for Management Development's "World Competitiveness Yearbook", which places Scotland 36th of 60 developed nations and regions on competitiveness and also places the UK 22nd. There is no level playing field and, without the necessary powers, that lack of a level playing field will persist and what I have just described will continue to happen. How competitive and responsible is that? The answer is, "Not very."

On lower-level targets, all the Executive will say is that it is committed to making its targets as outcome focused as possible. Is that all right? No, it is not, because many of its targets are not

outcome focused, are not specifically measurable or are not dated within the current electoral cycle.

Meanwhile, other countries and autonomous states and provinces are cracking on, genuinely building competitive advantage and making real progress. They are not taking any self-denying ordinance on competition to give Scotland a chance, and that is why reversing the pattern of low Scottish growth is now becoming urgent. It is the cause of our population decline and of the high levels of deprivation that must be tackled if we are to avoid a further spiral of decline.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will Jim Mather give way?

Jim Mather: No. I have heard from Jeremy Purvis before.

That is all the end product of a deeply flawed Executive strategy. The Executive will not claim the powers that we need and it will not set targets. Meanwhile, the other countries of Europe are doing the sensible thing and are building all the competitive advantage they can muster. They are doing everything—I emphasise that word—that we can do, plus they are using their direct control of their resources to increase their competitiveness and the size of their national economic cakes.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Will Jim Mather give way?

Jim Mather: No. I am in my last minute.

Members should look at this week's issue of *The Economist*. It elegantly supports the Scottish National Party's argument in an article entitled "A case for nationalism"—there is no question mark—and subtitled "European governments need more fiscal freedom, not less". It goes on to offer advice to other countries that have entered monetary unions. That advice is as valid for Scotland in the UK monetary union and goes as follows:

"Because euro members have shed their power to pursue independent monetary and exchange-rate policies, they need more fiscal independence, not less."

The SNP accepts that, of course, because it is true in the sterling zone. We advocate that policy every day and now, with even more proof and endorsement of the proposition, the argument is even more persuasive and will sweep the minister away.

The Economist is right. In the short term, the SNP would pursue radically different spending plans that would create a more competitive Scotland and be augmented by increased powers. We would thereby help Scotland to become the thriving, caring and prosperous country that it could be.

15:49

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): I am pleased to open the debate for the Conservatives. I would gladly have presented an alternative budget in detail, but the budget process and its associated parliamentary procedures militate against that. Executive ministers and back benchers have, in the past, criticised Conservatives and nationalists for not presenting alternatives—as happens in councils, when council taxes are set—but Opposition MSPs do not have the access to officials that councillors have. MSPs do not receive the detailed level of information that councillors do, nor do we receive details of incomes through the budget process.

Furthermore, amendment of the budget bill is problematic because it requires that each subject committee receive alternative proposals and that the Finance Committee receive those as well as making its proposals. The Finance Committee's budget report is an important cross-party attempt to point out serious misgivings and to scrutinise the budget bill. It is difficult to oppose the Finance Committee's report when it comes to Parliament; indeed, previous attempts by me to lodge reasoned amendments to the bill or to suggest amendments to the process have been rejected.

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): I admire the attempt to defend having no budget proposals. Why is it that the Tories in the rest of the United Kingdom are capable of producing alternative budget proposals? Apparently, that seems to elude the Scottish Tories.

Mr Monteith: I am sorry, but I think the member is being disingenuous. I am talking about the parliamentary procedure for dealing with the budget, which is designed to scrutinise the budget, but not to encourage an alternative budget. That is the distinction that I wish to draw. We prepare alternative budgets in the political sense, and we attempt to float them and sell them to the public. However, that does not form part of the parliamentary procedure. All things considered, the chances of alternative budgets coming before Parliament, or even coming before the Finance Committee, are very small.

Mr McCabe: I presume from the member's comments that he is directing his criticisms at the parliamentary authorities and at the processes that Parliament has adopted for scrutinising the budget.

Mr Monteith: I am not pointing the finger at any particular people or authorities; I am saying that there is much room for improvement in the parliamentary procedures. From time to time, the Finance Committee has said much the same thing, so there is nothing new there—it is not rocket science.

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform has already informed Parliament that—

Mr Macintosh: Will the member give way?

Mr Monteith: No, I must make progress. Mr Macintosh is not going to ruin this speech by taking up my time. The minister has already informed Parliament that he will not raise income tax by 3p in the pound to fund the budget. Of course, he does not need to—we all know that a Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, if there happens to be one, will do that for him. We know that because this week the Institute of Fiscal Studies has told us that there is an £11 billion black hole that needs to be plugged. The average working family—a couple who earn average earnings—will face an additional bill of £1,000, which is equivalent to 3p in the pound on income tax, in order to pay for this budget.

The alternative, of course, is to allow Oliver Letwin to occupy 11 Downing Street, because he has matched Labour's spending on health and schools and has matched the Barnett consequentials that bring funding to Scotland. At the same time, he will ensure that Gordon Brown's black hole will be plugged.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): And the sun will shine every day.

Mr Monteith: In Tory Britain, it certainly will. I believe in There Is No Alternative, but there is now an alternative: we can go for economic growth in Scotland. Our alternative would be to cut council tax—we have proposals for that—to cut business rates and to increase road spending. Those proposals, costed within the current budget year, could be delivered and would increase growth. None of those policies would reduce spending on schools or hospitals. With Oliver Letwin's guarantee of the same Barnett consequentials, the economic debate in Scotland should be about our different priorities. The debate should not be about childish accusations with scaremongering about Tory cuts; it should be about our priorities. For that reason, I call on the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform to support Oliver Letwin in his goal—to be in 11 Downing Street.

15:54

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): This is a short debate, which is a shame, because it is my last as a member of the Finance Committee. In a masochistic kind of way, I will miss these debates, which I have come to enjoy. If I may be self-indulgent for a moment, I will miss sitting on the committee but—as other more experienced members know—when it comes to committee membership what goes around often comes around, so I may well be back. However, the members, the clerking staff and the budget

adviser have done an excellent job over the past year in supporting me as a new member of Parliament.

The main purpose of the debate is to approve the Executive's spending plans for the financial year 2005-06. We are tasked with scrutinising the differences between the bill and the draft budget for 2005-06 that was published in October. The main differences are in the presentation of figures. Much discussion has taken place in the Finance Committee and with the minister on how best to present budget documents to provide the right level of information consistently and with clarity. However, if such discussions never end, the result will be documents that are neither consistent nor clear. That said, the improvements in presentation have been applauded by the committee.

Of particular note is the fact that there is greater detail on capital spending. It was welcome that in his statement last year on the spending review, the then Minister for Finance and Public Services announced a substantial increase in capital investment. That was welcome because the spending is indeed that—investment. In June he announced a new target to increase net investment by 5 per cent per annum in real terms over the spending review period.

The summary tables in the accompanying documents to the bill are helpful, and are an improvement on previous examples. Indeed, the clarity of the accompanying documents highlights the lie of the SNP and the Conservatives, who say that they have insufficient information to provide alternative budgets. Wendy Alexander was right in pointing to the fact that the Conservatives are quite happy to suggest alternative budgets in other parts of the UK. Indeed, Oliver Letwin did that, and admitted in three sections of his budget documents that his proposals for public services are cuts, cuts and cuts.

Mr Monteith: Will the member give way?

Jeremy Purvis: I will happily give way to Mr Monteith in a moment.

The nation—or those who are eagle-eyed among us—managed to capture the SNP's launch of its election campaign on Tuesday. The Salmond and Sturgeon double act—the Sonny and Cher of politics in Scotland—did not mention much about an alternative budget in Scotland, although Sonny did talk about oil. They seek to bank future investment in public services on the volatile oil market. That strategy, as Mr Mather would say, is about making a pet project seem attractive. That is the SNP's case for independence.

The document "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland"—GERS—which Jim Mather referred to in a debate before Christmas, is a useful basis on which to proceed. It helpfully

calculates all Government spending in Scotland. It shows a deficit of £9.3 billion. If 100 per cent of oil revenues is included—problematic though that is—the deficit is £4.4 billion. In the budget debate in December, Mr Mather had a magic wand to hand, and said:

“An independent Scotland would quickly and readily wipe out the deficit.”—[*Official Report*, 23 December 2004; c 13260.]

Jim Mather: Jeremy Purvis should do his arithmetic. GERS is a useful basis on which to make the case for how Scotland could perform. It should not be worn as a badge of shame that is put to the wider public and the investment community while saying, “Come here. We’re a basket case.” That is crazy. Turn it round, Jeremy—it can be turned into a positive.

Jeremy Purvis: Let us analyse that further. I know that a cynic is what an optimist calls a realist, but optimism is now an official policy of the SNP. Let us examine what Mr Mather asks us to consider in wiping out the deficit. Increased growth would wipe out 17 per cent of the deficit, but he does not give an SNP target for growth. Obviously, the growth rate would spring up from day one of independence—but that is ridiculous. He said that our full share of UK revenue—excluding oil, because that would already be counted at 100 per cent under the £4.4 billion deficit—would wipe out another 8 per cent. Scotland does not have a fiscal surplus. When we account for the population base in all non-identified expenditure in GERS, that is the simple fact. To say that we should have our fair share is therefore ridiculous.

Best of all, Mr Mather said that the SNP would implement

“proper and full Gershon savings.”—[*Official Report*, 23 December 2004; c 13260.]

That would take away another 11 per cent of the deficit. As we know, Gershon is predicated on thousands upon thousands of job losses in Scotland. Is that now SNP policy?

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

Jeremy Purvis: No, I will not.

In addition, in the very next sentence of his speech Jim Mather said that Scotland should have a fair share of civil service jobs and defence spending, which would wipe out even more of the deficit. Those are civil service jobs that the SNP supports being cut, and spending on defence that it is opposed to, which is laughable. SNP economic policy is ridiculous, ludicrous and laughable.

The new big idea, which the SNP launched on Tuesday, is an oil fund modelled on that of Norway. It is true that Norway’s oil fund is substantial, but it will not be the solution to all ills

for all eternity, as Sonny Salmond would have us believe. On Tuesday he said that the fund will provide an income for Norway for the rest of time. Obviously that is the SNP’s aim for Scotland, but there is no mention of revenue forecast from such a fund in any SNP documentation, such as its recent flawed policy pronouncement on pensions. The SNP would rely wholly on its version of the oil fund to pay for public services. The Norwegian oil fund has been described recently as the pension fund for Norway, but Norway’s central bank, which administers the fund, said recently that it would not be able to pay more than one quarter of Norway’s pension obligations and that the rest must come from taxpayers.

The SNP has no coherent budget policy and no coherent economic policy and not once has it proposed an alternative to the Executive’s budget. Its members have said this week in the chamber that they want more spending on housing, health and pensions, but they continue to argue for corporation tax, although we do not know at what rate, and they claim that independence would wipe out our fiscal deficit at a stroke. As I said, that is ridiculous, ludicrous and laughable.

16:01

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): As has been outlined, this is a debate on the principles of the budget. I agree with Brian Monteith that the budget process does not favour amendment; it is designed for scrutiny, not alteration. That raises wider questions about what we want the budget process to achieve and what we want the relationship between the Executive’s budget and the legislature to be. If, as the Executive parties seem to be suggesting, we want to make amendments to the budget, we need to change the process to make that possible.

However, the debate is about the principles of the budget and in the short time I have I will concentrate in more detail on some of the practices in the budget. Members with good memories might recall that last year I sought to draw attention to the contradictions in the transport section of the budget in particular. When I first read the budget document, I could not see the figure for the M74—the massive spending on road building in Glasgow. The reason why that figure does not appear anywhere in the budget is because the Executive has chosen to exclude capital and depreciation in its calculations of transport spending. When it is included, spending on public transport makes up a much smaller share of overall transport spending than the Executive’s oft-quoted claim of 70 per cent by 2007-08. That massive spending on the expansion of road building in Scotland does not appear in the budget because we are using a private finance

initiative scheme—a scheme that will spread the cost over 20 years and which will, I argue, mortgage our transport for the next 20 years and make the 70 per cent figure laughable.

On top of that, a closer look at what is included in the Executive's public transport spending is revealing. Included are grants to piers and harbours, grants to the Tay road bridge, the transport agency development fund, the regulation of utility road works and, as my colleague Shiona Baird pointed out to the First Minister, the road haulage modernisation fund. Those are all worthwhile projects, but why do they appear in the public transport sector of the budget? How can we have a proper debate about the principles of the budget when projects are hidden as PFI schemes and not treated properly, and when the road haulage modernisation fund, which is clearly not about public transport, is included in the public transport section?

We could discuss a host of other issues, such as funding for affordable housing in Scotland. We could discuss proper funding of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency which, as my Green colleagues have pointed out, faces real difficulty in meeting Government objectives in relation to the European water framework directive because it is not getting enough funding. We could discuss the continuing crisis in the health of our nation, which is caused partly by the fact that we spend so much on our national sickness service; we deal with people once they become sick and do not do nearly enough to prevent their becoming sick. We are spending £8 billion on the NHS in 2005-06, but not even £80 million on health improvement. We need that spending on public health improvement to ensure that we have a healthier nation.

Fundamentally, the budget is not about transport, the environment, affordable housing or health. It is a budget, like the previous ones, that is about meeting the Executive's obsession with economic growth. Until we have a budget that has a different set of principles and is not simply about arbitrarily increasing one measure of our economic well-being, we will not have a budget that can be fully supported.

16:05

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP): I want to ask about transparency. Given that the entire Scottish budget is a lump sum that we are given by Westminster, it is obvious that Westminster's efficiency review, which is designed to save £21 billion by 2008, will affect the position in Scotland.

Gordon Brown brought into the discussion in Scotland and in other devolved authorities about

the announced 20,000 job cuts. There was a bit of a furore and the Scottish Executive denied that it would be taking on board Gordon Brown's cuts. In the press, ministers said that they would make efficiency savings of £500 million by the 2006-07 budget and £745 million by 2007-08. However, quite often, efficiency savings and moving front-line jobs are euphemisms for job losses and cuts. Where will the efficiency savings be made in the budget? Will they come from the £7.5 billion that is allocated through the Scottish Executive Finance and Central Services Department? What will the savings consist of? Will the Executive give the civil service union, the Public and Commercial Services Union, a guarantee that, as it moves towards so-called savings in the budget, there will be no compulsory redundancies? Will the minister clarify whether the savings will be achieved by taking more public services that are currently provided by civil servants into the private sector? Is that part of the Executive's strategy to secure the savings? I would like the Executive to identify those elements for us so that we are clear about the implications for job cuts.

The budget is supposed to be equality proofed. Equal opportunities was one of the founding principles of the Parliament. Where and how does the Executive propose to build in financing for equal pay for men and women in the public sector? I hope that the nursery nurses take the councils to court to establish equal pay for their jobs, but workers should not have to take the Executive, kicking and screaming, to tribunals to get equal pay. That initiative should come from the Parliament. Under which budget headings has equal pay been built in? I would like to hear what the minister has to say on that point.

16:08

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie)

(Lab): I want to correct an impression that one or two members might have given. The procedures are adequate in giving members of all parties the opportunity to propose alternatives to the budget. What is interesting is that, if such alternatives are presented, they are scrutinised by an informed committee, whether that be a subject committee or the Finance Committee. Perhaps the fact that serious questions will be asked has acted as a disincentive to people who might otherwise have brought forward alternatives. I suppose that Brian Monteith, as the Conservatives' finance spokesman, has the option of being a member of the Finance Committee and scrutinising issues along with the rest of us. It is wrong to say that the procedures are inadequate in ensuring the ability to present alternatives.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Every year, we hear the

argument that non-Government parties should produce a complete alternative budget. Will Des McNulty remind me whether Tony Blair produced an alternative budget before 1997? The answer is no, is it not?

Des McNulty: Tony Blair published detailed proposals, which we have yet to see from the SNP. I will pick up Jeremy Purvis's point about Sonny and Cher. Perhaps the song that Nicola Sturgeon and Alex Salmond should sing to each other is "It's not you babe", because we are still waiting to hear anything of substance from either of them.

It must be said that the Conservatives have produced something. We have the James report, on which Oliver Letwin's proposals are based. However, when we examine the proposals—we do not have full publication of them—we see a gap where Scotland should be. Perhaps the Conservatives' proposals contain a paradox, because Brian Monteith has said that the size of the Scottish block would not be affected, whereas I understand that Oliver Letwin says that about £35 billion of savings would be made.

Mr Monteith *rose*—

Des McNulty: Perhaps Brian Monteith wants to intervene to tell me exactly what would happen to the Scottish block. In that case, I would be delighted to defer to him.

Mr Monteith: It is gracious of the member to invite me to intervene. I am happy to answer him by saying—as I said in my speech—that Oliver Letwin has guaranteed that the Barnett consequential will be the same as those that are proposed in Gordon Brown's spending plans. We have gone further, by saying that Barnett consequential that do not match those proposals will be topped up to match them. There is no need to debate cuts. We need a debate about spending priorities.

Des McNulty: I presume that the Tory slogan for the next election will be "Less is more", which is perhaps consistent with the Tory approach. Brian Monteith talked about cutting council tax but, as I have said frequently in the chamber, I have a strong recollection of council tax increases in 1995, 1996 and 1997, all of which were based on Conservative policy choices. Taxes for businesses increased significantly more at that time than they have under Labour. Those of us with longer memories should not allow people whose memories are not as exact to forget what the Conservatives did and would do in power.

Jim Mather makes the same speech every time. The paraphrase of it is that more powers would solve all Scotland's problems at a stroke. His Jeremiah speech is unfair to Scotland on two counts. There are things wrong with Scotland's

economy, such as the features that the Finance Committee has identified, which include the need to change the balance between the private and public sectors, the need to improve Scotland's transport infrastructure and—properly—the need to address how the university sector can be improved and made more fit for the purpose of delivering opportunity.

Jim Mather *rose*—

Des McNulty: The problem with Jim Mather's approach is that he takes us away from addressing such problems, which fundamentally concern how we spend the money that we have. To that extent, his approach has a diversionary aspect that does not serve Scotland well.

Jim Mather: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in the last minute of his speech.

Des McNulty: The second point on which Jim Mather lets Scotland down is that he does not take the honest position of being Churchillian, saying that independence would mean blood, sweat, toil and tears and telling us exactly how the SNP would deal with the missing billions and what services would be cut to follow the hard route towards independence. Saying that more powers would deliver immediate benefits is not an honest position. Jim Mather needs to own up to that. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Fergus Ewing: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am sorry to raise the matter, because time is constrained, but I seek your guidance. We know that it is not competent for members to intervene in the last minute of a speech. Does not that imply an obligation on members making speeches not to make personal attacks on other members in the last minute? Do not such attacks display a lack of courtesy to the members concerned?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members are not prohibited from taking an intervention in the last minute of a speech. Sometimes we counsel against that because we are not convinced that sufficient time is available to take and deal with an intervention. However, ultimately, whether to take an intervention in the last minute is up to members.

16:14

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I think that the discourtesy that has been displayed today was not against Jim Mather—his back is broad—but against the ambassador from Luxembourg, whom we saw representing that independent nation of a small and successful kind in the distinguished guests gallery this morning.

I return to a recurring theme when I speak in finance debates—the lack of conformity to good accounting principles in how we lay things out. As long ago as the 13th century, the Florentine bankers developed a system of double-entry bookkeeping in which one could see the sources and application of money. Ironically, to use that system and record effectively, they had to use not the Roman number system but the Arabic one, which had the number zero in it, although that was forbidden by the city authorities. The word for zero in Arabic is “sifr”, from which we get today’s word “cipher”, and it was considered that using that system concealed the truth. Encipherment sometimes seems to be the way in which our accounts are dealt with.

I was grateful to Jeremy Purvis for bringing up pensions. As I look through the accruals in the bill—of which I shall say more—I note that there is very little in the way of accruals, or income. Let us look at the accruals that derive from superannuation. The figure for teachers is £1.156 billion, which immediately transfers to expenditure on pensions. The whole way in which we are managing pensions is going to bite and bite hard. I do not say that we will be able to solve that problem in one, two or three years; it is a long-term problem that we must engage with. That applies equally to 11 Downing Street as it does to people here.

In the brief time that is available to me, I will talk about accruals. Looking at the figures for the Scottish Executive Development Department, I see that we are going to get a total of £100 of income from 10 line items, including “Receipts from Energy Action Grant Agency” and “Fees for functions carried out by the Scottish Building Standards Agency”. That is not a great deal. We also see, on page 14 of the bill, that the Scottish Police College superannuation funds the expenditure of the Scottish Police College and that the Scottish Legal Aid Board superannuation funds the expenditure of the Scottish Legal Aid Board. On page 17, we see that the superannuation contributions for teachers and the national health service turn into expenditure on teachers and the NHS.

Audit Scotland is going to generate £100 of income from the sale of information technology equipment. If it can sell anything worthwhile for that amount, I would love to have it as well. The miscellaneous income for the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body also totals £100. The Food Standards Agency’s income from its charges, veterinary services and inspections is only £100. It is remarkable how, in focusing only on expenditure, we appear not to be dealing in any sensible way with income.

Occasionally, when we see a proper reference to income—such as the £17 million in the budget

for tourism, culture and sport—we also see a footnote saying, “Income to be surrendered.” Frankly, until we see income and expenditure, we will not be able to see what is going on. By the same token, it is time that we expressed our budget with assets and liabilities—especially the increasing, worrying, devastating, crippling private finance initiative liabilities.

16:19

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): I want to dwell on the issue that has come to dominate the debate—the fact that neither the Scottish Tories nor the SNP has produced even the bare bones of a budget proposal. I accept wholly Fergus Ewing’s point that it is unreasonable to expect every detail to have been finalised; however, with £25 billion at their disposal, surely they could have come up with something.

We might ponder that question today in particular. I ask members to recall that, just three hours ago, at First Minister’s question time, both the SNP and the Tories were worried about the UK Parliament trespassing on the Scottish Parliament’s areas of responsibility for one family in one place who occasionally come to Scotland, yet here we are, three hours later, discussing spending plans that will affect every Scottish family in every single community on every single day of the year, and the silence is deafening. To be fair, Brian Monteith commended to us Oliver Letwin’s plans. It is fair to say that Oliver Letwin has not been tiptoeing or trespassing on Scottish plans; he has been like a rampaging elephant.

My colleague, Des McNulty, took a significant intervention from Brian Monteith on that, when he said that we would get the Barnett consequentials of Oliver Letwin’s plans. Of course, the Barnett consequentials of £35 billion of cuts is £3.5 billion of cuts. Therefore, it is perhaps not a surprise that we have heard not a squeak from the Sewel-sensitive Scottish Tories about where those cuts will fall in Scotland.

Mr Monteith: Will the member explain why the £23 billion of efficiency gains that Gordon Brown talks about are not sold as cuts, but the £35 billion of efficiency gains that Oliver Letwin talks about are sold as cuts? Both figures are clearly based on the same analysis and both are efficiency gains.

Ms Alexander: Tempting as it is for me to enter into the efficient government debate, I will resist for once and come to the central question that I want to pose to the Tories.

The biggest item in the budget that we are debating today is the Scottish health service. In that item, the Tories have a big idea that we are going to introduce health vouchers worth half of the cost of treatment. Of course, such a health

voucher is only any use if the person using it can afford to top it up. No wonder that even Brian “free market” Monteith is frightened to go out and argue that the Tories’ central budget proposal is to destroy 50 years of consensus about health care being dependent not on the size of a person’s bank balance but on their need.

I turn to the SNP. This morning, the SNP was also sounding off about Sewel trespassing, but there has been no SNP budget, not even from another place. It is all so different from 15 years ago when, like snowdrops in spring, one could rely on there being an SNP budget. Those with good memories will remember the refrain “Everybody else fiddles the figures but not the SNP.” The only problem was that eventually the SNP could not find one independent commentator who would put their name to an SNP budget that tried to spend the oil first to balance the books and then all over again to have a nest egg. Much better than spending the oil money twice was to jump on the bandwagon of an issue of public concern, preferably one that could be blamed on another place, such as pensions. It is much better to bleat than to face the tough choices that budgets bring.

The Executive has brought forward a budget that balances the books, boosts services and promotes economic growth. I commend it to the chamber.

16:23

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

In the short time available to me, I will consider the impact of the budget on the economy, which the Executive is always telling us is its top priority.

By a fortunate coincidence, three sets of relevant figures came out this week. The latest growth figures were published, to which Jim Mather referred. They show that in the third quarter of the year 2003-04, Scotland’s growth was 1.8 per cent against the UK’s rate of 3.2 per cent. Of course, Scotland’s growth in the previous year was also 1.8 per cent, and the UK’s was 2.8 per cent. Therefore, the gap has widened again. We know that manufacturing is a major reason for that, because it has suffered tremendously in the past five years and continues to decline.

We had a second set of figures on the trade gap. The deficit in Scotland’s balance of trade was £3.96 billion in 1998, which is not a figure to be proud of. In 2001, the gap rose to £6.8 billion, which represents one tenth of the Scottish gross domestic product. The size of the United States’ trade gap compared with its GDP is often criticised, but the Scottish figure is double that of the US and, rightly, should be criticised.

The third set of figures is on the enterprise gap, which has also widened. There are fewer

entrepreneurs in Scotland than there were a year ago. Then, 5.5 per cent of the population was regarded as being entrepreneurs, but the figure now is 5.2 per cent. The UK figure has also fallen under this tax-and-spend Labour Government, which is not surprising, but it is still well ahead of the figure in Scotland. Again, the gap between the UK and Scotland has widened.

What should the Executive be doing? First, it needs to start tackling the size of the public sector. We have raised that issue time and again, as have many independent commentators. It is simply not sustainable to have a public sector that consumes around 54 per cent of GDP. The latest quarterly figures show an increase of 7,230 staff in local government. It would not be so bad if they were all in front-line services, but I do not believe for a minute that they are. The public sector continues to grow, despite all the warnings.

Secondly, the Executive should reduce the business rate. With the setting of the English rate, the gap has widened again. We know that the business rate goes straight to the bottom line of every business in Scotland and that it is a major factor in our poor progress on economic growth.

If we consider the budget as a whole, we see that, apart from revenue from the business rate, the money that the Executive gets comes from London in a cheque from Gordon Brown. Therefore, as Brian Monteith said, it is entirely appropriate that we should examine the wider picture at UK level. As he said, the Institute for Fiscal Studies identified yesterday an £11 billion black hole in the UK budget. That means that, under a Labour Government, the national tax burden is likely to reach a 25-year high by 2010 and that hard-working families across Scotland will have to pay £1,000 a year more. Of course, the result of that is that money will be sucked out of the economy and economic growth will slow even more than it has done.

Never mind—there is hope. Over the skyline on his charger comes our good friend Oliver Letwin, with his Conservative plans to benefit the Scottish economy. The James report, to which members have referred, identified £35 billion in savings. If Wendy Alexander examined the detail of that, she would see that the budget increases would be in the devolved areas, such as health and education. Of course, that would mean that Scotland would continue to receive what it does under the Barnett formula. The generosity that the UK Government has shown towards Scotland would continue and we would also have £4 billion in tax cuts. Therefore, Scotland would benefit twice; the very generous amount of money would continue to come in, but we would avoid the tax rises that would be inevitable under a new Labour Government. People in Scotland would have more

money in their pockets and we would get economic growth as well as the same level of public services.

Therefore, my advice to the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform and, indeed, to all those concerned with Scotland's finances and economic growth is clear: vote Conservative.

16:28

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston (Lab)): I welcome the budget report and the behind-the-scenes work by the members of the Finance Committee and the staff who supported the committee in its appraisal of the budget.

In a sense, the budget looks at two fundamental things about which I do not think there is much disagreement in the chamber. One is how we deal with the elements of what we would call the new economy, which involves the retail and service sectors, and the high-knowledge economy. The issue is how we find ways in which investment can maximise opportunities for communities across Scotland. My contribution to the debate will be to consider how we can make the connections that will impact most markedly on the areas in which the greatest disadvantage exists. Obviously, that includes the Glasgow Shettleston constituency. Given the statistics that have been announced on a range of social policy, there is no doubt that if we can get the economy operating more effectively in disadvantaged areas or engage such areas in economic activity, we can change markedly the social make-up of those communities.

Another key thing is to ensure that resources flow in the right direction, so that individuals have the knowledge and education with which to enter the job market and so that new opportunities and investment can be targeted on those areas. It is not, as the Tories have claimed, about the level and scale of public spend. Like many lessons of the 1980s and 1990s, what we do with the public spend is much more critical. All major economies recognise that there is little or no difference in most European democracies in terms of public expenditure; the debate is about what that money is spent on.

If anything is a legacy of the 1980s and 1990s in the community that I represent, it is the scars that have been left by the economic policies that were followed by the Conservatives. We have levels of incapacity benefit that are unacceptable. We have high levels of lone-parent households with people who find it difficult to find employment. We also have a generation of workless households. Those things were never the concern of the Tory Administrations of the 1980s and 1990s. As someone who taught in the east end of Glasgow for a considerable period of time, I think that there

is a marked difference there at present from what I experienced in the 1980s and 1990s when I was living and teaching in the east end of Glasgow.

We need to ensure that our economic strategy tries to make those differences. Where I differ from some other commentators in today's debate is that I welcome the M74 development. I believe that that is one of the key elements of economic regeneration for one of the most disadvantaged communities in Scotland. The trick with that development is to ensure that the community benefits, as previous investments have sometimes missed it out.

There must also be a commitment to ensure that, when we engage in major facility developments, we identify areas of disadvantage as key, conscious choices. I make no apologies for having argued that in the past, in my role as an individual MSP and in my role as a minister. That is why I welcome the national facility development in the east end of Glasgow. That sends a message of confidence and improvement.

We have a very different world now from the one that we had 20 years ago. We have a labour market in which the debate is about not lack of work, but skill shortages. The level of public sector employment is at an all-time high and we have a level of youth unemployment that is much more manageable than has been the case for generations. When I hear the Tories say that Oliver Letwin is the answer to some of the problems, I think that that will go down in the political lexicon as Letwin's folly. There is no doubt, in my opinion, that we have serious problems if the Tories believe that they can square the circle that they have drawn this afternoon.

From the nationalists, we have heard a counsel of despair—they say that until we have more powers there is very little that we can do. Jim Mather even used the word "strategic" to mean politicians having a key word for pet projects to make them sound more important. I therefore look forward to hearing next week the SNP's strategic election demand: independence for Scotland. I am conscious of Fergus Ewing's concern about ensuring that we do not make any political attacks in case people feel rather sensitive about that. It strikes me as a disappointment that the combined intellectual wit and economic knowledge of Jim Mather, Fergus Ewing, Murdo Fraser and Brian Monteith could not produce even a fragment of a budget that responds to the Executive's direction in its budget expenditure.

In the past five years, the Executive has made a marked difference to the community that I serve, and I believe that the budget deserves the support of the chamber.

16:33

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I agree with Frank McAveety that what matters is how Governments spend money and whether they do so effectively and efficiently. I agree, too, that projects such as the M74 should be supported—and are supported, I believe—by mainstream opinion in Scotland. There is a certain consensus in respect of those aims.

I want to address the topic of transport in relation to the budget. We know that there are huge challenges facing Scotland, not just in the Highlands, which I represent, but throughout Scotland. We know that the sum that is required to bring our road network up not to a top-class standard but just to a reasonable standard is £4,000 million over 10 years. We know that our rail system in Scotland, although it is improving, is second class in comparison with that in continental Europe. We know that our air services in comparison with those of Ireland are inferior, fewer and less frequent, although we are a larger country. That is not a legacy in which successive Westminster Governments can take a great deal of pride.

However, I will be characteristically positive—as members would expect me to be—by offering some free and unsolicited advice to the Executive. The advice is that the Executive should cancel a new policy on which it is about to embark. I refer to lorry road user charging, which is about to be introduced to deal with the problem of the foreign freight lorries that come into Britain but pay no vehicle tax. In addition, those lorries do not generate any fuel tax because their drivers bring their fuel into the country.

To tackle that problem, the Government has decided that it will introduce road user charging of 15p per km, but only for lorries. Because of a fuel duty rebate, the charge will be revenue neutral. The only extra income will come from foreign vehicles and will amount to around £140 million a year. However, the technology to collect that £140 million a year might cost between £500 million and £600 million. Mr McCabe's colleagues down south are about to embark on a system that will cost approximately three times more to run than the revenue it will raise. The matter is reserved, but we will be landed with the consequences in Scotland.

Mark Ballard: Does Fergus Ewing agree that the advantage of a revenue-neutral scheme like that is that it will encourage fuel efficiency? I am thinking of the shift in emphasis from fuel to distance.

Fergus Ewing: That is the theory, but the practice is different. The scheme that the

Government proposes has a lower cost for using motorways and a higher cost for using trunk roads. That will encourage lorry drivers to go on longer journeys to avoid paying more than they need to. The scheme will encourage longer journeys, which is something that fuel tax does not do. If people have to pay as they go, they will travel by the shortest possible route.

I am sure that the Executive will ignore the advice that I have given it. Sadly, it is clear that we have inefficient Governments in London and Scotland. The public expect us to try to use money effectively, but that is not happening in the Scottish Executive's work in the transport area.

16:37

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Tom McCabe said, rightly, that the bill is probably the most important bill in the parliamentary calendar. It is a pity therefore that we do not have a little longer in which to discuss it in more detail. He also said that he felt that the Executive had improved on the budget process. I concede that the Executive has taken on board many of the Finance Committee's recommendations. Jeremy Purvis was right to acknowledge the improvements that have been made, especially in the presentation of the budget document.

I agree with Jim Mather, Brian Monteith and other members that the budget shows few signs of an overall strategy or clearly defined targets. The Executive's refusal to accept targets for economic growth means that the budget does not appear to be making Scotland more competitive. In their speeches, Des McNulty and Wendy Alexander quizzed that rampaging elephant Oliver Letwin's guarantees on the Barnett formula, but Brian Monteith and Murdo Fraser sorted them out on that front.

Des McNulty was absolutely right to say that we need to change the balance between the public and private sectors. Tom McCabe went out of his way to emphasise the Executive's massive spending. Certainly, Andy Kerr, the former Minister for Finance and Public Services, told us that since devolution there had been the longest and largest sustained rise in public spending in living memory. According to the budget, the year 2005-06 will see public spending rise to a massive £25 billion—a 54 per cent increase over the 1999 figure. Although health will see a 70 per cent increase and education a staggering 83 per cent increase, does that mean that waiting lists and waiting times will be down or that our schools will do better? The answer is no, no and no.

As we heard in the debate, Conservatives are not against public spending per se. Scotland's

block grant would increase at the same rate as that which Labour proposes. The significant difference, however, is that sustained investment would not require the third-term tax rises that most independent analysts agree are inevitable if Labour is re-elected. Conservatives will not throw public money at problems without first having a clear idea of the outcomes and the likely costs that are involved.

Frances Curran and Wendy Alexander raised the matter of efficiency and efficiency gains. I wish that Wendy Alexander had been tempted rather more into speaking about efficiency, but she drew back from doing so. One of the main building blocks of the budget is the document entitled "Building a Better Scotland: Efficient Government—Securing Efficiency, Effectiveness and Productivity", which the Executive has published and which sets out the plans to find £1.7 billion in efficiency savings over three years to 2007-08.

Stewart Stevenson: Does the member agree that efficiency is not related to expenditure and that one can reduce expenditure and decrease efficiency?

Mr Brocklebank: I am not absolutely sure what Stewart Stevenson is asking, but I will say that there appears to be no radical agenda for reducing the scope and therefore the size of government, despite Mr McCabe's mixed messages.

In the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform's interview in *The Times*, he seemed to accept that public service job losses are inevitable. He said that he expected to see an increasing number of people working on the front line, but fewer people overall and he committed himself to streamlining government. However, what do we find? The latest quarterly figures show that the number of council workers has now rocketed through the quarter of a million mark, with an extra 7,000 staff employed by Scottish councils last year. If that is not bad enough, John Elvidge, who is the Executive's top civil servant, admitted in response to a question that I asked at the Finance Committee a couple of days ago that the number of civil servants has soared from 3,500 to 4,457 in the past five years, which is a 33 per cent increase over the period. How does that square with Tom McCabe's pledges on efficient streamlined government? John Elvidge defended the extra civil servants. He says that we need them, but either he is wrong or Tom McCabe is wrong. Perhaps Tom McCabe will explain things to us when he sums up.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Brocklebank: I am sorry, but I am in my final minute.

At the beginning of his speech, Tom McCabe stressed the importance of transparency, and we agree that transparency is important. I may or may not agree with the first of Mark Ballard's arguments about PFIs, but he is surely right to say that projects such as those that he mentioned should be more clearly spelled out in the budget document.

We need far more transparency in our budget discussions and we need clear and achievable targets. As Murdo Fraser outlined graphically from the figures that have been released this week, improving growth in Scotland is crucial. The budget does nothing to improve growth and entrepreneurialism and it is certainly not strategic or transparent.

16:42

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): At the beginning of the debate, the minister said that the budget process is not necessarily easy to understand. We do not necessarily have to apologise for that, because running a country's budget—or at least the part of its budget that we control, as we control only part of the country's expenditure and virtually none of its income—is bound to be a complex matter. However, we are sometimes still a bit opaque in some doings.

Consider the bill that we are setting on its parliamentary progress. When my colleague Stewart Stevenson was talking about some of the accruals, I saw some distinctly blank faces on the benches, although that is perhaps understandable. If one looks at the final few pages of the bill and tries to work out why there is £100 income from the sale of information technology equipment, when the bill by and large consists of figures that are into the billions of pounds, one will find that there are questions that perhaps the Finance Committee might want to ask at stage 2, even if only to keep the anoraks on that committee happy. I am sorry that Jeremy Purvis will not be one of us on that occasion.

Of course, there has been an interesting debate about the Conservatives' budget and Oliver Letwin in number 11—a most unlikely scenario if ever I heard one, especially mounted on a charger, as Murdo Fraser would have him. Apparently, there was a reassurance that what was done to expenditure south of the border would not affect our Barnett consequentials or, if it did, there would be an extra allocation to the Scottish block. I can see that being popular with the Tory backwoodsmen in the House of Commons. If Mr Letwin ever became chancellor, he would not be able to get away with that.

Mr Monteith: Of course, the member has greater experience of Westminster than I have.

Does he agree that that is exactly what happened in the past, and that Barnett consequentials were topped up or the Barnett formula was adjusted to ensure that Scotland got more money than it may otherwise have got?

Alasdair Morgan: The problem is that the past is in the past. Mr Monteith should know that the mood among his Tory colleagues south of the border is that we should shift for ourselves post-devolution. They will certainly not be willing to give us any top-up. The point is that we should not ask for any top-up; we should not be dependent on expenditure decisions that are made at Westminster to determine the total size of the Scottish budget. We should be responsible for our income as well as for our expenditure.

I presume that Jeremy Purvis, Wendy Alexander and others raised the old chestnut, "Why does the SNP not put forward its own budget?" because they wanted to have some fun voting against it. Most Labour and Liberal members spent most of their time talking about anything other than their own budget. I except Frank McAveety from that stricture, although I suggest to him that simply to say that the reason for the economic decline in the area that he represents is the political colour of the Government in Westminster is to underestimate the size of the problem. There is an inbuilt problem in the system that governs Scotland that contributes to that economic decline.

I return to the question of why the SNP does not have its own budget. Apart from standing order 9.16.6, which states that one cannot amend the budget unless one is an Executive minister—

Des McNulty: Will the member give way?

Alasdair Morgan: No, I will not give way now because I am almost finished.

I do not know how many Government civil servants it took to draw up all the accompanying documents that go with the budget bill, but if the Executive were willing and thought that it would be cost justified to give both us and the Conservatives a similar number of civil servants so that we could come up with our own figures, we might want to re-examine our approach to the question of why we do not have our own budget. I suspect, however, that that would not be a good use of public money.

Leaving aside the accrual of £100 that I mentioned, most of the figures in the budget bill are so vast that any party could come up with a totally different pattern of expenditure in all areas of Scottish life without altering this budget bill. It is clear that none of the details in the budget is in the budget bill, so why bother amending it?

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Wind up, please.

Alasdair Morgan: The conclusion is clear that Scotland needs to do better and that the Executive does not have the powers to deliver that. If the Executive is not prepared to campaign to get the powers that would allow it to do better, it should move over and let in those who are prepared to do that.

16:47

Mr McCabe: Today's debate has been about agreement on the principles of the budget bill. No one, thankfully, has proposed that we could get by without such a bill. Although several colleagues have made suggestions about its contents, no amendments were proposed at the appropriate time back in December last year. Therefore, I might conclude that not only are we all agreed on the need for a bill, and on the principles that I set out in my opening remarks, but we also seem to have some measure of agreement on the detailed contents.

That said, colleagues have raised a number of important issues during this afternoon's debate, even if they did not always concentrate on the matter at hand. I will try my best to deal with at least some of those issues.

Mr Mather is determined, as is the SNP's wont, to talk down the reality of the situation that people experience day to day in Scotland. He wants to pay much attention to the actions of other European countries and suggests that, somehow, their actions create a better set of circumstances than those that are enjoyed by people in Scotland. However, in doing so, he omits to mention the sustained and stable mortgage rates that people have enjoyed in Scotland over a prolonged period.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the minister take an intervention?

Mr McCabe: No, I will not.

Mr Mather omits to mention the lowest unemployment rate for a generation. He forgets, as I said in my intervention during his speech, that here in Scotland, we have the second-highest level of employment in all Europe. It is not in the SNP's interests to portray that situation and it is determined to deny that this budget will enhance that situation in the future.

Jim Mather: Will the minister give way?

Mr McCabe: No, I will not.

According to Mr Monteith, the Conservatives will perform the magic act of cutting tax while increasing spending. The next thing we know, he will be asking us to believe that, during the Conservatives' previous spell in Government, we did not see unemployment that stunted a generation, mortgage rates that destroyed families

throughout Scotland and the UK, or the horrendous sight of a Chancellor of the Exchequer bopping in and out of Her Majesty's Treasury as the economy went into meltdown. The economic model that Mr Monteith proposed today is exactly the same as that which led to that disastrous situation.

I have some difficulty with Mr Ballard's comments about the nature of the Executive's budget, because I absolutely agree with him. He said that the budget is predicated on the Executive's obsession with growing Scotland's economy—and he is absolutely right. That is why I can stand here and cite the statistics that I have already mentioned.

Jim Mather: How can the minister make such a comment when we have discovered this week that, despite his predecessor's claims that economic growth was the top priority and that he would look for improvements in gross domestic product per capita, we achieved a pathetic growth rate of 1.8 per cent last year during Mr Kerr's term of office, against a UK growth rate of 3.2 per cent?

Mr McCabe: Again, we see Mr Mather's selective use of statistics. Mr Mather takes the annual figure and completely ignores the quarterly figures, which tell an entirely different story about Scottish economic performance.

Ms Curran mentioned efficient government. We have made it perfectly clear to the trade unions that we will do all in our power to resist any compulsory redundancies and will employ the best human resource practices in that respect. However, although we have said that we will retrain as many people as possible, we think that it would be disingenuous for anyone in a vibrant economy to give an absolute guarantee about redundancies.

I accept Ms Curran's point about equality proofing. In its evidence to the Equal Opportunities Committee, the Executive acknowledged that there is more to do and we have committed ourselves to working with the committee to make progress on that matter.

Mr Stevenson's speech was a tour de force about the accounting practices of ancient European economies. I would have thought that, with all that knowledge, he would have known that the insertion of the £100 that he mentioned is a convention that is used when there is uncertainty about the income generated. When that figure becomes more certain, it is added to the next revision. Perhaps Mr Stevenson is like the rest of his SNP colleagues in being more knowledgeable about the past and less concerned about Scotland's future.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the minister give way?

Mr McCabe: No.

I have no doubt that Mr Morgan will apologise to Ms Sturgeon for forgetting that, in fact, she proposed an amendment to a previous budget.

We recognise that the money in the budget belongs to the people of Scotland. It is our duty to ensure that we allocate it to meet their priorities and to get the best value possible for every pound that we spend. We also acknowledge that we need to improve efficiency in the public sector. Last year, we launched the efficient government plan for tackling waste, bureaucracy and duplication in order to increase and improve front-line services. We are taking that action not just for the sake of it, but to give real assistance to those who deliver education, health care and justice to the people of Scotland.

Our partners in local government will play a key role in helping us to meet those commitments. By March 2008, core funding through aggregate external finance will have increased by 55 per cent since 1999-2000 and a total of £30 billion will be available to local government over the next three years. In such a growth situation, it is only right and proper to seek out efficiencies and reassure people in Scotland that each pound of theirs is being spent to best effect.

This budget is only the beginning of the plans that we announced last September. It builds for the future by building up our infrastructure, including our schools, hospitals and transport network, and by providing a modern, sustainable base that allows our economy to grow and gives the support that our public services deserve. Such an approach will benefit and strengthen all our communities. Those are the things that people care about and which make a real difference—initiatives that seek not to promote a dependency culture but to provide people with real choices about how they live their lives.

That, Presiding Officer, is the budget that we present to Parliament today. Above all, it is a budget for ambition, for choice and for enterprise, and a budget that rejects the narrowness of nationalism and the selfishness of conservatism. It is a budget that portrays Scotland as a confident country, promoting opportunity and—while doing so—pursuing fairness.

National Lottery Bill

16:55

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of motion S2M-2255, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the National Lottery Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the provisions in the National Lottery Bill that relate to the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Patricia Ferguson.*]

16:56

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): It seems that not a day goes by now without our having a Sewel motion. Today's is on the National Lottery Bill.

I acknowledge that some powers are being repatriated to Scotland under the proposals in the National Lottery Bill, but the minister will be aware of continuing concerns in the voluntary sector in Scotland over some of the bill's proposals. Under the bill, the secretary of state who is responsible for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in London will be able to decide what portion of the lottery cake will be presented to Scotland. The secretary of state will also have powers to top-slice certain amounts of that portion of the cake. Inevitably, that will result in a smaller portion being returned to us here in Scotland. Will the minister give a commitment to the chamber this afternoon that the 11.5 per cent of the lottery budget that is currently spent here in Scotland will continue under the new arrangements in the National Lottery Bill?

I ask the minister to address a further issue. At the moment, the Community Fund provides funding only to voluntary organisations. The new Big Lottery Fund will be able to allocate moneys to voluntary organisations and to public and private projects. Will she assure us that the level of funding that is provided to voluntary organisations in Scotland under the Community Fund will continue under the new Big Lottery Fund to ensure that those voluntary organisations do not lose out? Will she further ensure that we do not find that lottery money is finding its way into public projects that should properly be funded by the Executive itself?

Ministers' new power will be to appoint a new Scottish committee to watch over the application of the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland. Will the minister make a commitment that appointments to the new Scottish committee will reflect Scottish society and be based on a person's ability rather

than on which political party's membership card they have in their back pocket?

16:58

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): I have to admit to some surprise at the tenor of Michael Matheson's contribution—not least because the questions that he raised, and others, were dealt with at the meeting of the Enterprise and Culture Committee earlier this week, at which this Sewel motion was considered. As far as I understand it, the committee was content that it had responsibility for scrutinising the motion.

The comments that Mr Matheson made at the end of his contribution were gratuitous rather than exploratory. It might have been helpful if he had expressed his genuine concerns about this particular Sewel motion, as opposed to his—and his party's—manufactured concerns about Sewel motions in general. He might have found another way of raising any genuine concerns prior to today.

The Enterprise and Culture Committee had due opportunity to consider the motion as part of the process that was requested by the Scottish National Party some time ago, when it asked that we consider such matters in committees and not always in the chamber.

For those reasons, Presiding Officer, I am happy to press the motion.

The Presiding Officer: The question on motion S2M-2255 will be put at decision time.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-2314, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 2 Committee reports to the Justice 1 Committee by 9 February 2005 on the draft Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (Modification) Order 2005 and the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Prescribed Police Stations) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/9); and by 10 February 2005 on the draft Remote Monitoring Requirements (Prescribed Courts) (Scotland) Regulations 2005.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Margaret Curran to move motion S2M-2311, on the office of the clerk, and motion S2M-2312, on rule 2.3.1.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, between 4 September 2005 and 29 May 2006, the Office of the Clerk will be open on all days except: Saturdays and Sundays, 2 December 2005, 23 December 2005 (pm), 26 and 27 December 2005, 2 and 3 January 2006, 14 and 17 April 2006, 1, 26 and 29 May 2006.

That the Parliament agrees the following dates in terms of Rule 2.3.1: 8 – 23 October 2005 (inclusive), 24 December 2005 – 8 January 2006 (inclusive), 11 – 19 February 2006 (inclusive), 1 – 17 April 2006 (inclusive), 1 July – 3 September 2006 (inclusive).—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motions will be put at decision time, to which we now come.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are nine questions to be put as a result of today's business. In relation to this morning's business, I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Allan Wilson is agreed to, the amendments in the names of Richard Lochhead, Shiona Baird and Frances Curran fall.

The first question is, that amendment S2M-2320.4, in the name of Allan Wilson, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2320, in the name of Alex Johnstone, on energy policy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 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)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (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)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)

Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 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)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (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)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 49, Abstentions 2.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-2320, in the name of Alex Johnstone, on energy policy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
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)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (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)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)

Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
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)
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (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)
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 46, Abstentions 6.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's study into present and future energy supply and demand in Scotland; supports the Executive's position of not supporting the further development of nuclear power stations while waste management issues remain unresolved; supports the Executive's continuing commitment to the development of renewable energy in Scotland, including wind, wave, tidal, solar and biomass power, as a key element of a balanced energy supply portfolio; supports the Executive's commitment to achieving 40% renewable electricity generation by 2020, and welcomes the Executive's proposal in the Review of the Climate Change Programme to create an Energy Efficiency Strategy for Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-2291, in the name of Tom McCabe, on the general principles of the Budget (Scotland) (No 2) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, 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)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (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)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (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)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)

Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 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 63, Against 13, Abstentions 39.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Budget (Scotland) (No.2) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-2255, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the National Lottery Bill, which is UK legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the provisions in the National Lottery Bill that relate to the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-2311, in the name of Margaret Curran, on the office of the clerk, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that, between 4 September 2005 and 29 May 2006, the Office of the Clerk will be open on all days except: Saturdays and Sundays, 2 December 2005, 23 December 2005 (pm), 26 and 27 December 2005, 2 and 3 January 2006, 14 and 17 April 2006, 1, 26 and 29 May 2006.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S2M-2312, in the name of Margaret Curran, on rule 2.3.1, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees the following dates in terms of Rule 2.3.1: 8 – 23 October 2005 (inclusive), 24 December 2005 – 8 January 2006 (inclusive), 11 – 19 February 2006 (inclusive), 1 – 17 April 2006 (inclusive), 1 July – 3 September 2006 (inclusive).

Infertility Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-1852, in the name of Mary Scanlon, on infertility services in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

17:06

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I am grateful to secure the first debate on infertility in the Parliament and I thank those members who have stayed on for it. Coincidentally, there was an adjournment debate on infertility this week in Westminster Hall, led by the Labour MP Kevin Barron. He is chair of the all-party group on infertility, and its vice chairman is the Conservative MP Andrew Lansley. In that debate, Kevin Barron stated that 80 per cent of infertile couples in England have to pay for their treatment, the cost of which can run to tens of thousands of pounds. I do not have the figures for Scotland, but they are worth seeking.

It has been said that, in Scotland, we are more likely to discuss our debts and our bank balances than infertility. Infertile people naturally do not like to talk about their problem, not even to close family in many cases. Consequently, many will not even come forward for treatment. A recent article by Kate Foster in *Scotland on Sunday* states:

"This is the debt generation. It's not just about delaying childbirth to have a career, it's about being able to afford a home."

In *The Scotsman*, Gillian Bowditch says:

"Get the economy right and we'll get breeding".

The issue is complex, but I will concentrate on infertility treatment. Recent research in Aberdeen shows that the average sperm count has fallen by 29 per cent in the past 13 years. I have not read every word of the sexual health strategy that was launched today, but I would like sex education to be more about getting pregnant and not all about preventing girls from becoming pregnant. One couple in four in Scotland will need assistance to conceive at some point in their reproductive lives—that is equivalent to 32 MSPs. In a year, 5,062 couples present to their general practitioners and some 4,657 of those couples will be referred to hospital care. Members might not know this, but I understand that the commonest single cause of infertility is defects in male fertility, not in female fertility. That is followed by problems with ovulation, and disease of the fallopian tubes.

According to Infertility Network Scotland, births in Scotland could be increased by around 2,000 a

year if all current attempts at in vitro fertilisation were successful, and more if present limits were removed. Infertility can have a profound effect on individuals, couples and relationships and is associated with high levels of depression and marital break-up. The Infertility Network describes the feelings that are expressed as fear, guilt, anger, shock, shame, isolation and inadequacy. That is not to mention the issues of femininity and machismo, which are too complex even to start to talk about.

Although we do not treat it as such, infertility is a public health problem as defined by the World Health Organisation. It is often described as a lifestyle, rather than a medical issue. It might not be life threatening, but it is life affecting.

Modern infertility treatments exist, and they offer an excellent chance of success. After three cycles of IVF or intracytoplasmic sperm injection—ICSI—treatment, a couple stands a 50 to 65 per cent chance of having a child. Well, almost: the cut-off age for the treatment currently stands at 38, when the success rate for treatment is about 25 per cent. However, it drops to less than 20 per cent after the age of 40.

In Grampian the waiting list is nearly five years—I see Margaret Ewing nodding. In the Lothians, it is two to three years, and it is about 12 months in Glasgow. Many couples end up paying the full cost of treatment themselves. Someone from Edinburgh e-mailed me last week to say that there was a seven-month waiting list for an initial test in Edinburgh. In order to get in before the deadline, she paid for it herself, through BUPA. Poorer couples clearly cannot afford to do that.

At a time when there are concerns about Scotland's falling population, as mentioned by the Registrar General for Scotland in his annual report, it makes sense to provide those who dearly wish to have a child, but who are experiencing difficulty, with every assistance, particularly given that the total number of births registered in Scotland in 2002 was the lowest figure ever recorded—and 2002 was the sixth consecutive year in which the total number of births reached a new low.

The raising of the upper age limit for IVF treatment to 40 has been mentioned. That is welcome, but unless it is accompanied by more prioritised resources, the waiting lists and waiting times will simply lengthen. As everyone knows, the earlier that treatment is available and the younger the age, the greater the success rate. I ask the minister why infertility treatment sits outside the waiting time directives and why it is acceptable for infertile couples to wait for up to five years for treatment, while waiting list targets for other treatments are six months.

In March 2003 a meeting was held, in the presence of the Executive, involving all the key players in infertility in Scotland. The meeting produced consensus and I hope that the minister will accept its recommendations in her winding-up speech.

The current criteria disallow infertility treatment for couples if there is a child from a previous relationship living in the home. That means that many women and men could be barred from treatment despite not having their own biological child. The options for such couples are to fund treatment themselves, or to return the child from the previous relationship to the former partner. What a choice.

Sperm donation legislation passed at Westminster comes into force in Scotland in April this year, from which time sperm donors will give on a willing-to-be-known basis. That means that information about the father will be kept, so that the child, at 18 years old, can trace his or her father. That will undoubtedly reduce sperm donation, which, in Scotland, is already critically low. We bring in a large percentage of sperm from England. In Glasgow, much of the sperm is imported from Denmark, but sperm from outwith this country will stop when the legislation commences in April. The removal of anonymity is a huge issue, and we need to plan now for how to recruit donors with the awareness that they are willing to be known. Scotland is now classed on an international scale as a very-low-fertility country. On that ground alone, we need to do more.

Women are choosing to start a family later. The average age for first-birth mothers is now 30. Unfortunately, two years of unsuccessful attempts to conceive and a five-year wait for treatment—which applies to many women—with a cut-off age of 38, means that women need to get serious about childbirth earlier than age 32, or they might be too late.

I will finish with a quote from Lord Winston, which was cited by the Infertility Network:

"The infertile deserve compassionate social, not demographic consideration of their problem."

I am grateful for the debate, and I look forward to the minister's response.

17:15

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I thank Mary Scanlon for bringing this debate to the chamber. I am pleased that the Parliament is debating infertility, as there is no doubt that it desperately needs wider public discussion.

For most people who are affected by infertility, it is an extremely private issue that can cause

mental and emotional anguish, and can lead to long-term problems such as depression and the breakdown of relationships. The nature of the condition and the complexity of the emotions involved mean that many of those who are affected avoid speaking openly about their experiences, even with the closest of family members. For women, feelings of sadness, jealousy, anger, grief and loneliness are all associated with the experience of infertility. Equally, men can suffer from emotional anxiety, stress, feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.

A sad result of the trend is that we rarely have open, honest or poignant discussions about infertility in the public domain. Those who are unaffected by infertility are therefore too often reliant on sensationalist reporting and public discussion, such as the recent outrage over the case of 66-year-old Romanian mother Adriana Iliescu, which can form their perception of the condition and its treatments.

In reality, of course, the sad truth for infertile couples is far more fundamental and heart-rending than such high-profile cases sometimes suggest. An estimated one in seven Scottish couples experience fertility problems. Waiting lists can be as long as four years. As Mary Scanlon pointed out, a cut-off age of 38 for IVF treatment for childless women, plus an average two-year wait before GP referral, means that the real cut-off age for discovering fertility problems is closer to 32.

In a country where political will is being applied to tackle a declining population, surely it is time that our society recognised that infertility is a legitimate health care need that requires nationwide commitment. We have to open up widespread discussion of infertility to ensure that there is greater understanding of all the issues involved.

As important as the need for a comprehensive and consistent nationwide approach to infertility is the need for a dedicated strategy to tackle the underlying causes of the condition. While current levels of involuntary childlessness can be attributed to different factors, such as women waiting longer to start families, previous illness and a fall in the average sperm count—as outlined by Mary Scanlon—the alarming rise in sexually-transmitted infections in Scotland in recent years could override all those contributing factors as the main cause of infertility in coming decades. It is therefore fitting that this debate should follow the Minister for Health and Community Care's statement on a sexual health strategy for Scotland.

As many as one in 10 young people in this country could have the sexually-transmitted infection chlamydia without knowing it. In some

areas of Scotland, clinics have reported finding that as many as one in four young women are infected with the disease. The silent harm of chlamydia is of great concern. In a significant proportion of cases—particularly among women—it can be asymptomatic, and so can remain undetected, which puts women at risk of developing pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility. It is essential that we take action. Money that is spent now on better information services and testing the population, coupled with a national screening programme such as that in Sweden, could save us a great deal in future decades.

There are other causes that require attention. Once again I draw attention to endometriosis, which we debated four years ago. I wish to put some questions to the minister. In 2001, the estimated waiting time for the diagnosis of endometriosis was seven years, which highlights an urgent need for better understanding. Could the minister investigate whether the diagnostic situation has improved? Will she reconsider the possibility of having a public awareness campaign to encourage greater interest in and understanding of the condition among the public, the medical profession and the scientific community?

Once again, I thank Mary Scanlon for raising the subject of infertility. In the spirit of talking about it, I say that my husband and I have personal experience of infertility, having tried unsuccessfully for a number of years to start a family. We were extremely lucky to conceive without IVF—it was a miraculous occurrence—but I have not forgotten the emotional turmoil at the prospect of not being able to have a child. I hope that the forthcoming review of guidance on the provision of fertility services in the national health service will result in improved services and greater reassurance for couples that their decision to try to have children will be supported and resourced.

17:20

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): Like Elaine Smith, I congratulate Mary Scanlon on bringing this important subject to the chamber and on the cogent case that she has laid before us. Perhaps she could ask her colleague David Davidson why, of those who have remained for the debate, only one is male—apart from you, Presiding Officer. There might be a psychological explanation for that; I am not sure.

In the annals of the Parliament, we can see that the issues that are raised in members' business debates are important. I think that you will accept, Presiding Officer—although I do not have statistics—that the debates are often about issues pertaining to the delivery of the health service. I say that as a serial attender, or perhaps even offender.

I am proud that the Parliament has this important facility to bring to the attention of ministers and their officials issues that can often be lost in the broad sweep of general legislation. The debates ensure that we can bring before the Parliament not only constituents' issues, but issues that transfer across geographical boundaries in Scotland and elsewhere. Such subjects are part and parcel of what we should be talking about in the Scottish Parliament. I believe that members' business debates are part of making this a genuine people's Parliament and ensuring that minorities are not forgotten. I say to the minister that addressing any slippage in the provision of adequate services to infertile couples is part of ensuring that those who experience infertility and wish to undergo fertility treatment are not forgotten in the broad health policy agenda, which we accept is complex. In Scotland, according to the figures that I have, 2,500 couples a year undergo fertility treatment and can access three cycles of treatment via the NHS.

A committee of senior doctors has recommended that the age limit for receiving treatment be raised from 38 to 40. I hope that the Executive will accept that and provide the necessary resources to assist people, against the backdrop of demographic change in Scotland and the fresh talent initiative. We should enable people who are here to have children and if they have difficulties we should do everything that we can to assist them.

We all know that, increasingly, women are postponing the possibility of pregnancy until their mid-30s or thereabouts. It might come as quite a shock to many people who have been using various forms of contraception to discover that conception is not as easy as it seems. Raising the age limit for treatment is important given the demographic trend in Scotland.

Over the many years in which I have been an elected representative, I have discovered that it takes a great deal of courage for couples to talk about infertility. Elaine Smith has had personal experience of the issue and she is right that the people affected find it difficult to talk, even to close family members. However, they have to talk to their general practitioner, be referred to a consultant and come to our surgeries—I have dealt with several cases over the years. We are asking them to discuss one of the most personal, emotional and private aspects of their lives. They tell us how they feel about the barbed comments that are sometimes made. For the sake of parliamentary propriety I will not go into those comments. Some are meant in a jocular fashion, but the hurt and the emotional instability that people experience, which affect their close relationships, cannot be underestimated. Their angst is immeasurable. From my years of

conducting surgeries—I do not want to say how many years—I know that it is unusual for an MP or MSP to be in tears during a surgery. I am used to constituents being tearful, but some of the cases that have been placed before me can reduce me to tears.

I want the minister to examine the distribution of cases. Mary Scanlon talked about the waiting lists, figures for which are available. When I checked today, I noted that the waiting time in Grampian—the list was established in 1995—is five years. From 1987 onwards, when people in Moray came to me with fertility problems, they were referred to Ninewells hospital in Dundee, which meant that they incurred a great deal of travelling expenses and so on. The waiting time in Lothian is three years and in Glasgow it is probably one year. I sincerely hope that the minister will address the disparity in waiting times. I know that the minister is not only a politically caring individual, but a personally caring individual.

17:26

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): I join others in congratulating Mary Scanlon on securing this debate. Over the years, she and I have disagreed on many health-related issues, but I genuinely admire her tenacity and consistency in championing a number of issues in the Parliament, infertility being one. Over the years, Mary Scanlon has raised this issue in forums that I have been involved in and has succeeded in raising awareness and changing minds and policy as a result.

I felt duty bound to speak tonight, not least because the motion mentions the report of the expert advisory group on infertility services in Scotland, which I launched in my former life as Minister for Health and Community Care. I remember spending some considerable time thinking about how that work could be taken forward. I readily admit that my recollections might have become fuzzy over time, but I recall being impressed by the work that was being done. While I agree that it is right that that work be re-examined—particularly with regard to implementation—it is important that any work that ministers take forward builds on the thorough work that has been done.

That work was done because successive ministers recognised that the degree of variation across the country was unacceptable. In infertility services, as in so many others, the challenge is how to remove the postcode lottery. That is what the Health Department and its ministers must focus on. The situation cannot be solved simply by issuing an edict from the centre or investing a pile of money; there are complex issues about service-

level delivery in ensuring that there is a genuine equity of service across the country.

Communicating the work that is done by clinicians to people who are affected by infertility is also important. I remember studying the work and gaining an understanding of why some of the recommendations were being made. That involved spending a considerable amount of time discussing the subject with some of the best experts in the country. It is important that couples who have a limited amount of time with a clinician and who are already upset and emotional have the reasoning behind certain decisions and policies in the health service explained to them in a way that they can understand more readily than is often the case.

As others have done, I want to make a link with the earlier statement on the national sexual health strategy. Many have talked about the need to discuss such issues more openly. I am talking not about requiring people to be explicit about their personal experience, but about having a society that is able to discuss issues pertaining to sex and relationships, infertility and reproductive health in general. We have a long way to go before that happens, however. I well recall from my experiences of being pregnant and of trying to conceive—I will not go into more detail—that although I was well read and well educated and had accessed much information, I found that many matters were not part of the common currency of understanding in our society. We should not kid ourselves that as a society we have got to grips with the issues.

I agree strongly with Elaine Smith's points about the importance of recognising the link between sexually transmitted infection and infertility. I am disappointed that the sexual health strategy that was published today makes no commitment to a national chlamydia testing scheme. We need not wait for further evaluation of projects to progress that. We know from work that has been done that such testing works, diagnoses infection and can lead to people being treated. We should remember that chlamydia is the leading cause of tubal infertility in women. I hope that that is a clear issue on which the minister will respond.

Although much progress needs to be made, we should applaud not only the work that is being done in the health service to deliver services, but the research that is being conducted in Scotland. Right on our doorsteps, we have the centre for reproductive biology at the Edinburgh royal infirmary, which is undertaking leading-edge work on infertility and many other areas of reproductive health. Some time ago, the cross-party group on sexual health received from Dr Bob Millar of that centre an utterly illuminating presentation of which many members would be interested to hear more.

I congratulate Mary Scanlon again on securing the debate. I hope that it raises awareness and changes practice in the time to come.

17:31

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I echo what other members have said. I thank Mary Scanlon for initiating an important debate. In my professional career as a doctor, I worked in community paediatrics, so I did not deal directly with infertility cases. However, I dealt with such cases indirectly, as I was for a time a medical adviser to the adoption panel in the Highlands.

The panel dealt with many couples who had undergone failed IVF treatment and the trauma of that. They were becoming older and had realised that adoption was the way that they might have a family. Sometimes, couples were still undergoing treatment during assessment as adoptive parents. They were put on hold while the IVF continued, so they experienced the trauma of worrying about whether the IVF would succeed and of thinking that they might be missing the chance of a placement of a child for adoption.

Mary Scanlon described infertility as a life-affecting issue, but I think that it is more than that; it can be a life-destroying issue. I would strongly take issue with anyone who said that treatment should not be available to everybody on the NHS, but I do not think that anybody would say that. It is up to us to make that provision available.

Mary Scanlon mentioned societal changes that might lead to an increase in infertility, such as the fact that women delay child rearing for reasons such as career issues. She also referred to the debt generation. I was talking casually to somebody up in the Highlands who said that his daughter, who is in her early 20s, has so much debt from her student days that she will be unable to consider having a family and taking a career break for years. He described that, perhaps in a rather extreme way, as a sort of genocide that was being perpetrated on that stratum of society—the people who have been students and who cannot consider becoming parents for many years until they pay off their debt.

Chlamydia, which has been mentioned, is another issue. I will not go into that, because other members have, but I echo the comment that we will not have good reproductive rates unless we have good sexual health, which is crucial in society.

Mary Scanlon mentioned the falling sperm count. I do not want to stray too far from the debate's purpose, but we must take that matter seriously. Evidence is increasing that at least one factor in the falling sperm count is toxic pollution in our environment. Many of the toxic chemicals that

are found everywhere in our environment are known to be hormone disrupting.

At present, the REACH legislation—it concerns the registration, evaluation and something that I never remember of chemicals—is being gradually processed through all the European Parliament's committees. The chemicals industry is exerting great pressure for that legislation to be diluted, but we should resist that, as, indeed, the UK Government has so far. I have told the Scottish Executive—as have others, to ensure that our views are known at the UK level—that the regulations should be as stringent as possible and that we should try to phase out potentially hormone-disrupting chemicals for the good of future generations.

Someone touched on the slightly unfortunate publicity in the papers about a much older woman in another country who had been given infertility treatment. However, I do not think that that would happen here.

When I was looking up information for the debate, I rather extravagantly downloaded and printed off the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's document "Tomorrow's children: A consultation on guidance to licensed fertility clinics on taking in account the welfare of children to be born of assisted conception treatment". Some of the advice that it contains is obvious and has been known for years, such as checking that neither parent has a record of child abuse. However, other issues are addressed—for example, the welfare of children who are born to certain family structures. The document states that the families' structure seems to have less effect than their standard of living and that poverty is much more important than how the family is structured. Particularly, children who are born by assisted conception to lesbian parents do well. That is worth saying, as the research is evidence based.

I very much welcome the debate. I believe that, in a civilised society such as we hope we have in Scotland, treatment for this distressing condition or group of conditions should be available to everybody, irrespective of where they live and what their income is.

17:37

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): As I listened to Mary Scanlon's speech, I was watching the reactions of members around the chamber. That is one of the reasons why I have chosen to speak in the debate, although I was going to stay and listen anyway. In case anybody thinks that I am the token male in the debate, I should say that I have done my bit for family raising. I had five children—with my wife, I

might add—and I still have some responsibility there. I was interested to hear Mary Scanlon talk about the importation of sperm from Scandinavian countries. A recent DNA check found that Stonehaven, where I live, has the highest Scandinavian DNA profile in Scotland. There is nothing new in that; it is the motive that is different now.

Members have raised issues about age. I agree that the age at which people qualify for treatment should be raised, especially as nowadays people who have careers often marry or settle down much later in life. However, I have a slight reservation. I do not condemn my parents in any way, but my mother was 37 and my father was 42 when I arrived. That was fine: I had caring, loving parents. However, when it came to asking, "Are you going to come and play football, dad?" that was a wee bit beyond his level. We must bear the needs of the child in mind.

There is a lot of male angst because of the stigma that is attached to infertility. As is often the case in Scotland, we are not good at talking about mental health, infertility and similar issues. My late brother-in-law was desperate to have a family and could not believe it when he was told that the fact that he could not have children was his problem. That hurt him for years, to the point at which he might as well have become a father to my children—I would have liked that contribution financially—because he treated them as his own. When he died last year, the last thing that he said to a younger member of our family was that he very much regretted not having his own children, although he had enjoyed participating in my children's lives.

Taking all those personal experiences together, we ask what is causing the problem. I agree with Eleanor Scott—I made a note of this—that general health is important. There is, undoubtedly, evidence of environmental pollution in western society. I do not agree with everything that the European Union says or does and I think that we should scrutinise it in Parliament, but I believe that this country has to pay some attention to the effect of toxic materials on health in general, not just on the fertility aspect of it.

We have a diminishing population and family life is under stress. There are many pressures on family units and couples. When people can prove that they can bring up a child—and that has nothing to do with wealth; it is about people's ability as parents—that should give them some qualification for treatment. Parenting education should be given at school and that should include education in fertility and the things that can damage people's future ability to have a family.

Part of that is diet and lifestyle. People are binge drinking and there is dreadful misuse of alcohol,

tobacco and drugs. The sexual health of the nation is poor and, as Susan Deacon said, we do not know how many infections there are. I would back her idea of a chlamydia testing scheme. For many people, the problem is a matter of lifestyle. They get into drink and drugs; they end up having sex and getting infections. That damages their lives.

Many contraceptive preparations damage women's fertility. They can limit a woman's physical capability to have children. Moreover, the sheer angst caused by fertility problems can cause mental health difficulties and those, again, can postpone children. There should be some form of counselling for people who have such difficulties. We need to get them into the system and speaking to people.

The community health partnerships have a public health role and I hope that the minister will respond on where she thinks fertility issues should fit in in that respect. On affordability, the health service in Scotland belongs to us and it is for us to decide how we spend the money. I am not being xenophobic when I say that I would not like people to come from other parts of the United Kingdom and Europe because we have something on the health service that they do not have. We have to consider the numbers carefully.

Few people are experts in the field, which is small and specialised—we cannot have a brain surgeon on every block. However, why can we not set up a peripatetic consultancy system that would operate out of Edinburgh, for example, and go to the regional centres? The problem is not a life-and-death one and nothing is going to happen overnight, so people can make appointments. If that happened, the experts could go out to where they belong—in the community.

17:42

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Rhona Brankin): I thank Mary Scanlon for giving us the opportunity to speak about infertility services and to review the guidance of the expert advisory group on infertility services in Scotland on criteria for access to NHS-funded assisted conception treatment. From talking to officials, I know that Mary Scanlon has a great passion for the issue and I have probably heard her speak about it in the past.

The Scottish Executive has long recognised that management of infertility represents a health need. Susan Deacon worked on the issue in her former life as a minister; we should acknowledge the importance of that. The Executive prides itself on putting families and children at the centre of our policies. We also acknowledge the heartache and pain that not being able to have a child or complete a family unit causes many couples.

As many members have said, infertility is much more than just a physical health need; successful and unsuccessful treatments can have long-lasting emotional impacts. For that reason, we are keen to ensure that access to NHS-funded assisted conception treatment is available fairly and equally throughout Scotland. Like many other MSPs, I have heard heart-rending stories at surgeries in my constituency.

NHS-funded infertility treatment has been available in Scotland for many years, although provision and access is variable around the country; I will touch on that more in a moment. In order to redress that, an expert advisory group on infertility services in Scotland—EAGISS—was convened to examine the services that are available and make recommendations for future management of assisted conception treatment. The group reported in 1999. The report covered a range of issues, including the evidence base for effective treatment and the service model for different levels of infertility treatment. One of the report's most important recommendations related to the criteria for access to treatments requiring Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority licensing, such as IVF or ICSI. Following production of the EAGISS report, the Scottish Executive asked NHS boards to adopt the criteria.

The criteria covered clinical aspects, such as underlying health problems, previous treatments and age, and the number of treatment cycles that a couple should have. The criteria were based on the best clinical evidence of effectiveness that was available at the time. The criteria also stated that couples who already had a child living with them in their home should not be able to access NHS-funded treatment. That social criterion was reached by consensus. Again, Mary Scanlon referred to issues around that, which I will touch on later.

The EAGISS report was well received, I understand, by clinicians and service users because of its focus on ensuring equity of access across the country and its emphasis on basing the criteria on evidence of effectiveness. The chief medical officer asked NHS boards to implement all the recommendations and the service model that was set out in the report, but no timescale was specified.

To ensure that boards were working towards implementation, a review of access criteria was conducted in 2000, which found that NHS boards were working towards implementation of the criteria and that significant progress had been made. However, the review also found that there remained variability in the criteria that boards were using, particularly around the female upper age limit for treatment. Because of that continuing variability and the availability of more up-to-date

information on the effectiveness of treatment, the Scottish programme for clinical effectiveness in reproductive health conducted a consensus conference in 2003, at which the very latest evidence was presented and each of the criteria was revisited. The conclusions of the conference were submitted to the chief medical officer for consideration.

Concurrent with those developments in Scotland, Westminster ministers asked the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to review fertility services in England and Wales. NICE published in 2004 recommendations for clinical management of fertility services in England and Wales, which included criteria for access to treatment.

We then asked NHS Quality Improvement Scotland to revisit the conclusions of the consensus conference, review NICE's recommendations and provide us with a coherent evidence base for provision of infertility treatment. I now have the results of that review by NHS QIS, which suggest—based on evidence of effectiveness of treatment—that there should be changes to the age limit of up to 40 years and to the number of cycles that are available to eligible couples, which is currently five cycles.

However, as I have already remarked, not all NHS boards have adopted the present EAGISS criteria. Many people have drawn attention to that. Therefore, prior to making any further changes, we need to ensure that we can deliver on the criteria and that we are not simply creating even longer waiting lists for treatment.

Mary Scanlon asked whether the Executive intends to introduce waiting-time targets. We do not routinely collect information on waiting times for fertility treatment because of sensitivities around patient confidentiality. The HFEA is responsible for maintaining all information on infertility services throughout the United Kingdom. Indeed, it releases information only to licensed centres in order to ensure that patient confidentiality is protected. However, we are very much aware of the kind of differences that exist. Margaret Ewing drew our attention to the longest waiting time—five years—which is in Grampian.

We need to think carefully about what is happening in terms of current implementation and its variability. We also need to think about whether we are going to change the criteria and whether we can deliver the criteria—that is critical. We are going to conduct a consultation in the coming months, in which we will take on board comments from service users, which is important, and clinicians. We will concurrently conduct an economic appraisal of the suggested changes to the status quo.

We need to be clear about the resource consequences of widening the access criteria before possible implementation of revised guidance. It is important that NHS services be provided equitably and fairly and that service users do not feel that they are subject to exclusion or inclusion on the basis of where they live. However, that does not mean that all infertility services can be available in every board area. David Davidson touched on that. Some areas of provision are highly specialised and can be delivered only by appropriately trained, resourced and licensed centres. That means that there will still be a need for couples to travel to a tertiary centre for specialist care such as IVF. However, we want to ensure that the pathway of referral on to those centres is clear and equitable, regardless of where the patient originally presents.

There has been much discussion about infertility. Elaine Smith, Susan Deacon and other members have talked about that. There is no doubt that we need to look in broader terms at issues to do with infertility. Indeed, the Scottish Executive is seeking to make a difference and to tackle issues such as smoking with legislation that it is introducing. It is also seeking to tackle over-consumption of alcohol and is taking steps to address obesity.

A lot with which I agree has been said about chlamydia and sexual health. Chlamydia is potentially damaging to fertility. Members may be aware that that is one of the areas that the national sexual health demonstration project, Healthy Respect, has been looking at, and it intends to demonstrate best practice in improving sexual health, including prevention and diagnosis of chlamydia. I recognise the importance of that. I respond to Susan Deacon by saying that we have to make it clear that tackling chlamydia is one of the central aims of our sexual health strategy. Although a national chlamydia testing scheme may not be feasible just now, I am certainly not ruling that out. I want to be absolutely sure that we are doing something effective about the appalling rates of chlamydia in Scotland. Let there be no doubt about that.

Through the consultation and appraisal that I described, we believe that we can develop a protocol for infertility services that not only provides equitable provision for patients but is deliverable within available resources. Through the consultation, we want to address issues such as the use of social criteria, the relative priority of infertility treatment—given the many demands on the NHS—and the balance between attempting to ensure that as many infertile couples as possible have at least a limited number of treatment cycles and ensuring that we maximise the effectiveness of treatment.

Mary Scanlon: The minister speaks about resources being available. It is my understanding that, following the EAGISS report in 1999, health boards were expected to implement its recommendations but were not given additional resources. That is part of the reason for the increase in waiting times. Is the minister committed to taking resources from elsewhere in the NHS in order to earmark funding for infertility services in future?

Rhona Branlin: I can tell Mary Scanlon that, as part of the consultation, what we need to establish is why services have developed so patchily across Scotland. Is it to do with resourcing or with clinical leadership in NHS board areas? We need to get to the bottom of that. Clearly, we need to establish protocols that will allow health boards to provide services that are equitable and available to people no matter where they live and no matter what their economic position is. We want to complete the review and publish our conclusions by end of summer 2005.

I also want to mention endometriosis, which was mentioned by Elaine Smith. I agree that endometriosis causes huge pain and suffering to women and I certainly take it seriously. I do not have at my fingertips up-to-date information on endometriosis, but I am more than happy to get an update for Elaine Smith and will forward it to her.

I conclude by thanking Mary Scanlon for the tenacity that she has brought to her work in this area. I would be delighted to meet her to discuss how we can take matters forward. I am more than happy to work in partnership with the other members in the chamber who have demonstrated an interest in the subject to see how we can improve infertility services throughout Scotland.

Meeting closed at 17:55.

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