

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 16 March 2005

Session 2

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CONTENTS

Wednesday 16 March 2005

Debates

Col.

TIME FOR REFLECTION	15341
STANDING ORDERS (COMMISSIONER FOR PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS)	15343
<i>Motion moved—[Karen Gillon].</i>	
Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)	15343
The Deputy Minister for Parliamentary Business (Tavish Scott).....	15345
Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP).....	15346
Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	15347
Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)	15348
Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green)	15349
Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab).....	15350
Karen Gillon	15351
HOUSING	15353
<i>Motion moved—[Johann Lamont].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Linda Fabiani].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Mary Scanlon].</i>	
The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont).....	15353
Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)	15359
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	15362
Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)	15365
Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab).....	15367
Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)	15369
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	15372
Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	15374
Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab).....	15376
George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD).....	15378
Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP)	15380
Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab).....	15382
Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP).....	15384
Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab).....	15385
Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)	15386
Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)	15388
Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP).....	15390
The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm).....	15393
SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODY MOTION	15398
<i>Motion moved—[Robert Brown].</i>	
BUSINESS MOTION	15399
<i>Motion moved—[Ms Margaret Curran]—and agreed to.</i>	
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	15401
<i>Motions moved—[Ms Margaret Curran].</i>	
POINT OF ORDER	15402
DECISION TIME	15403
FRANZ FERDINAND ROCKS	15411
<i>Motion debated—[Pauline McNeill].</i>	
Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)	15411
Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	15414
Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)	15416
Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	15417
Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab).....	15419
Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green)	15420
Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP)	15422
Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab)	15423
Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab).....	15424

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)15426

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson)15427



Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 16 March 2005

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Graham K Blount, the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer.

The Rev Graham K Blount (Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer): Good afternoon. For some reason, my counterpart in the Welsh Churches Assembly office felt an urgent need to come up to Scotland to consult me last weekend. We discussed weighty matters of shared concern and then we went hymn-singing together—to Murrayfield. There is a gesture of faith for you.

Even if the embarrassment of the first half was partly redeemed by the second half, I confess that it still drove me to reread MacDiarmid's "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle". Perhaps MacDiarmid and the kirk are not natural companions, but there is a wonderful stanza in that epic poem in which he writes:

"He canna Scotland see wha yet
Canna see the Infinite,
And Scotland in true scale to it."

There is a richness in that, whether it is about the daunting challenge of testing ourselves against the best—as on Sunday afternoon at Murrayfield—or about getting our worries, our ambitions and even our vision in scale.

That sense of scale grabs me most among the mountains of Assynt. I have just read a book called "Of Big Hills and Wee Men". It was, of course, the title that got me—at my height, it resonates, as do the words of the Psalmist who says:

"When I look at the sky, which you made, at the moon and stars, which you set in their places"—

he could have added Suilven and Stac Pollaidh too—

"what is man, that you think of him; mere man, that you care for him?"

Seeing ourselves in scale does not diminish us as men or women, as politicians or ministers—of either kind—or as a nation. It may stop us from getting carried away with ourselves, but most of all it gives us roots, enriches us and enlarges our vision.

Even the English have a version of MacDiarmid's vision:

"He knows not England, who only England knows".

The vision that looks beyond the horizon of me and mine, of us and wha's like us, and even of the next election, will fuel our future: without it, the people will indeed perish, as the writer of Proverbs says. For churches, which too often fit Edwin Muir's scathing rebuke that

"The Word made flesh here is made word again ...
And God three angry letters in a book",

and maybe for Parliaments too, which sometimes struggle to make brave words flesh, there is challenge in trying to live that vision.

Grant us vision, Lord, and courage, for the living of these days. Amen.

Standing Orders (Commissioner for Public Appointments)

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-2569, in the name of Iain Smith, on behalf of the Procedures Committee, on procedures in relation to the commissioner for public appointments in Scotland. I call Karen Gillon to speak to and to move the motion.

14:34

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): The motion that is before us today invites Parliament to note the recent report by the Procedures Committee, which recommends new parliamentary procedures for dealing with statutory consultation documents and reports of non-compliance that are received from the commissioner for public appointments in Scotland. The changes to standing orders that we recommend are set out in annex A to the report.

The Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc (Scotland) Act 2003 provided a framework for the appointment of a commissioner for public appointments in Scotland and the first commissioner, Karen Carlton, was appointed in June 2004. Some of the commissioner's functions under the act require her to engage with Parliament, but there have been no procedures to govern how Parliament responds. The Presiding Officer therefore wrote last year to ask the Procedures Committee to consider what those procedures should be—our report is the result. In preparing it, we took evidence from the commissioner and consulted the Standards Committee. We also had the benefit of the cooperation of staff at the commissioner's office. We thank all those who participated.

The commissioner's first task is to prepare and publish a code of practice on how appointments are made. In preparing or revising the code, the commissioner is required to consult Parliament. I understand that such a consultation is likely to begin after Easter. The commissioner is also required to prepare a strategy to ensure that appointments are made in a manner that encourages equal opportunities. In preparing that strategy, the commissioner must again consult Parliament.

No standing orders deal with how to handle any such statutory consultation documents. In that context, we have recommended a rule change that is couched in fairly general terms so that it can be applied in any situation when someone is under a statutory obligation to consult Parliament. We expect statutory consultation documents normally to be laid before Parliament but, however documents are provided, the new rule will ensure

that notice of them is given in the *Business Bulletin*, so that consultation exercises are brought to the attention of all members.

Under the 2003 act, Parliament as a whole is to be consulted. That makes necessary some sort of debate in the chamber. We felt that such a debate could usefully be informed by prior scrutiny in committee, so we recommend that the Parliamentary Bureau initially refer consultation documents to a lead committee—and, if appropriate, to other committees—to consider and report on to Parliament. That approach strikes the right balance by enabling Parliament as a whole to respond to a statutory consultation without its taking up an inordinate amount of chamber time.

The commissioner must also report to Parliament any case in which the code of practice has not been, or appears unlikely to be, complied with and when ministers have failed, or are likely to fail, to act on that non-compliance. The commissioner may also direct ministers to delay making or recommending an appointment until Parliament has considered the case.

We imagine that such circumstances will be very much the exception, but we acknowledged the importance of there being in place a procedure to deal with the possibility. The first step is to ensure that members are given notice, so we recommend that all such reports be notified to members in the *Business Bulletin* when they are received.

It is possible, but unlikely, that some reports may contain personal or sensitive information that must be treated confidentially. The commissioner will make it clear when that is the case so that Parliament staff can take all reasonable steps to ensure that private and confidential information is made available only to members of the lead committee that considers the report.

The committee recommends that, once they are received by Parliament, all reports of non-compliance be referred directly to a committee for consideration. No committee's remit specifically covers public appointments. During the passage of the Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc (Scotland) Bill, the establishment of a dedicated committee was suggested. However, having considered the evidence, we believe that the likely amount of work will not justify the establishment of such a committee so, following consideration and discussion with the Standards Committee, we believe it appropriate to recommend extending that committee's remit to cover public appointments. In view of that recommendation, the bureau will not need to be involved in referral of reports of non-compliance. Instead, we suggest a rule that will allow reports to be referred directly on receipt to what will be known as the standards and public appointments committee.

In the necessary circumstances, the new rule that we recommend would require the standards and public appointments committee to report to Parliament and would require Parliament to have a debate in the chamber. However, it is worth emphasising that we expect the rule to be invoked rarely. The commissioner is likely to make a non-compliance report in the first place only if she has already exhausted all other avenues.

In conclusion, the committee believes that the new procedures that I have outlined will provide a clear and sensible framework for Parliament to follow in dealing with statutory consultations and non-compliance reports that the commissioner refers to it. On behalf of the Procedures Committee, I am pleased to recommend the new procedures to Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Procedures Committee's 3rd Report 2005 (Session 2), *Procedures in relation to the Commissioner for Public Appointments* (SP Paper 304), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 18 March 2005.

14:40

The Deputy Minister for Parliamentary Business (Tavish Scott): I thank Karen Gillon for her lucid explanation of the proposals that she has made on behalf of her colleagues.

Parliament's consideration of the report marks another step in establishing a distinct and relevant regulatory process for Scottish public appointments. As Karen Gillon illustrated, the process originated in a consultation that Scottish ministers commissioned and which revealed widespread public support for the creation of a Scottish commissioner for public appointments. We took steps to establish that post in the Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc (Scotland) Act 2003, which rightly envisages a number of specific roles for Parliament, including consideration of breaches of the commissioner's code of practice that are referred to it. Taken together, we believe that they will allow Parliament to play a full part in helping to maintain what we believe is a robust and fair process.

During the passage of the bill, we said that we would have no objection to a dedicated parliamentary committee's being set up to deal with such tasks, but it was always recognised that the relatively small amount of work that was likely to be involved would probably not justify the establishment of a stand-alone committee. Therefore, we were happy to leave it to Parliament to arrive at its own conclusions on the workload, which are now embodied in the report, as Karen Gillon illustrated.

I am sure that the proposed extended remit of the Standards Committee is extremely sensible and is in proportion to the range of its responsibilities. The choice of the Standards Committee to lead on the issue is relevant and will benefit Parliament's consideration of any proposals that are put to it by the commissioner. I need hardly add that I doubt very much whether many breaches of the code will be referred to it. The Executive's track record on compliance with the UK commissioner's code of practice over the years demonstrates that material breaches of the code have been rare. I am sure that that will continue under the new regulatory regime.

The creation of a Scottish commissioner is central to the Executive's plans to provide Scotland with an independent, accountable and open public appointments system that is based on merit; we remain committed to that vision. I am sure that the Scottish commissioner's enhanced powers and the Scottish Parliament's increased involvement in the ministerial appointments process will improve public confidence in the system and provide demonstrable reassurance that allegations of patronage and cronyism are totally unfounded. I am therefore delighted to endorse the report and to confirm Scottish ministers' support for its adoption.

14:43

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): On behalf of the Scottish National Party, I welcome the Procedures Committee's report, but I want to make a number of points, the first of which is a general point for that committee. The recommendations on the role of and the practice of reporting to Parliament by the commissioner for public appointments are sensible, but there is still an accountability deficit in respect of some parliamentary commissioners whom Parliament has legislated for and appointed. In particular, I hope that the Procedures Committee will now address how the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman and the information commissioner will report to Parliament. How they do so is not at all clear, as it was previously not at all clear how the commissioner for public appointments would do so.

Secondly, I hope that the commissioner and the committee will consider at an early stage—including at the design stage of the code of practice for public appointments—the recommendations in the 10th inquiry report of the United Kingdom Committee on Standards in Public Life, which was produced in January. That report made a series of recommendations on further improvements to the system of public appointments north and south of the border. Many

of the recommendations that are made in that report are worthy of consideration.

The only note of discontent that I would express is on the last point that was made by the deputy minister about the code of practice and whether there is still prejudice in the system. The code of practice—as designed and implemented by Dame Rennie Fritchie—made substantial improvements. I hope that when our public appointments commissioner draws up her code for consultation, she will use the opportunity to strengthen the code vis-à-vis both parliamentary scrutiny and, more important, the need to take patronage out of the system.

Despite the code and various reforms in recent years, the reality is that about two thirds of all appointees who express a political affiliation are from one party. Although that party gets 35 to 40 per cent of the vote in Scotland, I do not believe that it has two thirds of the best brains that apply for public appointments in Scotland. Through the code, the commissioner and the Standards Committee we must try to build confidence in the public appointments system by taking patronage out of it and ensuring that prejudice in favour of one political party is no longer maintained. Until that happens, many of us will retain a degree of scepticism and even cynicism about the system of public appointments.

My third point relates to what Karen Gillon said about how the commissioner should report to Parliament. There are, essentially, four areas in which the commissioner is directly responsible to Parliament, and it makes perfect sense for that to happen through the conduit of the Standards Committee. In the context of the system of public appointments in Scotland, we are talking about standards in public life and ensuring that appointments to quangos and other bodies are above and beyond reproach regarding patronage or any other kind of favouritism. Parliament should debate the commissioner's annual report along with the report from the new standards and public appointments committee on the key issues that Parliament has still to address.

The Procedures Committee has demonstrated typical common sense, which was articulated by Karen Gillon in her opening speech. We are glad to support the Procedures Committee's recommendations, but with the caveat that the remaining patronage in the system must be cleared out once and for all.

14:48

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The Conservatives are quite happy with the changes to standing orders, which will help the commissioner for public appointments in Scotland,

Karen Carlton, to do her job properly. She has to come up with a code of practice for the making or recommending of appointments to public office by Scottish ministers, and she must ensure that her strategy encourages equal opportunities. I also agree with much of what Alex Neil said about removing patronage from the system.

The commissioner must report to Parliament any case of non-compliance with the code of practice, and she may direct Scottish ministers to delay making an appointment or recommendation until Parliament has considered possible breaches of the code. Each year, she must lay before Parliament a report on what she has done. At the moment, there are no standing orders to allow for such procedures. After taking evidence from the commissioner in December, the Procedures Committee agreed on a course of action. Measures were necessary because it was unclear how a breach of the code of practice would be dealt with procedurally. It was also unclear how the requirement to consult Parliament on the code and the equalities strategy would operate in practice.

I shall not bore Parliament by repeating the recommendations that Karen Gillon has ably put forward. We are happy to support them; the substance of that support will be seen in due course.

14:49

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I apologise for the absence of Iain Smith, who lodged the motion that we are debating. He is unable to be present, but he supports fully the proposals that have been made in his name. That is a relief.

The suggestions in the report are sensible. Appointments must be transparent—the points that Alex Neil made have some substance. It is partly up to those of us who are not members of the Labour Party to encourage people who are members of no party, of the Liberal Democrats or of other parties to apply for jobs. Patronage is a two-way street. Many people still think that there is patronage when there is not, so they do not apply. It is up to us to get people of good quality of all points of view to apply, which would help to even things out. We do not want any relics of patronage in the system.

As a member of the Standards Committee, I am slightly concerned that I will soon be a member of the standards and public appointments committee. I foresee people sliding up to me shiftily at receptions to say, "I am very keen to be on the quango for looking after swans. Any chance of a job?" I will have to explain to them that it is not that sort of committee.

The Standards Committee is the right committee to deal with the matter. We try to deal with MSPs who step out of line, so it is right that we should deal with ministers who do so. Tavish Scott says that that has not yet happened, and I am sure that it will not happen in the future, but in such cases ministers should come before the Standards Committee. The committee has a relatively light workload because members all behave so well, so we can take on this extra business. Alex Neil may be right when he says that we should also deal with some of the other commissioners, but that is an issue for another day.

The proposals are sensible. The point is to ensure that our whites are whiter than white. At the moment they are certainly white, but it remains to be seen whether they are whiter than white.

The Presiding Officer: This is a rather tight debate. Mark Ballard and Richard Baker should limit their speeches to three minutes.

14:52

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): We are beginning to move in this country towards a different system of governance that places commissioners and ombudsmen and women in a crucial position in our body politic. It is right that Parliament's standing orders should evolve as our system of governance evolves, in order to establish the correct relationship between the commissioners and ombudsmen and women and Parliament. In that context, I want to say a little about the system of consultation.

Although the public may accuse us of inducing consultation fatigue among them, it is noticeable that there has been no system for consultation of Parliament, so I welcome the new rule 17.5 on consulting Parliament. That is particularly important for matters such as the code of practice—members including Alex Neil have expressed concerns about existing codes and the existing system of public appointments. We need proper consultation of Parliament and we need the whole Parliament to give unambiguous support to the code.

The Procedures Committee was faced with three options for the consultation. The first was simply to put consultation documents on record through the *Business Bulletin* and to leave it to members to respond to them as individuals when they noticed it. The second was to proceed immediately to a debate on the consultation. There were considerable difficulties in deciding who should lead the debate in Parliament, because the consultation would be produced not by the Executive but by the commissioner for public appointments.

The option that we chose was much more satisfactory. There will be recognition in the *Business Bulletin* that the document has been sent to Parliament. The Parliamentary Bureau will recommend that a specific committee deal with the consultation, properly scrutinise it and produce a report. There will then be an opportunity for the consultation document to be debated by Parliament in order to ensure that there is unambiguous support for it. That is a good method of consultation.

I am glad that the rule as it stands does not apply to one commissioner's consultations alone, and I hope that it will set a standard for general parliamentary consultation. I hope that the current consultation leads to a better outcome and to progress in developing our system of public appointments in Scotland as well as our code of practice for public appointments. That will be an outcome that we could all support unambiguously.

14:55

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): I was going to start my speech by saying that I was sure that this would not be a contentious debate, but I had not reckoned on Alex Neil who could make a debate on motherhood and apple pie contentious. The Procedures Committee's report addresses many of the concerns that he holds and has expressed—rightly or wrongly.

The proposals will ensure that the commissioner can carry out her duties effectively by the introduction of standing orders that relate to those duties. We agree that it is vital that those important duties be carried out effectively because they are about ensuring confidence in our public appointments by monitoring appointments processes and establishing a code of practice for ministerial appointments. The report reflects effective joint working by the parliamentary authorities and committees, which is further reflected in the cross-party support that we have heard today for the proposals in the report.

There is consensus that we want the right structures to be put in place to ensure that the public have full confidence in the proceedings of our Government and Parliament and, of course, to ensure transparency and fairness in the way that appointments are made to public bodies. In order to arrive at specific proposals for changes to standing orders, the committee heard extremely useful evidence from the commissioner on what procedures should be put in place; the report reflects that.

The committee recommended that statutory consultations be laid before or otherwise provided to Parliament, and that statutory consultation documents be referred to a lead committee prior to

their consideration by Parliament as a whole. That reflects the importance of such documents.

The committee also recommended that the remit of the Standards Committee be extended to include public appointments, and that reports on non-compliance with the code of practice be referred to the standards and public appointments committee, as it will be called. It recommended that when there is debate on non-compliance, that committee should prepare a report to inform a debate in the chamber. Perhaps the most significant change that the committee proposed was the additional role for the Standards Committee. The committee considered the possibility of a separate or subject committee to consider reports of non-compliance, but in the light of the expected workload and because reports will focus on processes, I agree that the most practical way forward is for the Standards Committee to be responsible for such matters.

What is proposed in the report not only is an efficient procedure for ensuring that reports that are referred to Parliament by the commissioner can be considered thoroughly and expeditiously, but will be of real assistance to the commissioner in ensuring that her work can be carried out effectively. That we have debated the report shows that it is important to instil confidence among the public about how people are appointed to public bodies and, more generally, the debate is part of the important job that we need to do to ensure that people have confidence and trust in people in public life and in the procedures of our Parliament and Executive.

When one examines the legislation that we have passed, I for one believe that we have made great strides on such issues and I commend the report to Parliament as another part of meeting that important challenge.

14:58

Karen Gillon: I welcome the general support for the committee's recommendations. Having met Karen Carlton, the new commissioner, I am confident that she is a suitably independent and feisty woman to carry out the job that she has been given. [*Interruption.*] I hear heckling from the back—Margaret Jamieson should know better.

I heard the remarks that Alex Neil made about other commissioners and I tell him that that is not an issue that has been referred to us so far, but if he wants to write to us about it, I undertake that the committee will consider it as part of its forward work programme. I could get into a debate with Alex about patronage, but given that I am responding to the debate as the impartial deputy convener of the Procedures Committee, that

would be inappropriate at this stage. Maybe we will do that later.

In response to Alex Neil's final point about the commissioner's annual report, there is nothing to stop Parliament debating that report if it so wishes—to do so might be appropriate on occasion.

In general, I welcome the tone of the debate and members' contentment with the Procedures Committee's report, which takes a commonsense approach.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): On the second recommendation, which concerns the extension of the Standards Committee's remit to include public appointments, am I right in saying that if the motion is passed the committee will now be able to look at the work of ministers, not just that of MSPs? Is not that quite a dramatic departure?

Karen Gillon: Parliament has considered its response to that very specific issue and has decided that we should have a commissioner for public appointments and that he or she should have a specific role. If Parliament agrees to the motion, it will have determined that the Standards Committee is the appropriate body to judge whether there is non-compliance with regard to the commissioner's role or to ministers' work in that respect. In this case, it is appropriate for Parliament to decide that the Standards Committee should become the standards and public appointments committee; after all, it is the appropriate committee for such work. I am sure that Mr Rumbles's successor as convener will ensure that the committee carries out the maximum amount of scrutiny on the matter.

I ask the Parliament to support my colleague Iain Smith's motion at decision time.

Housing

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-2585, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on housing.

15:01

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont): People will be aware that, over the past two weeks, there has been a series of important developments in the Executive's approach to housing. After all, every member in the chamber shares the interest in housing that has woven its way through the Parliament's work since its earliest days. In the past two weeks, we have published our new policy statement on housing, "Homes for Scotland's People: A Scottish Housing Policy Statement"; launched our new homestake initiative to help first-time buyers and others get a foot on the home-ownership ladder; introduced the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which focuses on the quality of the maintenance and repair of private sector housing; issued new planning advice on affordable housing; and announced how we intend to progress the single survey scheme. Of course, housing is important to us all, and it can bring out in our policymakers the most creative thinking and the most perverse and irrational decision making.

Although I will try to cover the amendments later, I must say that I am disappointed that there has been such a focus on the right to buy instead of on the breadth of related and complex housing issues. After rigorous scrutiny by the Parliament in 2000-01, the right to buy was reformed. However, as Linda Fabiani's amendment points out, current tenants' rights were preserved and, as a result, I believe that there has already been the movement that the amendments call for.

We accept that a range of measures is required to support first-time buyers. Indeed, some important announcements that have been made at Westminster today will have an impact on that matter as well as on other matters that will be discussed this afternoon.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Will the minister give way?

Johann Lamont: No, I will not.

We recognise that problems for first-time buyers are different in different places. One particular problem might be supply, and we believe that the Executive should focus on creating new homes for buying and renting.

Our approach to shared equity does what right to buy has been criticised for not doing: it acts as a recyclable benefit. When it has benefited one

person, it can move on and benefit another instead of providing only a one-off benefit that is tied to one first-time buyer.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

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

Johann Lamont: The last time that I opened a debate, I got so waylaid in various highways and byways that I did not get through the substance of my speech. I assure members that, if I can, I will take a number of interventions, but I am driven by the responsibility of getting to the end of my speech in one piece.

In particular, I do not want to miss my next point. Today, we have announced the details of Communities Scotland's £404 million investment programme of affordable housing for next year, with increased provision in all local authority areas. Of course, there is a connection between that significant investment and the quality of the management of our economy at Westminster.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Johann Lamont: No.

This debate therefore offers a timely opportunity for Parliament to consider our vision and ambitions for housing in Scotland and how we intend to turn them into reality.

The focus of the motion is the housing policy statement, which takes stock of our policies across the housing agenda and their links to other policy areas. Since devolution, there have been massive increases in public investment in housing; ambitious legislation on homelessness and antisocial behaviour; and major progress in relation to community ownership, fuel poverty and tenant participation. We felt that it was time to draw together those strands to ensure that we make coherent progress.

In creating safer communities and addressing the difficulties that are experienced by tenants, we are reclaiming housing for use. Not only are we addressing the issue of blight in our communities, as felt by those who live in hard-to-let areas, but we are recognising what a hugely wasted resource such housing is. We must meet the challenge of addressing the needs of fragile communities that may be falling into disrepair.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the minister give way?

Richard Lochhead: Will the minister give way?

Johann Lamont: I give way to Richard Lochhead.

Richard Lochhead: The minister mentioned lack of supply, particularly in relation to first-time buyers, and affordability. Does she accept that although financial incentives to help first-time buyers on to the property ladder are useful, if the land is not available in the first place, all that the public purse will do is to subsidise landowners who drip feed the market with plots of land? What will the minister do to make more land available in rural Scotland?

Johann Lamont: I accept that there is a specific problem with land. I welcome Richard Lochhead's recognition that simply supporting people with individual financial packages will not address the issue. If he bears with me, I will address the issue of land supply.

The policy statement sets out in detail our objectives and our plans to deliver them. It emphasises that housing is not just about bricks and mortar—it is about places that people can call home, and the delivery of good-quality, warm and affordable housing in safe communities. Decent homes of the right type and in the right place are vital to the health and well-being of individuals and communities, and to economic growth.

The policy statement covers a wide agenda. In the short time that is available to me, I will pick out some key themes. We need to increase the number of quality homes that are available to buy and rent at affordable prices, and we need those homes to be in places and communities where people want to live, both in our cities and in rural areas. We need to ensure that rented homes are brought up to standard, so that tenants are offered homes that are safe and secure and which fulfil their aspirations.

Mr Swinney: Will the minister give way?

Johann Lamont: No.

We need to respond to the aspirations of young families and others to own their own homes, but recognise that many people will continue to find rented houses more suited to their circumstances.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the minister give way?

Johann Lamont: No.

We need to give the elderly and other vulnerable people access to support to allow them to live in their own homes and communities. We need to close the gap between deprived and more prosperous areas.

We need to have a balance of housing provision and to make real the right to rent—not as a worst-case option—but we should also build flexibility into our housing choices, to allow people to have the most appropriate housing for them at each stage in their lives.

Our stocktake has reinforced the clear view that we must address the workings of the housing system as a whole—market housing as well as the social rented sector. Housing policy cannot be seen in isolation. Our initiatives on land-use planning, transport and the economy, for example, will play a major role in influencing what can be achieved.

Public investment is a fundamental part of the equation. The recent spending review announced an increase in public investment in affordable homes to £1.2 billion over the next three years. That has allowed us to make huge progress—from 18,000 to 21,500—in the number of affordable houses that we will be able to fund over the period.

As I said, next year's investment programme will amount to £404 million, which represents an increase of 23 per cent over this year's budget. We have announced today the details of how that money will be spent on the ground. Investment in social rented housing is increased by more than £75 million to nearly £290 million, while investment in owner-occupation initiatives will total £30 million, which is a 60 per cent increase in the budget.

In urban areas, the programme recognises the need to regenerate communities and to address demand pressure in certain areas. Funding has been increased by a third to £235 million. Investment in affordable housing in rural areas will increase to £97 million, which is a record level. Spending on affordable housing in rural areas this year represents a 107 per cent increase on spending in 1999.

More than £150 million will be invested in pressured areas, in which demand outstrips supply and prices are beyond many people. That figure is up by 70 per cent. In addition—and linked to increased investment in pressured areas—there will be an increase in spend on advanced land acquisition. The £404 million investment by the Executive will lever in an extra £170 million in private finance to boost the money that we can spend. All 32 local authority areas in Scotland will see an increase in expenditure under the new investment programme for the coming year. Local details will be announced shortly.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the minister give way?

Mr Swinney: Will the minister give way?

Johann Lamont: No.

However, public investment is only part of the answer. We will also need to enable the housing market to deliver for Scotland. Land supply is crucial. Major reforms to the planning system, involving new legislation and guidance, are under way and a white paper will be published later this

year. Our reforms must assist the provision of long-term, effective land supply for housing. That will provide the certainty and confidence that are necessary not just for the development industry, but for communities.

The planning system can play an immediate role in relation to affordable housing. In areas in which clear need is demonstrated, the new planning advice note on affordable housing, which we published last week, recommends that 25 per cent of the units in a private sector development should be contributed as affordable housing. Suggestions have been made that that figure is too high or too low.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister clarify a matter that has been raised in the Communities Committee? By “affordable housing”, does she mean social rented housing or is she using the generic term for all kinds of affordable housing?

Johann Lamont: I am talking about both social rented housing and low-cost home ownership. We want to target a particular group of people through the approach that I described. Local authorities are well versed in issues about their areas and I am sure that they will use the new approach in a productive and positive way.

We are taking a range of actions to free up public sector land for potential development. The massive investment in strategic water and sewerage infrastructure that was announced recently will help to overcome constraints on housing development.

We have placed a lot of emphasis on assisting people into home ownership. I make it clear that renting a home is as valid a choice as home ownership, but we must respond to the aspirations of the many people who want to own their home. In some parts of Scotland, many people who traditionally would have become first-time buyers have been priced out of the market, which has perhaps started to have an impact on the capacity for movement in the social rented sector. Our investment plans include nearly 5,000 homes for low-cost home ownership by 2008, which is the largest expansion in low-cost home ownership for a decade. The approach will not happen at the expense of social renting, because those homes will be in addition to the 16,500 social rented homes that we will fund during the same period. The homestake scheme, which we announced last week, will help in particular first-time buyers and people on low incomes and, as I said, the scheme will be recyclable, to the benefit of the broader community. The scheme will be used, in large part, in connection with new supply, but we will pilot its use for the purchase of houses on the open market.

Our determination to improve the physical quality of homes in Scotland is a mainstay of the policy statement. We have introduced the Scottish housing quality standard, which we have used to set demanding targets to ensure that warm, dry, decent homes become the norm in 21st century Scotland. Prudential borrowing and community ownership are powerful tools to help to achieve the quality standard in social housing. A further 80,000 homes are on the community ownership programme and, subject to the balloting of tenants, will transfer to community ownership.

I will mention briefly the Housing (Scotland) Bill—the Communities Committee did a great deal of work on the bill this morning. The quality of private sector housing is the main focus of the bill. It is estimated that £5 billion-worth of repairs, some of which are urgent, are needed in the private sector. The bill will address the problem by modernising the powers that are available to local authorities to deal with housing that is of poor quality or in poor condition. For example, local authorities will have new powers to declare housing renewal areas, which will allow a comprehensive approach to be taken to condition and amenity problems. Local authorities will also have powers to require owners to maintain houses and to carry out work on a house if, without that work, the house might lapse into serious disrepair or affect neighbouring buildings. Because some owners genuinely need help to carry out their responsibility to repair and improve their houses, we will allow local authorities greater flexibility in how they provide assistance. We must find a way of focusing on the responsibility that we all have to maintain our homes, rather than simply to do up the bits that will look attractive to the outside world.

The bill will provide enabling powers for the single survey scheme. At least in part because of the cost of shelling out for multiple surveys, the vast majority of people who buy a house commission just a basic valuation survey and then face steep repair bills in the first few years of occupation. If people are to have responsibility for maintaining their homes, knowledge of a house's condition should be of central importance. For that reason, the bill will give ministers the power to introduce a mandatory single survey scheme, whereby when a house is marketed the seller will provide upfront to prospective purchasers a thorough survey of the house's condition.

Christine Grahame: The minister might be aware that the Communities Committee heard evidence today about the expiry date on surveys, which will cause her team some difficulties. For example, if a seller pays £800 for a single survey, but does not sell their house within three months, they might have to get another survey done. They would have shelled out £1,600 and they might

have to shell out even more. Will the minister consider the issue? It is a serious problem, which could prevent the measure from going ahead.

The Presiding Officer: Please respond and then wind up, minister.

Johann Lamont: We acknowledge that the issue has generated a great deal of debate and we want to work closely with stakeholders to ensure that the measure will have no unintended consequences. However, there was a huge sign-up to the idea that people who are trying to get into the housing market ought not to have to pay for a number of surveys over a period of time, when at the end of the process they might not even know about the condition of the home that they have bought. No one could say that our pilot scheme was successful; not even Pollyanna herself could put a good construction on it. Nevertheless, we believe that the concept is not flawed and that the rationale is as strong as ever. We will pursue the concept with stakeholders.

As usual, I have managed to run out of time. In conclusion, I would say that the housing world is changing rapidly in Scotland. Much has been achieved since devolution. We must now consider issues to do with the private sector and I am sure that Cathie Craigie will be happy that we will consider issues to do with private landlords. Our commitment that people should have access to good-quality, warm and affordable homes can become a reality and not just an aspiration. I believe that the plans that are set out in "Homes for Scotland's People" provide a sound basis for moving forward.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the wide range of policies outlined in *Homes for Scotland's People* to increase the quantity and improve the quality of homes in both the social rented and private sectors; welcomes the £1.2 billion investment to achieve the three-year target of 21,500 affordable homes and the 23% increase in the Communities Scotland budget for next year; endorses the Homestake initiative to help first-time buyers and others into home ownership; acknowledges new planning advice setting a benchmark, where need is demonstrated, of 25% of all new housing development to be affordable homes; supports recent announcements and ongoing work to develop water and sewerage infrastructure for new housing and boost the availability of land, and welcomes the Housing (Scotland) Bill published last week which will seek to raise standards in the private housing sector and strengthen the rights of private sector tenants.

15:16

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): We acknowledge the wide range of policies that is outlined in "Homes for Scotland's People". Some of those policies are very similar to the policies of my party—we have discussed them many times before in the chamber. We welcome the Housing

(Scotland) Bill, which deals with the private sector. As a member of the Communities Committee, I look forward to hearing the evidence as we head towards the stage 1 debate. I have been very impressed by the work of the housing improvement task force in developing the legislation.

Since its inception, the Parliament has agreed myriad policies and initiatives relating to housing, all of which have been well intentioned and long overdue. Yesterday, when I was in Perth to listen to pre-legislative evidence, I thought to myself, "What on earth happened with Scotland's housing before the devolved Parliament?"

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

Linda Fabiani: I certainly will.

Tricia Marwick: Can I tell the member what happened with Scotland's housing before this place was set up? One debate on the housing support grant was scheduled every year at Westminster. It lasted for an hour, and it was the sole debate on housing in Scotland.

Linda Fabiani: There we are. Members did not know that they were getting a double act today.

The Executive has a tendency to believe that, once something has been announced, it will just happen, as if the problem has already been solved. Sometimes the Executive does not realise that the practicalities can be difficult. For example, there can be good legislation on homelessness but not enough local authority resources. Local housing strategies were announced four years ago, but how many have been approved? In that regard, I return to an idea that I have spoken about in the chamber before: having the right to a house does not actually put a roof over a person's head.

Some items within "Homes for Scotland's People" are aspirational but worthy of further practical consideration. I was extremely interested in the consultation document on shared equity when it came out, because I have felt strongly on that subject for many years. In her speech, to which I listened carefully, the deputy minister said that the subsidy would be in perpetuity and would be recyclable. However, in "Homes for Scotland's People", I noticed the potential for full buy-out within shared equity. I would like to hear more detail on who will make those strategic decisions. Will the decisions be devolved—as they should be—to local authorities, who know the supply and demand issues in their areas better than anyone? Will local authorities have the right, in partnership with registered social landlords—who will perhaps supply the shared equity—to say, "No, there shall be no 100 per cent buy-out in this location"? I look forward to detailed answers to those questions.

Paragraph 1.5 of the Executive's document contains the aim

"to enable young people to remain in rural communities."

In the rural communities in which I have worked in housing, houses are built and then—not far down the line—end up in the holiday home market. In Galloway and Perthshire, for example, that is a big issue.

There is an anomaly in introducing shared equity while we still have the extremely cumbersome shared ownership scheme. What will happen to that?

The biggest anomaly of all is that the right to buy is still draining the social rented sector of thousands of properties each year. On current projections, the social rented market will lose three houses for every house that is scheduled for construction. That makes no sense. I know that the question of right of buy is up for discussion with the Executive again next year, but I ask the minister to put minds at rest by at least cancelling the extension to housing associations that is due in 2012.

I note from paragraph 3.23 of "Homes for Scotland's People" that the Executive feels that

"A well functioning housing market will reduce pressure on the need for public investment in affordable housing, while the provision of low cost home ownership can reduce pressure on the social rented sector."

The reverse is also true. A well-resourced social housing sector will reduce pressure on those people who feel that they have to buy, who sometimes cannot afford to do so, but who feel that they have no other way of getting a roof over their head. The perception that to own is good and that to rent is bad can, and should be, reversed. The balance has tipped a bit too far, but we can rectify that if the will is there. That is not to deny that there are many people who wish to own but who find it difficult to get on to the housing ladder. That is why properly managed shared equity is welcome. A range of financial packages to assist first-time buyers would also help, as the Scottish National Party's amendment notes.

I turn to housing supply. I know that colleagues will deal with the issues of infrastructure and Scottish Water later in the debate. Fine words and good intentions are all very well, but practicalities take over. I received an answer to a parliamentary question that stated that no new approved social rented schemes had been delayed because of constraints imposed by Scottish Water. I find that difficult to accept and presume that the answer was slightly disingenuous; it is probably the case that schemes are not being approved until Scottish Water is sorted out.

Developers of private housing are adamant about the fact that infrastructure delays are likely to continue. I read with interest Lewis Macdonald's comments that, in cases in which demolition had taken place, there would be no need for infrastructure investment when a similar number of properties was to be built. That is another example of the theory not matching the reality. Historically, water and sewerage infrastructure has often been operating over capacity, so Scottish Water will insist on upgrading work before it allows new housing developments—even when houses have been demolished. Does the minister really believe that when the Red Road flats in Glasgow are demolished, it will be possible for the same number of houses to be serviced on that site without any further infrastructure investment being necessary?

Talking of sites, I was pleased to hear more about the initiative on the release of land in public ownership. It is interesting that the Forestry Commission is involved, but I would like to know whether the scheme will be extended to the Ministry of Defence, which owns lots of land in Scotland. In situations in which local authorities have engaged in land banking, will the Executive use powers to ensure the development of social rented housing, where that is required?

I could cover many other issues that underpin our housing system, but lack of time means that I am unable to do so. In addition to the single seller survey, measures to do with the land register, conveyancing and single title deeds and conditions could make a big difference to how houses are purchased in this country. I might be able to deal with those issues in the future.

I move amendment S2M-2585.2, to leave out from "to increase the quantity" to end and insert:

"and, while welcoming the Housing (Scotland) Bill, notes that the target of 21,500 affordable homes over three years has to be offset against the 18,000 homes per year sold under the right to buy; therefore calls for the right to buy to be reformed for new tenants, while preserving the rights of existing tenants; further acknowledges the insurmountable difficulties for many young people in a first-time purchase, and calls for the introduction of a range of financial packages to assist first-time buyers, including a first-time buyers' grant."

15:23

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I welcome today's debate on one of the most serious issues that people in Scotland face. I congratulate Margaret Jamieson on being part of the environmental hit squad and getting her photograph into "Homes for Scotland's People".

Like other MSPs, I find that not a week passes without my being asked to help single people and families to find suitable accommodation. In the

Highlands, there are 9,000 people on the council's waiting list; I am told that that is a genuine figure. Many of those people have little hope of ever getting the rented house that they are looking for. I found out last week that one guy had been on the list for 17 years. The average age of first-time buyers is 37, which is three years higher than the average age in England. Recent Bank of Scotland research concluded that four out of every five towns in Scotland were unaffordable for first-time buyers.

That said, we welcome much of the new Housing (Scotland) Bill, although we have reservations about part 3, which deals with the single seller survey. My colleagues and I will return to that.

We acknowledge the fact that 400,000 families in Scotland own their own homes as a direct result of the Tory right-to-buy policy. Most of those families who achieved their aspiration of home ownership were first-time buyers. I am pleased that the Liberal-Labour Executive states in paragraph 2.18 of "Homes for Scotland's People" that it has no plans to change the right-to-buy policy. We welcome any policies that will build on the fundamental principles of the right-to-buy scheme, because that maximises the opportunities for tenants to become home owners. We propose—when we win the election—to make shared ownership more flexible and affordable to more people. We will announce our rural and urban housing strategy tomorrow, ahead of our conference in Dumfries this weekend.

In the interests of consensus, I should say that we agree with what the Executive says in section 2.6 of the policy statement:

"More people want the opportunity to own their home."

That said, I acknowledge the minister's point that renting has to be an option for many. The choice to rent or to own a home must be made by the individual.

It is interesting that the Executive shares the goal of home ownership, given that there has been only a 4 per cent increase in home ownership since the Scottish Parliament was established. I endorse what the minister said today about the need for more ambitious plans for spending to encourage home ownership—I think that the figure mentioned was an increase of 60 per cent.

When we look at the number of new dwellings that are completed year on year, we see that the figure was more than 24,000 in 1995 under the Conservatives and that Labour has reached that level in only one year since coming to office; it did so in 1999.

It is often stated that Scotland does not function as a single housing market, but the same is true of

many local authorities. If someone has a job in Inverness, for example, a council house in Wick or Kinlochleven is of little use to them. With Glasgow having more than 10,000 empty homes and plans to demolish more than 100 tower blocks, and Edinburgh having 8,741 empty homes, further research is needed into why those homes are empty. We need to know whether it is because of the poor condition or poor management of the property or because of poor investment in the housing stock. In that respect, we welcome the plans in section 3 of the policy statement to improve the evidence base as a foundation for future housing, planning and investment.

It is not only the type of housing stock that is important; occupancy figures need to be looked at. There has been a dramatic increase in occupancy by single people, particularly single men; I think that the figure for single males increased by more than 60 per cent last year. I hope that the evidence base will identify not just how many houses are empty and where they are, but the type of housing, which is also crucial.

I have raised my next point, which relates to the Highland Council housing strategy, on previous occasions, but I make no apologies for raising it again. The council said that, although it wants to offer a home to as many people as it can, to do so without the appropriate care and support can be detrimental. The council referred in particular to the hidden problems of alcohol and drug abuse and mental health problems.

Highland Council has also said that the cut of £2 million in supporting people funding over the next three years is likely to make it very difficult for it to provide housing support or to provide the increased services that are required under the legislation on homelessness, for example. The council has asked the minister for a commitment that the funding that the Executive is making available to support the introduction of that legislation will be continued.

I have time only to mention my support of stock transfer before addressing the single seller survey. There is no way in which the minister can say that the return of 74 surveys from a target of 1,200 was a success. Several people who were on the single seller survey steering group have told me that they were not consulted before the announcement was made on the mandatory nature of the survey. If we are talking about open and honest consultation and about including people, it is quite shocking that those people were not consulted on such a major decision.

I move amendment S2M-2585.4, to leave out from second "acknowledges" to end and insert:

"and supports extra funding to be given to other low-cost home ownership schemes; is concerned that local authorities are unable to meet the requirements of the

Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 and the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004; acknowledges that, under the Conservative's right to buy policy, home ownership in Scotland has increased from 35% in 1979 to over 65% today, with around 400,000 tenants exercising the right to buy since 1980, and believes that the right to buy should be protected for the next generation of homeowners in Scotland; supports recent announcements and ongoing work to develop water and sewerage infrastructure for new housing and boost the availability of land, and welcomes some parts of the Housing (Scotland) Bill published last week which will bring improvements to private sector housing but is opposed to Part 3 of the Bill, the introduction of the Single Seller Survey."

15:29

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I am happy to support the motion and to support the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which I am sure will be open to amendment, although it includes a lot of good points. I also support the interesting policy document "Homes for Scotland's People", which sets out a lot of the good things that the Executive has done and intends to do for housing in Scotland. We have progressed a long way in that respect.

The number of houses in the social housing sector for rent and the amount of affordable housing for purchase remain an issue. Although the numbers are much higher than they have been, they are still not high enough. We have to work on that to ensure that we increase the number of available houses.

I have a couple of points on the amendments to the motion. The pilot single seller survey did not work well, but the concept is correct and we should work out how to deliver it. The survey has to be seen to be independent by both parties. If, because the surveyor is taken from a list of neutral surveyors, the buyer and the seller can accept the survey as independent, the single seller survey will work. If people do not have confidence in it, it will not work.

Mr Monteith: Surely the points that the member makes are a number of months too late. It does not matter whether the single seller survey works; it is to be imposed on people whether they like it or not.

Donald Gorrie: Mr Monteith has a curious concept of government. If one is pursuing a policy, one must ensure that that policy is sensible and will work. Otherwise, one should not pursue it.

Mr Monteith: Hear, hear.

Donald Gorrie: This is basically a sensible policy. Mr Monteith should stop making non-sensible remarks—then we might get on.

The survey has to be accepted by both parties. At the moment, the surveys that most people get

when they try to buy a house are not worth the paper they are written on. They are a complete waste of time and a rip-off by the housing industry. Proper surveys would cover two separate points: first, the real condition of the house; and secondly, the estimate of what it is worth. It is the first part that is really valuable. Anyone can make up their own mind about the second part but, at present, nobody gets proper information about the condition of houses. It is important that people get that information.

Christine Grahame: I agree with the member. A valuation is a waste of time. The single seller survey is equivalent to a structural survey, but a structural survey has a date on it, and it will be difficult for buyers to rely on a survey that may be three months old. That will cause the seller a great deal of expense. The seller may not be particularly wealthy but may have to carry out repeat surveys in return for up-front payments.

Donald Gorrie: Ms Grahame must deal with different sorts of houses from those that I deal with. It is completely ridiculous to say that the condition of a house radically alters in the course of three months. That might happen on the odd occasion, but huge changes in the condition of a house do not happen repeatedly.

The right to buy is an important issue; it is not a panacea, and it must be addressed. Aside from the rhetoric, there is quite a lot of common ground. The minister is considering the issue, and we need to see how the system is working at the moment. In the view of the Liberal Democrats, we must work out ways in which we do not affect the rights of existing tenants, although people entering new tenancies should not have the right to buy while there is such a problem with it. That may not be the final solution, but we agree that the issue should be considered sensibly and we will debate the matter when the minister makes his proposition.

The main thrust of the bill is about how we deal with common repairs. For a long time, my colleague Robert Brown, who cannot be present, has been enthusiastic about sinking funds, which are called maintenance plans in the bill. There is a lot of good stuff in the bill about dealing with common repairs. There is also the issue of helping landlords. Although there are some bad landlords who have to be sorted out—at the end of the day there has to be a whip—many landlords who own two or three houses may have become landlords by accident. They do not really understand their obligations or the nature of buildings and should be given a lot more help in the form of education, advice and support. There should be a whole lot of carrots for landlords to eat before somebody applies the stick to the few who need it.

Much more advice is needed for other people in communities. If we gave advice to couples who are planning to break up we would not need to produce half the houses in the first place. We could help to develop places—

Mary Scanlon: Will Donald Gorrie give way?

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

Donald Gorrie: The policy statement promotes the different varieties of tenure, but we must promote them more imaginatively. We have to provide housing in conjunction with councils and housing associations, so we must get together with them to produce policies to which we can all agree. That would allow us to tackle Scotland's long-standing housing problem even better than we are tackling it at the moment. We have a big backlog to make up. We have started, but we have a lot further to go. The bill and "Homes for Scotland's People" contain good material on how to do that.

15:35

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): Everyone deserves to live in a warm, comfortable and secure home. We all agree on that, although we might disagree on the means of achieving the goal. Some members will say that the market should be the driving force; others will say that housing associations should be the key agents in delivering decent, affordable public housing; and there will be those who argue for a return to large-scale municipal housing.

Each of the housing providers that I have mentioned has an important part to play in the creation of a Scotland that has an adequate supply of good-quality housing. North Lanarkshire Council is a good example of a local authority that has managed and maintained its housing stock well. Thanks to the freedom provided by prudential borrowing, it is about to embark on a major capital programme, ensuring that, over the next few years, every council house will have a new bathroom and a new kitchen fitted. In Petersburn in my constituency, there is an excellent example of partnership work between a housing association—in this case, Linkwide—the local authority and, importantly, local people. When I first visited Petersburn during my election campaign in 1999, I was shocked and appalled at the state of many of the homes. Six years later, the housing in the area is unrecognisable. Linkwide has demolished old housing and built high-quality homes that are designed to be energy efficient and accessible to people with disabilities. In addition to that housing is the local authority stock, which has also been refurbished, and

relatively new private housing, most of which was bought by young families who had lived in the area previously. In its briefing for today's debate, Shelter Scotland points out that different forms of tenure must be considered to be equal; in Petersburn, that is the case.

With the support of community development workers from Linkwide and North Lanarkshire Council, the Petersburn Development Trust has been established to develop a park area in the middle of the housing estate. The directors of the trust are tenants from Linkwide housing and local authority housing, as well as people from the private sector. In addition, there are directors from the local school boards, the local community forum and Airdrie United Football Club. I am proud to be the chairperson of the trust, which has successfully raised more than £500,000 for the first phase of the park's development. That has come through the tying together of housing regeneration with community regeneration. The minister is correct to say that the genuine involvement of local people—tenants and other residents—is a vital part of the regeneration process.

Before I conclude, I will briefly mention a comment that the minister, Malcolm Chisholm, made during a speech that he gave to a housing conference in January. In that speech, he mentioned the possibility of land that is owned by a public body and is surplus to requirements being used for affordable housing, rather than automatically put on the market. That could be an excellent way to increase the amount of land available for housing, especially in pressured areas, and I encourage the minister to develop the idea.

The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive have done much over the past six years to improve housing in Scotland. That point is made by Shelter Scotland, and even Linda Fabiani accepts it in her amendment. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced a level playing field for tenants of all social rented houses by establishing the Scottish secure tenancy, which strengthened the rights of many housing association tenants.

However, I am not quite sure where the author of the SNP amendment was coming from when she suggested that we need to modernise the right to buy. That is exactly what the 2001 act does. Amendments to the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which were lodged in my name and which were accepted, ensure that people cannot qualify for a discount until they have been a tenant for five years, doubling the amount of time that they had to wait for a discount previously. The 2001 act also caps the amount of discount that people get at

£15,000 or 35 per cent, whichever is the lower figure.

Linda Fabiani: I suggest that the reason why the Executive has agreed to review the situation next year is that it realises that those measures do not go far enough. I call again for the extension of the measures to housing associations to be scrapped.

Karen Whitefield: There is an obligation to keep the situation under review, but we will not know the true effects of my amendments to the 2001 act until 2007 at the very earliest. Nobody can use the new right to buy until then, as to do so one has to be a tenant for five years. The chances of scrapping the right to buy next year are non-existent—that is not the commitment that was given.

The Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 is widely perceived as one of the most progressive pieces of homelessness legislation in Europe. My colleague Cathie Craigie's Mortgage Rights (Scotland) Act 2001 helps to protect and support people who face difficulties in paying their mortgage. The central heating initiative and the warm deal have resulted in the installation of 45,000 central heating systems and in the insulation of more than 200,000 homes. Other important Executive initiatives will help to improve not just the housing but the neighbourhoods in which people live: initiatives such as the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004; the investment of £120 million through the better neighbourhood investment fund; and the planned investment of £470 million over the next three years for the regeneration of communities.

The Executive is entirely right to consider housing as a broad issue. The new Housing (Scotland) Bill will help to address some of the long-standing problems in the private rented sector and it will build on other measures, such as the Tenements (Scotland) Act 2004. I look forward to the Communities Committee's scrutiny of the bill.

The Executive is committed to improving Scotland's housing, and I support the Executive's motion.

15:42

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): In the period following the first world war, the Government of the day rightly recognised that the way to deal with the housing challenge that faced it at that time was to provide decent public housing, built and managed by local authorities. Over the next 60 years or so, Governments of all political colours and ideologies were, generally, to follow the same direction with regard to housing policy. They did so because, for the most part, the

principle of allowing local authorities to develop housing plans to suit local need and to build and manage public housing stock worked.

There have been times when local authorities and builders got it badly wrong. The quick-fix housing solution of the 1960s was a particularly good example of housing policy going badly awry. Such quick fixes, which involved an unholy mix of housing planners looking for cheap, large housing developments and builders only too willing to make a quick buck on the supply side, cost Scotland dear in both financial and social terms.

Although I welcome the Executive's recent announcements on the setting of benchmarks and planning advice on a percentage of affordable homes in all new housing developments, we should be cautious about that. There are potential dangers, with quick fixes and profit-driven motives causing similar problems to those that arose in the 1960s. I will explain. Builders across the country are already expressing concern that the figure of 25 per cent could mean that developments do not add up financially, which could lead to homes being built at the low-quality end of the market with respect to construction methods, materials and size. That cannot be allowed to happen. The 25 per cent figure must be fully consulted on to ensure that people who are looking for affordable housing do not end up in a 60s repeat of cheap, bad-quality housing.

The generally accepted way of delivering public sector housing was thrown on its head by the Thatcher Government, whose ideological hatred of councils led to local authorities being written out of the script for new public sector housing provision. The right to buy might have had its critics, but the Tories' real sin was to introduce schemes such as the 75 per cent clawback of money accruing from council house sales. Those clawback rules stopped the building of new affordable houses for rent and the modernisation of below-standard council housing in their tracks.

Where are all the homes that are fit for heroes today? We all know that a great many of them have been sold. For example, more than 50 per cent of Stirling Council's housing stock has been sold, and in rural places such as Blairdrummond and Blairlogie 100 per cent of the council houses have been sold. Even in urban Stirling, 80 per cent of the homes in the Riverside area have been sold. The unfortunate effect of that high level of sales, together with vastly increased house prices and the lack of serviceable and appropriately priced land for new affordable housing, has led to nothing less than a modern-day housing crisis.

Mr Monteith: The member accuses the Conservatives of being ideologically driven in the 1980s and 1990s, but is he not being ideological in saying that the fact that the previously public

sector houses in Blairlogie and Blairdrummond are now fully owned is to be regretted? Surely the transfer of wealth and ownership is a good thing.

Bruce Crawford: I did not say whether that was a good or a bad thing. However, at the beginning of the debate Mary Scanlon should have apologised for the 75 per cent clawback scheme that existed when the Tories were in power, in the same way that last week Nanette Newman should have apologised for the closing of the dental school.

Mr Monteith: Nanette Newman?

Bruce Crawford: I meant Nanette Milne. I said of the Greens a few weeks ago that we cannae tell them apart; it is probably the same with the Tories.

The high level of sales and the other factors that I mentioned have, unfortunately, led to a severe problem with the amount of land available for housing. That is why I welcome much of what is in the Executive's policy statement, but we need to go further. For example, we have to give pressured areas much more robust tools. That means that real questions have to be asked about whether new tenants in either council or housing association homes should continue to have the right to buy.

Although there is some good stuff in the Executive's policy statement, other elements in it are utter twaddle. The Executive's motion states that it supports recent announcements on

"ongoing work to develop water and sewerage infrastructure for new housing and boost the availability of land".

Its press release of 8 March states that there will be

"Massive investment by Scottish Water in strategic water and sewerage infrastructure to release constraints on development."

That is all well and good, but it is utter spin, because, the next day, I got a letter from Scottish Water that states clearly:

"The priorities to date have focused on regulatory drivers such as improving water quality and the environment, together with the provision of investment to maintain the current performance of our assets.

Consequently, there is often very little flexibility in the arrangements to fund growth and resolve the issues around lack of capacity."

Scottish Water says that it cannot do the job.

Let us get serious about the issue. We are not going to sort the housing crisis in Scotland until the land is available. In many parts of Scotland the land will not be available until the water and sewerage facilities are there to match it. Scottish Water tells us clearly that it is in a difficult situation and cannot deliver. Let us cut the twaddle that is

among some of the good stuff, stop the spinning and get serious about the issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Patrick Harvie, to be followed by Brian Monteith.

15:49

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am sure that Bruce Crawford is grateful for that clear identification of this member, Presiding Officer. For future reference, I am the pretty one.

Linda Fabiani said earlier that the Parliament has had a strong focus on housing policy. Many of us will agree that devolution has, without doubt, been good for housing. The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive can be congratulated on the legislation that has been passed and the measures that have been, and will be, taken to improve the quality and quantity of Scotland's housing. There is no doubt that many of those measures are vital. Due to serious disrepair and a lack of affordable housing, Scotland is facing a housing crisis—the First Minister has admitted as much.

The Executive has begun to tackle the shortage of affordable housing. The Housing (Scotland) Bill, which I and fellow Communities Committee members discussed this morning, is an attempt to tackle the state of Scotland's private sector housing, and there is much in the bill that I can support. There have also been progressive changes to homelessness legislation, although we are yet to be sure that the ambitious targets will be met. The Executive should be complimented on that work, but it is no surprise that members are calling for more.

The first issue that I will mention is energy efficiency. Short of draconian measures such as state control of energy prices, energy efficiency will remain the key issue in relation to fuel poverty. At a time when political leaders in Scotland, the United Kingdom and beyond claim to put climate change at the top of their agendas, we have yet another reason to address energy efficiency. Domestic energy consumption accounts for more than a quarter of our carbon emissions.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The member referred to draconian measures such as state control of energy prices. Will he clarify that the Green party's policy is to renationalise Scotland's utilities, which would bring about state control of energy prices?

Patrick Harvie: Off the top of my head, I say that I will be happy to discuss that with my colleagues.

In addition to the need to address energy efficiency in relation to fuel poverty, we need to consider the drift towards single occupancy, which

Donald Gorrie mentioned. Members seemed dismissive of Mr Gorrie's attempt to raise the matter, but it is worth discussing. As more and more of us live alone, our energy consumption increases dramatically, as does the pressure on housing supply. If the Executive is serious about putting sustainable development at the heart of all decision making, it should attempt in its housing policies to address the trend towards single occupancy.

The other issue that I will address is the right to buy. The Deputy Minister for Communities said in her speech that she regrets that the right to buy is a focus of amendments to the motion, but I agree with the members who lodged the amendments that the issue deserves attention. Many housing organisations have argued that the current level of commitment to affordable rented housing is inadequate, with long waiting lists in many areas and thousands of homes being lost every year through the right to buy. The usual response to that is that those homes are not lost. Of course, physically they remain part of the housing stock, but the fact that they are lost to the social rented sector is significant. The thousands of additional affordable homes that the Executive has announced could be sold under the right to buy before we even know it and the Executive could find itself in danger of failing to meet the target to give everyone the right to a home by 2012.

Part of the solution must come from our attitudes to housing and the values on which our society is based. There is a widespread assumption that home ownership is the best option—a superior option—for everyone. That assumption relates partly to the type of housing that is available for social rent, but partly to our wider attitudes to acquisition and wealth. The Deputy Minister for Communities says that we should respond to aspirations for home ownership, but we should not respond in a way that fails to identify the difference between housing need and tenure preference. In short, we can respond to aspirations without feeding the notion that ownership is everything.

If the Executive is to address the issue of affordable rented housing and not just home ownership—I believe that it wants and intends to do that—there should be a determined effort to sell the idea of social housing rather than simply an effort to sell off the houses. Also, more could be done to encourage small-scale housing co-operatives and a range of other options that are more common in other European countries.

The private, public and community sectors all have a role to play in meeting housing need. Low-cost home ownership schemes are one part of the jigsaw but social rented housing is in greater need of attention because it has far greater potential to

meet Scotland's housing needs than is currently recognised.

As members have said, the Executive will report next year on the operation and effect of the right to buy. The Executive must be ambitious and not shrink from the task of challenging that policy. A report alone will not be enough. A review must consider the benefit to society that could arise from restricting or even abolishing the right to buy, at least for new lettings.

I look forward to working with my fellow members of the Communities Committee as we consider the Housing (Scotland) Bill and I hope that we can all look forward to more radical measures in the coming years.

15:55

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to speak in the debate. If I have the time, I will cover three points. First, we should move more speedily to an end to council housing. We should welcome that where it has happened and is happening and we should encourage the process. Secondly, we should recognise that a property-owning democracy is a desirable goal that we should not lose sight of and should encourage. Finally, we should acknowledge that the equation of housing affordability has two sides and that the supply side, not the demand side, requires the most attention.

When I talk of an end to council housing, I am not referring to an end to public or social housing. I am talking about an end to the politicised council housing of the past that was discredited because of its poor record in provision, care, maintenance and—to be frank—political preferment. My vision for public housing is of housing stock that is small enough to be locally managed and responsive to tenants' needs but large enough to have economies of scale. The switch in the past 25 years to housing associations, co-operatives and stock transfer from councils has meant more diversity of provision. We will support the Executive's efforts to take that journey further.

The phrase "property-owning democracy" was coined by that great Tory Secretary of State for Scotland, Walter Elliot. We should rededicate ourselves to such a goal, for it is by having independence of wealth for more and more people that the tyranny of the state or of one group of people over another is best guarded against. Economic independence brings lifestyle independence and political independence. Spreading wealth transfers power. The shift in the prevalence of home ownership from 35 per cent in 1979 to 65 per cent now has involved the largest

transfer of wealth in our history and the largest transfer of real power.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the member give way?

Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Mr Monteith: I give way to Tommy Sheridan.

Tommy Sheridan: On the principle of spreading wealth, can I take it that we have a new announcement that the member is now in favour of progressive taxation to further the spread of wealth?

Mr Monteith: I can take from that intervention only that the member is mightily happy about the transfer of housing ownership on such a grand scale. I thought that he would intervene to criticise that, but he did not take that opportunity, so I am sure that he now supports the Tory policy to move the ownership of council houses to individual tenants.

On the affordability equation, there is no doubt that the demand for housing to rent and purchase exceeds the supply. I have spoken to professionals in the house purchase market. The fundamental problem that will continue is that of supply failing to meet demand. Interest rates have fallen consistently since we left the exchange rate mechanism in 1992. We have 100 per cent mortgages and many varied schemes, so entering the market should not be difficult. However, it is, because the cost of housing continues to outstrip people's ability to obtain mortgages to afford homes.

Mrs Mulligan: Will Brian Monteith give way?

Mr Monteith: No; I must make my points.

It is important to address housing supply. The public rationing of land holds back the development of enough houses. It is therefore vital to do far more to allow greater numbers of houses to be built, be they for purchase or rent. I suggest that the planning bill that the Parliament has still to see and debate could have far more impact on the housing market than the Housing (Scotland) Bill will. I say that in all expectation, because we hope to be able to support the Executive in a comprehensive reform of planning that allows more housing to reach the market.

Bruce Crawford: Will Brian Monteith say what his stance was on the planned new housing development between Bridge of Allan and Dunblane?

Mr Monteith: I recall that my view was fairly similar to Bruce Crawford's view. Bruce Crawford seems to wish me to go into the matter. My view was that there should be a public inquiry on the development. I supported having a public inquiry, which was held.

I turn to the single survey, which is the Scottish Executive's own Ford Edison—one of the greatest marketing failures of all time. The designers at Ford thought that they had a popular product, but it turned out to be a turkey—a lemon. The Ford Edison was therefore withdrawn. However, what does the Executive do after only 74 people out of an original target of some 2,000 people take up a single survey? It does not recognise that the scheme is a turkey or a lemon and withdraw it—it decides to impose it by law. It is singularly clear that the market's response to the single survey was that it did not want it, but single surveys—and the costs associated with them—are to be imposed by law by the Parliament.

The ministers' arrogance knows no limits. So much for raising the game, consultation and the accountability that we were meant to expect from a devolved Parliament. The single survey may be a small example, but it says everything about the Executive's attitude in the Parliament to government.

16:01

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): As a member of the Communities Committee and someone with a long-standing interest in housing, I am pleased to have been given the opportunity to take part in the debate.

The importance that the Parliament has attached to housing since 1999 is a shining example of devolution's benefits to Scotland. The Executive's document "Homes for Scotland's People: A Scottish Housing Policy Statement" reminds us that, not long ago, Scottish public housing was in serious decline, fuel poverty was extensive and rough sleeping was widespread. Local authorities were saddled with high debts as they sought to tackle the deteriorating quality of their housing stock while high mortgage rates impacted on home owners and raised the spectre of repossession. That was the picture in 1999.

The Scottish Executive is leading the way in improving standards and in addressing the problems with which we were left as a result of a shamefully long period of neglect by a Tory Government that did not care about the conditions in which Scotland's less well-off people lived—that was highlighted by Brian Monteith. The Labour-led Executive has raised housing up the political agenda and recognised that an holistic approach to community living and housing is critical in order to ensure safe and strong communities for the people of Scotland.

Bruce Crawford: Will the member give way?

Cathie Craigie: Not at the moment.

The number of households in Scotland is increasing and, despite the growth in housebuilding, there are still significant housing shortages in some areas. Indeed, in parts of my constituency, social rented homes are thin on the ground, which leaves families with few options. In other parts of my constituency, new housing for sale is being built at an incredible rate. Unfortunately, those houses are outwith the reach of many of my constituents' budgets. I welcome the housebuilding in my constituency, the jobs that have been created, the family homes that have been provided and the economic benefits that have come to Cumbernauld and Kilsyth. In order to help my constituents to get the homes to which they aspire, I also welcome the Scottish Executive's intention to offer help and support to first-time buyers and to introduce planning guidance in which there will be a benchmark for 25 per cent of all new housing developments to be for affordable housing.

The Executive makes no secret of its desire to encourage aspiration and to ensure that all Scots have equality of opportunity. We can see that desire in education, enterprise and employment, so why should housing be any different? When it comes to their homes, people are aspirational, but too often they find it impossible to make their aspirations a reality.

Bruce Crawford: There has been a Labour Government for eight years. Is it acceptable that 1 million children in Britain still live in bad housing, as Shelter's publication points out?

Cathie Craigie: It is unacceptable that any child should live in poverty and the Executive is bringing down those figures in partnership with the Labour Government at Westminster. A man who is receiving a lot of television coverage today asked at a conference that I attended in Dundee a fortnight ago, "What is the point of the SNP?" With interventions such as that and amendments such as the one that the SNP is supporting today, I ask myself the same question.

Labour members do not accept second best in anything. We do not accept second best in our children's education, so why should we accept second best when it comes to housing? We strive to ensure that we have housing of the best quality. Thankfully, the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which will be scrutinised by the Communities Committee—indeed, it was discussed by the committee today for the first time—will raise standards in private sector housing.

Only this week, I was shocked to hear of the conditions in which a constituent of mine and his family are living. The council has undertaken to investigate the matter and to take what action it can to improve conditions in the house, but no private landlord should ever think that it is

acceptable to put a family in substandard accommodation. My constituent told me that he has no heating because he is afraid to use electricity in the house and is afraid to turn on the heating. Including the standard of electrical wiring in the tolerable standards may seem a small measure but, in context, it could make the difference between a warm home and one with no heating at all. It is not acceptable for irresponsible private landlords—however few of them there may be—to put the health and safety of their tenants and people living close by at risk. I am pleased that the bill will address that scourge.

I am also pleased that the bill proposes to make improved insulation a requirement of the tolerable standards. Nevertheless, I would like the Executive to consider the concerns of Friends of the Earth Scotland about the level of insulation that is required. The bill is an opportunity that we should not miss in that respect.

I am sure that colleagues will be aware of cases in which people have taken on the responsibilities of home ownership without thinking about the long-term cost implications. There is no reason why people cannot make a success of home ownership, but many of them will need advice and support. I am pleased that the Executive's policy statement acknowledges that.

The Scottish Executive is on the right track in involving professionals, tenants and residents in the future provision of homes for Scotland's people. I fully support the Executive's policy statement and look forward to proper scrutiny of the Housing (Scotland) Bill and the benefits that will be derived from its enactment. I support a policy that will see the right house in the right place at the right cost for the people of Scotland and I fully support the Scottish Executive's motion.

16:07

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I will focus on some of the key concerns about housing in rural Scotland and I will talk specifically about the problems that are faced by my constituents on the islands, especially on Mull. If I have time, I will also speak about the extra powers that are to be given to councils under the Housing (Scotland) Bill to deal with poorly maintained buildings.

The first issue is the shortage of affordable housing on the islands, especially on Mull and Islay. Members may have read in the newspapers about the plight of Mr Heggie, who is the only pharmacist on Mull. He is threatening to leave the island because he cannot afford to buy a home there. The general practitioner and the dentist on the island are in exactly the same position—they are living in rented accommodation that, come the summer, will be required for the tourist market.

Since moving to the island, they have found it impossible to buy a property and now they face losing their homes—key workers are about to be lost.

Linda Fabiani: Does George Lyon therefore see the point of decisions being made locally about whether shared equity housing should remain as such in perpetuity instead of being made available to be bought and thereby lost to that market?

George Lyon: I will come later to some of the key issues that I think need to be addressed.

The problem is not confined to Mull. Two senior teachers who recently took jobs in Islay High School found themselves in the same circumstances: they were going to have to leave their positions because they could not afford to purchase a property. It is also estimated that up to 50 people are living permanently in caravans on Mull as a result of the shortage of housing on the island. That is surely a scandal in this day and age.

There are three key factors behind the problem. The minister touched on the first factor—the council's reluctance to release land for building, which leads to sky-high prices for bare building plots. The average price in Mull for a bare plot, without any connections to the sewerage system and so on, is £95,000. The problem is compounded by the buying power of second and even third home owners, who are outbidding the locals. In many villages on Mull and in mainland Argyll and Bute, 50 per cent of houses are second homes. Local people cannot compete with second home owners.

The third problem that we face is the public sector's slow response in addressing housing needs on the islands. According to the local council's housing survey, Mull needs 50 new affordable homes for rent by 2008, but in the past five years West Highland Housing Association has managed to build only six houses a year. It would need to treble its output just to meet current demand. Even more galling for local people is the fact that, although Argyll and Bute Council sold the local schoolhouses in Ulva Ferry and Lochdonhead to the housing association, three years later they are still lying unoccupied. The housing association has never managed to get them renovated and on to the housing market. That is not good enough. I raised the issue with Malcolm Chisholm and with the previous Minister for Communities, Margaret Curran.

The housing associations' response has not been hampered by a shortage of finance. As a result of the Liberal-Labour coalition's decision to increase dramatically investment in rural housing, that investment is at an all-time high. In Argyll and

Bute, £9.5 million is available to the public sector to invest in housing. The big problem is that there is no delivery on the ground.

If the housing shortage on Mull and other islands in my constituency is to be tackled properly, three actions need to be taken. The minister touched on them in her opening speech and they are mentioned in the Executive document. First, there needs to be a dramatic increase in the pace of delivery on the ground by Communities Scotland and the housing associations. The second point is linked to the pace of delivery. The Executive needs to put pressure on councils to persuade them to be much more proactive in releasing land for the building of houses on the islands, especially on Mull, where private developers and the public sector are complaining bitterly about the council's reluctance to release land. If there is a constraint that prevents land from coming on to the market for either the public or the private sector, high house prices and the inability of locals to compete in the housing market will be the end result. In my view, the fundamental and key problem throughout Argyll and Bute is the failure to release land to allow building to take place. There are concerns that, unless that constraint is tackled, even the £9.5 million that will be invested this year may not be able to be rolled out to deliver new homes.

Thirdly, I ask the minister to consider conducting a pilot project on the islands, using the homestake initiative. The project should be targeted at key workers in health and education, in order to help the likes of Mr Heggie. That would be a constructive way of dealing with the specific problem that I have highlighted. I ask the minister to address the matter in winding up.

The Housing (Scotland) Bill will give councils more power to step in to repair poorly maintained properties in the private sector. That is a good idea, but in my experience councils such as Argyll and Bute Council have been reluctant to use the powers that they have under the town and country planning and local government legislation because they are afraid that they will be unable to recoup the financial costs of the action that they take. I ask the minister to respond to that point. I have no doubt that the Communities Committee will tackle it when it takes evidence on the Housing (Scotland) Bill, but it seems to me that, although the intention is there, if councils refuse to take action because of financial concerns, the new powers may not work.

16:14

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): There has been a suspension of reality regarding the background to this debate—by the minister, in particular, and by other speakers from the

Executive parties. No one would suggest that it would be either efficient or a good use of resources to try to fill a bath with water while the plug was out. However, we are told today that the Executive will try to address the serious and increasingly desperate lack of quality affordable housing, particularly in the social rented sector, while clinging to a failed, right-wing Tory ideology that imposes a right to privatise a piece of public stock.

George Lyon: Will the member give way?

Tommy Sheridan: George Lyon should give me a wee moment to get started. I will take his intervention in a moment.

That is no right under the European convention on human rights; it is an unfortunate infringement of other people's human rights to have access to an affordable quality home. I have tried several times to question the minister on the subject—although I have failed to gain answers—because in 2003-04, which is the last full year for which statistics are available, local authorities and housing associations sold nearly 20,000 homes between them but built just under 4,000. In 2003-04, how many new homes did the 32 local authorities in Scotland build? They built 53 new homes. Some people might say that that is a disgrace. In the past nine months, how many new local authority homes have those local authorities managed to build? Zero. None. Some people would say, "Yeah, but what about the housing associations? They will make up the shortfall."

George Lyon: Will the member give way?

Tommy Sheridan: Before I let the member in, I will just give this statistic. In 2003-04, 4,000 new homes were built by housing associations and 3,600 were sold by housing associations. That is the reality of trying to fill the bath while the plug is out.

George Lyon: I hear what Tommy Sheridan is saying, but if he had listened to my speech he would realise that the problem is not just about a shortage of available housing in the rented sector; it is also about a shortage of available housing in the purchase sector. As I outlined, the big problem in our area is that people cannot purchase houses, which means that key workers cannot keep jobs there. If we abolished the right to buy, how many extra houses would be built?

Tommy Sheridan: I think that George Lyon answered that question when he talked about public land that was not being released for housebuilding. If we had a proactive Executive policy that was positive about growing and protecting the social rented sector, available land on islands such as those that he mentioned, as well as in the whole of urban Scotland, could be released.

Since new Labour took power, more than 160,000 social rented homes have been sold, but only 33,000 have been built to replace them. Therefore, we already have a shortfall of 125,000 homes. Since the Executive came to power in 1999, local authorities and housing associations have together sold 107,000 homes and only 27,000 have been built. That is a shortfall of 80,000 homes.

We cannot fill the bath while the plug is out. Let us replace the wasteful and inefficient right to buy with a positive right-to-rent discount in order to value, promote, build up and maintain the social rented sector. Members talk about wanting to help people on to the first rung of the property ladder. However, people will be helped on to that first rung not by giveaway gimmicks but only if we address the shortage of quality affordable homes in the social rented sector. A proactive right-to-rent discount would make the prospect of staying within the rented sector more attractive and, if the Executive actively promoted it, it would give the sector a burgeoning housing supply. That is how we should address the acute housing shortage, which in 2003-04 has seen more than 70,000 people officially homeless. That is a record of failure, not success, and it will get worse until we bite the bullet and get rid of the wasteful right to buy.

16:20

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): As other members have pointed out, we should not lose sight of the fact that devolution has enabled us to focus on Scotland's housing needs and on potential solutions to those problems in a way that would never have been possible if the Parliament had not been established. Moreover, we should not lose sight of how much has been done to push housing up the political agenda. In that respect, I applaud successive ministers' sustained efforts to take practical and positive measures to address Scotland's housing needs.

Nonetheless, many members, including ministers, have acknowledged that more must be done to address an ever-changing situation in many parts of the country and to tackle problems and challenges that come in many different shapes and forms. When we consider housing issues, we need to strike the right balance between analysing the problem and delivering the solutions. A lot has been done to understand some of the issues that have contributed to the chronic shortages of affordable housing in many parts of the country. In the months and years to come, we need to take action to address those problems, because there is no question but that

the situations that many of us see day in and day out in our local communities are intolerable.

I very much welcome the measures that ministers have set out both in the recently published Housing (Scotland) Bill and in “Homes for Scotland’s People”. I believe that those measures will have an impact, but I also think that we need to move forward further and faster.

Nowhere is that need more important than in Edinburgh and the Lothians. I am pleased that George Lyon factored into the debate the issue of the economic impact of housing shortages, because, although there is a great focus on social need in “Homes for Scotland’s People”, insufficient attention is given to the economic impact of the housing market not meeting the needs of the labour market in a given area. In the Edinburgh area—I say “area”, because the problem is not confined to the city—public sector businesses and employers are feeling the impact of people’s inability to afford housing. Incidentally, I should point out that I am talking not just about people at the lower end of the income scale, but about people at different points of the income scale and at different professional levels. We should also remember that, because of the significance of the Edinburgh and Lothian economy, the current housing problems impact not just on the labour market, on employers and on the economic viability and well-being of the city and its surrounding areas, but on the country as a whole.

Mary Scanlon: As a Highlands and Islands representative, I probably do not understand this situation but, given that Susan Deacon is a local member and given her comments on the effect of housing problems on the Edinburgh economy, why does she think that, according to Bank of Scotland research, 8,700 homes in the city are empty?

Susan Deacon: I urge Mary Scanlon and other members to look at the City of Edinburgh Council’s attempts to examine the whole array of issues and challenges that face Edinburgh. I am pleased to say that the council’s work is now being taken forward in partnership with the Scottish Executive. Like other parts of the country, Edinburgh has its own distinctive needs. The job for us all is not constantly to carp about past failures, but to grasp solutions for the future. I am pleased that the Scottish Executive and the city council are now working together to do just that.

Three issues distinguish the housing market in the Edinburgh area from that in others. The first is the scale of population growth; the second is house price inflation, which is among the highest in the UK; and the third is land supply—not the land supply problems that George Lyon spoke about, which are about the release of land by the public sector, but land prices. Those are critical issues that require a different approach to public

sector subsidy to meet social housing need in areas such as Edinburgh, where land price and land availability problems are much more profound than elsewhere.

On this rare occasion—and on this one issue only—I find common cause with Brian Monteith: the need to overhaul our planning system. I welcome the advice note that was published last week, to which the deputy minister referred. That measure is much needed and will have an impact. As the Minister for Communities and the Deputy Minister for Communities are in the chamber today, I make this point directly to them: I hope that the proposals that they bring forward to reform the planning system will lead to a more strategic, flexible, creative and decisive system than we have at present. That would be welcomed by all concerned, whether developers or communities. I also urge the ministers to examine ways of ensuring greater coherence and consistency between local housing strategies and local structure plans, because, all too often, that synergy does not exist.

In conclusion, I strongly welcome the measures that ministers have taken and I hope that we will continue to drive forward change. However, I hope that we will address the social and economic imperatives that face us—particularly in the city of Edinburgh, but also throughout Scotland—in this priority area in the months and years to come.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): I will give Sandra White three minutes.

16:27

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I will do my best.

In a recent press release from the Scottish Executive, the Minister for Communities stated:

“Housing isn’t just about bricks and mortar, it’s about places that people can call home. Decent homes, of the right type and in the right place, are vital to the health and well-being of our communities”.

I agree whole-heartedly with that, but unless we have a proper strategy and a commitment to social rented housing, people will not have a place to call home in the communities that they call home.

The SNP amendment calls for

“the right to buy to be reformed for new tenants”.

That is an essential part of a housing policy that seeks to address the diminishing supply of social rented accommodation.

Like Christine Grahame, Shelter has rightly highlighted the continued use of the phrase “affordable housing”. It has become a catchphrase, yet we do not know whether it means social rented housing or affordable private

housing. The minister must clarify what he means by “affordable housing”. Is it social? Is it private? What is an affordable rent and what is an affordable house? It would be interesting to hear answers to those questions.

In my remaining time, I will talk about the Glasgow Housing Association, which is the biggest landlord in Glasgow and which has just celebrated the third birthday of the housing stock transfer. I use the word “celebrated” loosely. Some people may celebrate, but many folk have not celebrated the transfer. I do not have time to go into all the issues, but suffice it to say that if the MPs, councils and councillors in England who are opposed to stock transfer write to me—perhaps I will write to them—I can tell them just how bad the GHA has been for many tenants in the Glasgow area.

If members do not believe me that people in England are actively campaigning against wholesale stock transfer, perhaps they will believe Frank Dobson, who put forward an amendment at the Labour Party conference against stock transfer—the amendment was carried by a margin of eight to one. He said:

“If you’ve got a ballot coming up, fight like hell to persuade people to vote no—the more people who reject it the better chance we have of turning over this stupid policy”.

I ask the minister to examine the finances of the Glasgow Housing Association. Why does it have £725 million languishing in the bank while people are sitting in homes without repairs? Why is it spending £96 million on staffing and running costs, yet only spending £44 million on repairs and maintenance? Those questions must be answered. I would like to have a conference with the GHA, with the minister’s help, so that it can tell us and the people of Glasgow what it has done in the past three years.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Maureen Macmillan. Very brief bullet points, please.

16:29

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Thank you for squeezing me in. I want to address the problem of second home ownership, because in pressured rural areas houses for sale must be protected from the second home market, as members said. Elsewhere, such protection is afforded by the use of title conditions—we went some way towards such an approach in the Title Conditions (Scotland) Act 2003. The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority proposes to use title conditions for all houses that are built in the park in future and the Cairngorms National Park Authority calls for similar provisions to be applied in its area. In Aspen, Colorado, where there is an

elite ski resort, houses are kept affordable for local people through a mixture of title conditions and an allocations system. Local authorities in pressured rural areas could, by imposing title conditions and through the planning system, designate at least a proportion of houses to be kept in perpetuity for local people. I thank the minister and his officials for the meetings that we have had and will have about the matter and I urge him to consider the strategy that I described.

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

16:31

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): It is a pleasure to take part in another housing debate in the Parliament. “Homes for Scotland’s People”, the Housing (Scotland) Bill and the planning advice note are all recent publications, which indicate that the Executive’s commitment in this important area cannot be doubted. That commitment is matched by deeds: the Executive’s spending proposals for 2005 to 2008 provide £1.2 billion over three years for affordable housing, increasing the development programme from 18,000 to 21,500 new affordable homes. Last week, the Executive announced a 23 per cent increase in Communities Scotland’s affordable housing investment programme, to £404 million in 2005-06. I particularly welcome the minister’s comment that support for rural housing has increased by 100 per cent since 1999.

The new homestake shared equity scheme, which was announced last week, aims to help 1,000 home buyers per year, including first-time buyers, to get a foot on the property ladder. The scheme will be introduced and run by Communities Scotland. I am interested in the level of scrutiny that the scheme will have, because I have had many discussions about joint ownership with constituents, particularly in West Linton, and I will be interested to learn about the development and impact of the scheme, through which owners will pay for a share of their property—normally between 60 per cent and 80 per cent—and legal and survey fees, and a housing association will fund the remaining share.

As members said, the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced significant changes to the right to buy for new tenants of local authorities and registered social landlords. In particular, the 2001 act introduced the modernised right to buy, which applied to new tenants from September 2002 and provided for a maximum discount of 35 per cent or £15,000—whichever is lower. I pay tribute to Karen Whitefield for her work on the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee when it considered the Housing (Scotland) Bill that became the 2001 act.

Many members focused on the right to buy. I acknowledge that organisations that sincerely want more houses to be available for rent to all our constituents have put in considerable effort to argue that the abolition of the right to buy would have an impact. However, there are more significant aspects to the availability of housing stock for rent and affordable purchase. I welcome the minister's comment that it is unfortunate that there has been too much focus on the right to buy. The complexity of the matter is exemplified by such factors as the availability of land for social housing and the price of land, which can have a bigger impact on the ability to construct new homes through the current investment programme than would the abolition of the right to buy. It is important that we meet the target of 21,500 houses. An example from my constituency highlights the problem.

Tommy Sheridan: Does Jeremy Purvis accept that the target of 21,500 houses represents 17,000 fewer houses than even the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland believes are necessary to plug the gap?

Jeremy Purvis: I will talk about approaches that will help to plug the gap in my constituency and indeed throughout Scotland if they are replicated across the country. Tommy Sheridan's solution would not solve the problem. Increased investment, even if funding were released through the abolition of the right to buy, does not necessarily counter the problem of the extremely high price of land, which Susan Deacon mentioned. Indeed, last year when I met the former Minister for Communities to talk about the release of an additional £1.5 million in the Borders, the topic of discussion was not necessarily what the money would be spent on at that stage, but how the money would be used creatively and differently to ensure the future expansion of housebuilding.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I am listening to this speech as a member of the Liberal Democrats and I am a little confused. I thought that the Liberal Democrats' policy was to abolish the right the buy.

Christine Grahame: So did we.

Jeremy Purvis: I can repeat the comments of my colleague Donald Gorrie, who espoused the Liberal Democrats' policy at our most recent conference. It is a policy that has been long held. We have a reformed right to buy. For new tenants, we will extend the existing legislation—which limits the right to buy for new tenants—and we will seek to ensure that that is continued in the Executive review that the minister has spoken about.

Christine Grahame: Will the member take an intervention?

Jeremy Purvis: No, I will not give way at the moment. If I have time, I will come back to the member.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one minute.

Jeremy Purvis: But unfortunately I do not have time.

I want to talk about our ability to use money wisely. In the Borders, Eildon Housing Association has been very creative in land banking—buying land now for future building with further Communities Scotland investment coming down the track. That will allow us to build houses for tomorrow's generation at better value. If we can take away land price inflation, we will achieve up to 25 per cent off unit costs for properties.

Many speakers have mentioned the availability of land in constituencies such as George Lyon's, and have mentioned the sustainability of our housing stock. I hope that—with "Homes for Scotland's People" and other documents—our housing stock will be more sustainable and I hope that, with new technologies and wiser and more creative investments, we can have a better housing stock for future generations.

16:37

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): In her opening speech, the deputy minister described the debate as important and she was right to do so. She also said that, in the past, the attitude towards housing policy had sometimes been perverse and irrational. She will be pleased to know that I am not about to accuse her of adopting such an approach.

Johann Lamont: Housing policy may have been perverse and irrational, but the point that I was trying to make was that we, as individuals, often make perverse and irrational decisions about housing—for example, buying a house after giving it less scrutiny than we would give a new coat. It is difficult to manage a sector in which people make that sort of decision when choosing between putting in a kitchen and repairing rot in the roof.

Bill Aitken: That is fair enough but, as I say, I do not intend to make any accusations of that kind against the Executive. However, I will certainly accuse the Executive of showing a disappointing lack of flexibility.

We would characterise our approach to housing as seeking to maximise home ownership while acknowledging that, for some, home ownership is not an appropriate aspiration. For those who must seek housing in the public sector, we would always do our best to ensure that such housing is affordable and of good quality. I do not think that many in the chamber would disagree with such

aims. I would suggest that, to some extent, we achieved those aims.

I listened to the amusing little interchange between Linda Fabiani and Tricia Marwick—the Pinky and Perky of the SNP front bench. They asked what happened in housing before devolution. I will tell them what happened in housing before devolution: we managed to increase the percentage of home ownership in Scotland from 35 per cent to 60 per cent. We also encouraged the housing association movement—of which Ms Fabiani has more than a little knowledge—to the extent that it was a major contributor towards the biggest improvement in public sector housing in Scotland since the war.

We have to acknowledge that major housing problems persist. One of the principal problems is the lack of provision of affordable housing in the private sector. We have to consider how that situation can be improved.

Bruce Crawford gave us an interesting history lesson. However, although his facts were correct, his conclusions were wrong. Planning in the public sector went wrong when we built too many council houses. When those houses came towards the end of their lives, they created tremendous problems for local authorities, to the extent that in Glasgow, for example, out of every pound in rent that was taken in, interest charges together with the management fee took up 80p, which left 20p for repairs. That was because of the overprovision that arose as a result of the planning failures in the 1960s, which Bruce Crawford was right to highlight. The 75 per cent clawback was designed to reduce debt and thus ameliorate the situation that councils faced at that time.

Bruce Crawford: Does the member not accept that the 75 per cent clawback hit hard the modernisation of council houses that were below standard and stopped places such as Blairlogie in Stirling, to which I referred earlier, having the opportunity to get new houses built in their area through the local authority? That was a direct result of the Tories' policy, which utterly failed Scotland.

Bill Aitken: I doubt very much that the increased number of owner-occupiers in Scotland would agree with Bruce Crawford on that. How can we possibly accept the arguments that are advanced by someone who compares Nanette Milne to Nanette Newman? We all know that Nanette Milne is much better looking.

I move on to address some of the other points that have been made. As Mary Scanlon said, some parts of the Housing (Scotland) Bill are acceptable to us, but other parts of it are too prescriptive. Some of the regulation that is proposed would place unnecessary bureaucratic

demands on private landlords and, indeed, on local authorities. I ask the minister to examine closely the idea of the single seller survey, as there are significant problems with it. Frankly, I think that it is not clear to whom the duty of care is owed. Anyone who bought a house on the basis of what such a document said would be being extremely foolish. The proposal must be scrutinised carefully, or it will end in tears. That is a matter for the minister.

The Executive has shown a lack of imagination in failing to take steps to increase home ownership. We would apply imaginative and flexible policies to cope with the lack of affordable housing. We would support shared ownership to a much greater extent, for example, and would encourage stock transfers. I say to Sandra White that the improvements in Glasgow that will come about as a result of the stock transfer there will be evident; indeed, we are beginning to see signs of that already.

Ms White: Will the member give way?

Bill Aitken: I do not have time.

We would encourage home owners to rent vacant properties and would take steps to improve the performance of Scottish Water which, as Bruce Crawford rightly highlighted, is woefully inadequate and is seriously affecting housing provision in Scotland. We would speed up the planning process.

In summary, we will be presenting constructive ideas on the subject. We will seek to amend the bill where it is wrong and will support it where it is right. We will not support the Executive's motion because it fails to address the issues that I have raised.

16:43

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): The debate has been interesting. I want to make some general comments about the geographical imbalances. Paragraph 3.23 of "Homes for Scotland's People" talks about

"the need to respond to the geographical imbalances in supply and demand"

and the importance of local authorities. That issue was acknowledged in the interesting speeches of George Lyon and Susan Deacon, to which I will refer.

There are differences in tenure not only between rural and urban settings, but between cities such as Edinburgh and Glasgow. The market in Edinburgh is 75 per cent private. Susan Deacon spoke about the special difficulties that are experienced in that hot spot, which has spread out to Midlothian, East Lothian and West Lothian and, to some extent, the Scottish Borders and Fife. The

factoring schemes that operate in Glasgow's tenements are alien to Edinburgh.

Small rural areas have been badly affected by the right to buy. Maureen Macmillan spoke about the problems that second homes create. Young people are now unable to remain in their local area. That has a devastating impact on employment and local facilities; it makes it difficult even for an area to keep its local school. I was particularly interested in the comments that were made about Mull. There is nothing new in life: I remember the building of key-worker houses back in the 1960s and 1970s. The houses were provided for key workers not just to buy but to rent. I moved to Galloway because key-worker houses were provided in the area for the schoolteachers, doctors and dentists who moved into the area. Young couples—I was at that time part of a young couple—moved into the area and then moved on to buy a house in the same area. The provision of key-worker housing took the pressure off young couples and gave them time to settle in the area. The idea is one that could be explored again today.

Mary Scanlon: Christine Grahame is talking about couples. Does she support compulsory coupledom, which Donald Gorrie proposed as a means of reducing the housing shortage?

Christine Grahame: For reasons that may be known, I really do not want to go there at the moment.

Because young couples, whether married or otherwise, are finding it difficult to purchase a house, they are deferring having a family. That has a huge impact on population decline, because it affects the decision whether to have one or two children. Young couples are burdened by onerous mortgages as that is the only way that they can enter the property market.

Currently, 136,000 households are on the waiting list for social housing in Scotland. I know that the figure is not accurate because it includes multiple applications. Nonetheless, it illustrates the substantial difficulty that the Executive faces.

I want to touch on the right to buy—I do not want to linger on the subject. The SNP policy on the right to buy is that it would go for new tenants; existing tenants, whose tenancies include the right to buy, would keep it until it was exercised.

Cathie Craigie: Will the member give way?

Christine Grahame: Do I get to make up the time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No.

Christine Grahame: In that case, I will move on.

The right to buy is only one part of the solution. That said, the Liberal Democrats seem to have two right-to-buy policies: Mike Rumbles is facing one way on the subject and Jeremy Purvis the other—but what is new about that?

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: Certainly not.

Shelter has made it plain that, in 2004, 16,300 homes were lost through the right to buy. I accept that someone continues to live in those properties, but the key point is that the houses are no longer available for rent. If the trend continues in the same direction, a further 130,400 homes will be lost to rent by 2012.

It is an absolute nonsense that we are selling council houses three times faster than we are building them. Mention has been made of the Executive's plan to build 21,500 affordable homes over three years, of which 16,500 would be in the social rented sector. However, given that those houses can be sold, is the figure gross or net? Household wealth is being created at the expense of others.

In aid of the argument to get rid of the right to buy—

Ms White: Will the member take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: I am sorry, but I have very little time.

I want to quote the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland—

Karen Whitefield: Will the member give way?

Christine Grahame: If the Presiding Officer allows me extra time for interventions, I would be delighted to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No.

Christine Grahame: The Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland said:

“As we approach the silver jubilee of the right to buy, I am very concerned that this paternalistic policy no longer meets the needs of a modern Scottish society”—

Cathie Craigie: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Surely members have to speak to the motion and amendments that we have before us. Clearly, the lead spokesperson for the SNP is confusing the chamber by not speaking to them. The SNP amendment calls for the right to buy to be modernised, but she is talking about its abolition.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I understand that the right to buy was discussed extensively in the debate. As the member is closing for the SNP, she is entitled to deal with the issues that were

raised in the debate. I ask the member to continue.

Christine Grahame: The SNP amendment calls for the right to buy

“to be reformed for new tenants”

and that is exactly what I am speaking to. Cathie Craigie should either read what we have to say on the subject or get some new glasses.

“The current Right to Buy policy does not allow local communities to influence how their housing needs can be best met.”

Those are not my words but the words of Jim Pollock, the chair of the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland.

Shared equity is a good idea. Shared ownership has not been working. It is my understanding that many people use the device simply to get into the rented sector by another means and do not buy into a percentage of the property. The policy has to be reviewed.

The grants for first-time buyers that my party proposes are just another tool in the toolbox and not the be-all and end-all; our intention is that they would assist people into the housing market. I am quite happy that the stamp duty threshold has been raised, as the new threshold reflects the inflation in house prices.

Although Patrick Harvie is not in the chamber, I acknowledge the importance of what he said about energy efficiency. I also want to mention his point about the need for a change in the culture towards renting or buying.

There is much to be welcomed in the Housing (Scotland) Bill. Good housing ideas do not belong to one or another political party; we need a mix of proposals for social rented and owner-occupied housing. A subject that we have not touched on is the private rented sector, in which tenants can be very vulnerable. The pendulum has undoubtedly swung too far, even if it is out of necessity, towards buying a property as the only way to get a house to live in. We need social rented accommodation for young people to move into and a culture change—social rented housing must not be seen as plan B or as substandard. Let us have good-quality social rented housing, as in other countries, where no stigma is attached to saying that one does not own one's home.

16:50

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): Linda Fabiani and Bill Aitken asked what happened to housing before devolution. Well, before devolution I was housing minister, briefly; there were no debates on housing; as Cathie Craigie reminded us, there were much higher

levels of rough sleeping, fuel poverty and local authority debt; and, before 1997, there were higher mortgage rates.

Mr Monteith: Will the minister give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: In a moment, when I get into my stride.

Great strides have been made since then. Our policy is based on giving individuals and families choices at various stages of their lives. It is about being on the side of the aspiring home owner as well as on the side of those who need to rent a property. It includes a massive programme of improving the quality of housing, both private and social rented. As Karen Whitefield reminded us, it takes a broad view of housing and closing the opportunity gap for disadvantaged individuals and communities.

Mr Monteith: Will the minister concede that, before 1997, spending on public sector housing was, in real terms, higher than his proposed spending?

Malcolm Chisholm: At a particular moment in time, that may have been the case, but I remind Brian Monteith that over the 18 years for which his party was in government, spending on public sector housing was certainly not higher than our proposed spending.

I welcome the many positive responses in the debate to our policy paper and bill. However, some members have been a bit grudging about the funding announcements. Today we gave details of the 23 per cent increase in funding for Communities Scotland next year. George Lyon talked about Argyll and Bute—the increase there, for example, will be from £6.6 million this year to £12 million next year. I emphasise our strong commitment to social rented housing. Investment in affordable housing in the next three years will be £1.2 billion, the majority of which will go to the social rented sector.

Some of those grudging comments were perhaps more about the shared ownership schemes, particularly the innovative homestake scheme.

Mr Swinney: Will the minister take an intervention?

Malcolm Chisholm: I must make progress.

Linda Fabiani asked who will decide whether homestake owners can buy outright. That will have to be agreed between the housing association and the grant provider, but the fundamental point is that, in that eventuality, the money, as Johann Lamont reminded us, is recyclable and can be used for another shared-equity home. The existing shared ownership schemes will be reviewed once the homestake scheme is up and running.

Another contentious issue is the single survey proposals. Brian Monteith was reasonable about the supply-side issues, which I will talk about in a moment, but completely unreasonable on the single survey. The market delivers some things, but not everything, and it certainly does not deliver for the buyer in this case, which is the key point. We propose to get rid of the multiple survey problem, which costs buyers in Scotland millions of pounds every year, and to address the estimated disrepair value of £425 million in houses that are sold each year.

To pick up one of Mary Scanlon's points, we had a meeting with stakeholders on 22 February to ask for fresh ideas for meeting our policy objectives, but no new proposals were identified. It was made clear that the Executive believes that the rationale for the single survey scheme remains strong; that we have concluded that the pilot shows that the voluntary approach does not work; and that it is a realistic possibility that the powers to introduce a mandatory scheme will be used. We will continue to engage closely with stakeholders and consider carefully what information can be gleaned from the pilot.

I turn to some broader issues that featured strongly in the debate. Susan Deacon emphasised planning modernisation and, along with Brian Monteith and Richard Lochhead, the importance of land supply. We have already announced our intention to streamline the preparation of development plans and ensure that they are produced on time and kept up to date. A key issue that development plans need to address is the long-term supply of land for housing. That will provide the certainty and confidence that are necessary not only for the development industry but for local communities.

Mr Swinney: Will the minister give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: Not at the moment.

We have already announced our intention to examine with local authorities and housing providers an improved approach to monitoring the amount of land that is being made available for housing, but it is important that, when monitoring reveals shortages in the supply of land, early action should be taken to increase provision.

Bruce Crawford and others mentioned the planning advice note on affordable housing, which has been broadly welcomed. He expressed concerns about the quality of such housing, but I remind him that subsidised housing must meet Communities Scotland's requirements and, ultimately, the quality standard. I also remind him that non-subsidised housing is subject to planning and building controls.

Karen Whitefield emphasised the importance of public sector land release. Various members,

including Linda Fabiani have already mentioned the scheme that has been agreed with the Forestry Commission Scotland, under which registered social landlords are given a preferential opportunity to buy surplus land for affordable housing. We will seek to extend that scheme and we are also investing £3 million in an innovative land banking fund to address land supply for affordable housing in the Highlands.

Mr Swinney: On the planning process, what consideration has been given to the input on affordable housing in the prioritisation of projects under quality and standards III in Scottish Water's investment programme? Will affordable housing be given priority over other developments to guarantee that the Government can achieve its objectives?

Malcolm Chisholm: Lewis Macdonald has already made a detailed announcement about that, and we have provided £14 million to registered social landlords to ensure that they can benefit from that announcement without any effect on rents or other costs.

Patrick Harvie talked about energy efficiency, on which we have a strong programme. I will mention some of the relevant factors. We have the housing quality standards for all existing social rented stock and the Housing (Scotland) Bill that was published recently includes a basic minimum standard for insulation. We are also committed to ending fuel poverty by 2016 and have made significant progress on that already, including providing 46,000 homes with central heating systems.

I will also say something on the right to buy, given the way in which it has featured in the debate. We understand the arguments that have been made on the right, but we carried out a substantial review and made significant changes to it in 2001 to achieve a better balance between the needs of the individual and of the community, and we are committed to report to Parliament next year on the effect of the right to buy. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. There is far too much conversation around the chamber. I would be grateful if members would listen quietly to the rest of the debate.

Malcolm Chisholm: The report will look carefully at the effect of the right to buy on the nature and condition of the housing stock and at the need and demand for affordable housing. We will consider the merits of the cases that are made for further adjustments to the operation of the right to buy in the light of the evidence in that report. Work on the report is being taken forward this year, building on earlier work with stakeholders that proposed a framework for the report. We are setting up an advisory group to consider the

framework and to oversee the production of the report, and I will shortly invite key stakeholders to participate in that work to ensure that we take account of the issues that are of concern to them.

Members will also know that we will make a statement on homelessness in a year or so to ensure that we have the detailed planning in place to fulfil our commitment to provide permanent accommodation for all unintentionally homeless people by 2012.

Our package of devolved housing policies has been crowned today by the announcement in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's budget statement that he will double the threshold for stamp duty land tax from £60,000 to £120,000. That is excellent news for all first-time buyers, but it is particularly good news for Scotland, which has most to gain from such a measure, as it is the only area of the United Kingdom in which the average house price is around £100,000, which is roughly two thirds of the UK average. Currently, about six in every seven first-time buyers in Scotland are forced above the £60,000 threshold, so raising the threshold to £120,000 will save purchasers up to £1,200 in transaction fees.

The range of new measures that have been announced in the past few days and that have been debated here today, including our new policy statement, the £404 million investment in affordable housing over the next year, the £1.2 billion investment in affordable housing over the next three years, the homestake initiative, planning advice, the aim to ensure that a quarter of all new housing is affordable housing and the planning announcements that have already been made—as well as the other announcements that will be made soon—are all major steps towards our objective of ensuring that there is an adequate supply of good-quality, warm, affordable housing for all in Scotland.

We now have the clearest picture ever of Scotland's housing needs. In the new policy statement, we set out a detailed plan of action, backed by a record level of resources. The challenge now is to translate all that into reality for everyone in Scotland. I commend our policy statement, our new bill and the Executive's housing policies to the Parliament.

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Motion

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is consideration of motion S2M-2511, in the name of Robert Brown, on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, on the appointment of George Lyon to the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body's proposal to appoint George Lyon to be a member of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.—
[Robert Brown.]

Business Motion

17:01

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-2596, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 23 March 2005

2.30 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Executive Debate: Growing an Enterprise Culture
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 24 March 2005

9.30 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Scottish National Party Business
 12 noon First Minister's Question Time
 2.00 pm Question Time—
 Environment and Rural
 Development;
 Health and Community Care;
 General Questions
 3.00 pm Executive Debate: Life Sciences
followed by Business Motion
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 13 April 2005

9.30 am Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Independents' Group Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Executive Business
followed by Business Motion
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 14 April 2005

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Scottish National Party Business
 11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time
 2.15 pm Themed Question Time—
 Enterprise, Lifelong Learning and
 Transport;
 Justice and Law Officers
 2.55 pm Executive Business
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

and (b) that the period for members to submit their names for selection for General Question Time and Themed Question Time on 14 April 2005 should end at 12 noon on Thursday 24 March 2005.—[Ms Margaret Curran.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is consideration of seven Parliamentary Bureau motions. Motions S2M-2587 to S2M-2590 are on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments; motion S2M-2591 is on the establishment of a committee; and motions S2M-2592 and S2M-2593 are on the designation of lead committees.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Advice and Assistance (Assistance by Way of Representation) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Civil Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees to establish a committee of the Parliament as follows—

Name of Committee: The Baird Trust Reorganisation Bill Committee;

Remit: To consider and report to the Parliament on the Baird Trust Reorganisation Bill;

Duration: Until the Bill has received Royal Assent, falls or is withdrawn;

Convenership: The Convener will be a member of the Liberal Democrat Party and the Deputy Convener will be a member of the Labour Party;

Membership: Trish Godman (Labour), Scott Barrie (Labour), Mr Kenny MacAskill (SNP), Mr David Davidson (Conservative) and Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Liberal Democrat).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 2 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Antisocial Behaviour (Fixed Penalty Notice) (Additional Information) (Scotland) Order 2005 (SSI 2005/130).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Bail Conditions (Specification of Devices) and Restriction of Liberty Order (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/142).—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

Point of Order

17:02

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. This point of order is further to the point of order that I made on 3 March.

On 24 February, the Parliament agreed to a Scottish Green Party motion on identity cards that, among other things called

“on the Executive to make a full statement on the intended use of the identity database by devolved institutions.”

In my previous point of order, I raised the question of whether, under rule 13.2.1 of standing orders, the Executive had given you notice of its intention to make the full statement that the motion called for. The Presiding Officer indicated that he had received no such notice, but that making such a statement was

“a matter for the Executive”.—[*Official Report*, 3 March 2005; c 15063.]

Have you now received any such notice of the full statement that was called for in the motion of 24 February?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

No, I have not had such a request. I believe that the Minister for Parliamentary Business wants to make a response. In the circumstances, I think that that would be reasonable.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Ms Margaret Curran):

I thank Mark Ballard for giving me prior warning that he was going to raise this matter. It has been discussed in the Parliamentary Bureau and I have indicated to the bureau, as I indicate to members now, that it is receiving the Executive's on-going attention. We will communicate appropriately with the Parliament—[*Interruption.*] I reassure members, who might be a bit cynical—heaven forbid—that, as ever, the Executive is giving proper attention to the wishes of the Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There the matter must rest for now.

Decision Time

17:03

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

There are 12 questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S2M-2569, in the name of Iain Smith, on procedures in relation to the commissioner for public appointments, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the Procedures Committee's 3rd Report 2005 (Session 2), *Procedures in relation to the Commissioner for Public Appointments* (SP Paper 304), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annex A to the report be made with effect from 18 March 2005.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S2M-2585.2, in the name of Linda Fabiani, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2585, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on housing, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)

Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)

Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 25, Against 76, Abstentions 12.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S2M-2585.4, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2585, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on housing, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

AGAINST

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)

Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 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)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 14, Against 97, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S2M-2585, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on housing, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
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)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
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)
May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)

McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
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)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
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)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 86, Against, 16, Abstentions 11.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament acknowledges the wide range of policies outlined in *Homes for Scotland's People* to increase the quantity and improve the quality of homes in both the social rented and private sectors; welcomes the £1.2 billion investment to achieve the three-year target of 21,500 affordable homes and the 23% increase in the Communities Scotland budget for next year; endorses the Homestake initiative to help first-time buyers and others into home ownership; acknowledges new planning advice setting a benchmark, where need is demonstrated, of 25% of all new housing development to be affordable homes; supports recent announcements and ongoing work to develop water and sewerage infrastructure for new housing and boost the availability of land, and welcomes the Housing (Scotland) Bill published last week which will seek to raise standards in the private housing sector and strengthen the rights of private sector tenants.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S2M-2511, in the name of Robert Brown, on membership of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body's proposal to appoint George Lyon to be a member of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that motion S2M-2587, in the name of Ms Margaret Curran, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Advice and Assistance (Assistance by Way of Representation) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005 be approved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The seventh question is, that motion S2M-2588, in the name of Ms Margaret Curran, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 be approved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The eighth question is, that motion S2M-2589, in the name of Ms Margaret Curran, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Civil Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 be approved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The ninth question is, that motion S2M-2590, in the name of Ms Margaret Curran, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2005 be approved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The 10th question is, that motion S2M-2591, in the name of Ms Margaret Curran, on the establishment of a committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to establish a committee of the Parliament as follows—

Name of Committee: The Baird Trust Reorganisation Bill Committee;

Remit: To consider and report to the Parliament on the Baird Trust Reorganisation Bill;

Duration: Until the Bill has received Royal Assent, falls or is withdrawn;

Convenership: The Convener will be a member of the Liberal Democrat Party and the Deputy Convener will be a member of the Labour Party;

Membership: Trish Godman (Labour), Scott Barrie (Labour), Mr Kenny MacAskill (SNP), Mr David Davidson (Conservative) and Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Liberal Democrat).

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The 11th question is, that motion S2M-2592, in the name of Ms Margaret Curran, on designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 2 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Antisocial Behaviour (Fixed Penalty Notice) (Additional Information) (Scotland) Order 2005 (SSI 2005/130).

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S2M-2593, in the name of Ms Margaret Curran, on designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Bail Conditions (Specification of Devices) and Restriction of Liberty Order (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/142).

Franz Ferdinand Rocks

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-2425, in the name of Pauline McNeill, on Franz Ferdinand rocks.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates Franz Ferdinand on winning the Best British Band and Best Rock Act awards at the 25th Brit Awards; welcomes the First Minister's view that Scotland should be a future host to the Brit Awards; notes that Scotland has an abundance of talented musicians, demonstrated by the fact that 11 acts are to appear at the international music festival in Texas, South by Southwest; believes that Scotland has a strong contemporary music industry which makes a significant contribution to the Scottish economy, comprising of small, medium and large companies; supports the work of the Cross Party Group on the Scottish Contemporary Music Industry which brings together virtually all strands of the music industry; recognises the commitment of the Scottish Executive to the industry and the funding of research into the feasibility of creating a music industry forum; further recognises initiatives such as Music Works, funded by Scottish Enterprise, and the need for the enterprise agencies to promote a distinct music industry strategy so as to encourage further development of Scottish-based musicians and related business activity, and sends its good wishes to all bands who are participating in South by Southwest.

17:10

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I was looking forward to hearing you say that.

Tha Franz Ferdinand miorbhaileach. I believe that that is Gaelic for Franz Ferdinand rocks, and they certainly do. That is the verdict of the Brit awards, those in charge of the Mercury music prize and many music fans throughout the world, and now our Scottish Parliament agrees. I almost think that we should have been allowed to have background music for the occasion, but I know that one has to get permission for that.

I thank all the members who signed the motion and I thank Tommy Sheridan, who lodged a similar motion. However, although the title of the motion captures the mood in the country of a Franz frenzy, it is just the lead-in to a much bigger and more serious debate about the significance of the popular music industry in Scotland. Franz Ferdinand is the current big success and there are many others, but I want to highlight the many up-and-coming bands and musicians, the emerging talent and the potential that we have to sustain our home-grown talent. I will argue that investment in a specific music policy would bring improved economic success and, at the same time, would enable us to tap into the passion that is felt by the

many thousands of young Scots who listen to and make music.

I have been pleasantly surprised by the level of interest in the debate, and I put on record my thanks to the Parliament's broadcasting office for initiating on the Parliament's website a public forum on the subject, which I hope will continue.

Scotland is taking its place in the world as a home for contemporary music. We are contributing to the renaissance in live music. Biffy Clyro, Idlewild, Belle and Sebastian, Aberfeldy—the list is endless, but unless we take a conscious decision to support the industry more it will fade as quickly as it has arrived.

I know that music lovers come in all shapes and sizes. Even MSPs have been known to attend the odd live gig, and I believe that someone who is sitting not so far from me has the biggest vinyl collection in Glasgow—we will hear from him later.

My own experiences are not unusual. I supported my brothers, Brian and Lawrence, whose band trailed the Glasgow gig circuit with little or no support, to take their talent to the next stage. It was the most soul-destroying experience in the world, and I know of many young musicians who feel the same. In a tribute to my brothers, I set up the Parliament's cross-party group on the Scottish contemporary music industry. Ken Macintosh has been a solid supporter of the campaign for such a group since 2000, when 12 people in King Tut's nightclub in my constituency hatched the idea of a music forum to take the ideas forward. Four years on, I can honestly say that the interest has been overwhelming.

The cross-party group represents a number of sectors of the industry. Its membership includes the Performing Right Society, the Musicians Union, the Scottish Arts Council, songwriters, broadcasters, DF Concerts, Riverside Studios, CPL Entertainment Group, showcase Scotland, colleges and universities, Teenage Fanclub, Del Amitri and too many others to mention. The group is a force to be reckoned with, and its main message is simple: we have a music industry in Scotland and we want recognition from the Governments in Scotland and at Westminster that it matters.

The Labour Government of 1997 was the first Government to take an interest in the music industry in the United Kingdom, the value of which is believed to be about £3.6 billion. A recent Scottish study found it difficult to estimate the economic worth of the Scottish music industry, but many observers believe that it accounts for about a tenth of the total for the UK.

A controversial aspect of the debate is the one that Alex Kapranos, the lead singer of Franz Ferdinand, raised last month: whether the

commercial industry can justify support from public funds. Countries such as Holland, Denmark and Sweden have developed state music policies and use state funds to support touring and recording, and they have reaped the benefits of that. Recently, the Welsh Music Foundation was set up as an enterprise agency with a dedicated board drawn from those in the industry. Peter Hain MP was so shocked to learn that the economic activity that a rock concert in Wales generated did not benefit Wales directly that he set about changing that immediately. The Irish have set up a similar music board and I believe that we in Scotland must have a plan to do that too. It must recognise that there are thousands of small businesses in the music industry that could be larger with the right support—that is the message that we get from all businesses, small and large.

We should enshrine popular music in our definition of culture. Rock and pop are a legitimate choice of culture. We should stop talking of the high arts and the low arts, because there is nothing low about rock and pop. The plan should incorporate the brilliant work of our education sector and its drive to connect directly with the industry to ensure a quality standard for courses that are taught throughout Scotland. Jewel and Esk Valley College, James Watt College of Further and Higher Education, Napier University and others are dedicated to that.

We can capitalise on many successes. Soma recording school in my constituency brought to the Arches 700 young people who were considering a career in DJ-ing and the potential of electronic media. The next time that members see the new BMW advert, they should know that a Scottish company supplied the background music.

A new recording classroom in Lourdes Secondary School, which the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport visited with me, has ensured that the number who enrol for the music standard grade in that school is much higher. The number who are taking a qualification at King's Park Secondary School has trebled because those who were prone to exclusion from the classroom saw something interesting in which to take up a qualification.

Scottish Enterprise pioneered MTV Europe in Edinburgh and invented the business exchange MusicWorks, but that needs to be funded for more years—the funding runs out this year. Showcase Scotland showcases Scottish talent in Scotland and to international players. I challenge Scottish Enterprise to build on its initial success, to give Scotland a more co-ordinated approach to the music industry and not simply to reduce the idea to digital platforms.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise is a model of good practice. It supports events and small record

labels with a specific music policy. It has many innovative and attractive ideas.

As we speak, Scottish bands are playing their hearts and souls out to many promoters and record companies at the biggest showcase in the world, in Texas, at which Scotland has 10 bands. We should not underestimate the importance of that.

We must go further. We should be part of many international festivals. On the day of the MTV Europe awards, the First Minister said that we should argue for the Brit awards to be staged in Scotland. I urge EventScotland to take that challenge seriously and to prepare to argue Scotland's corner. We could go further—we could have our own Scottish event. What is wrong with that? Why should we not give international awards? We have started that with the tartan clef awards and we could go on.

The music industry association for which I and our group have long argued is about to happen. It has been funded by the Scottish Arts Council and was driven by Frank McAveety when he was the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport. Establishing a body to speak with one voice is no mean task. That development is important.

To keep the campaign live, I am working with members and the Parliament on the prospect of holding an event in the summer in the Scottish Parliament. I cannot confirm the details tonight, but the essential point is that the debate is not just about tonight; we want to ensure that it continues. The Swedish experience shows that giving people rights in culture and equal access make a difference.

If Franz Ferdinand are listening, the Scottish Parliament warmly congratulates them. We have more work to do. As is said on "cd:uk", keep it here. Keep the debate live. Let us see the potential that we have and support the Scottish music industry.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. A considerable number of members want to speak, so I will keep them to a tight four minutes.

17:18

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I declare an interest as a member of the Musicians Union. On behalf of our members and the many aspiring players out there, we celebrate Franz Ferdinand's success. Everyone should remember that theirs was not an overnight success. Through the years, it reached fruition because people were starting to put in place the means whereby musicians could play their music to the kind of folk who could book them.

The south by southwest festival in Texas has proved for Scottish bands to be a gateway to the USA, where much of our music is appreciated. That is an interesting and striking contrast to the days when people felt that they had to go to London to get ahead—I make no nationalist point. The music industry is international and reaching the big English-language markets directly is important. In the field in which I work—traditional music—the Irish found that out many years ago and tapped into the US audience and the diaspora of Irish people in the US. The Scots must learn that we, too, have an audience for our rock music and our traditional music by that route.

As Pauline McNeill said, Highlands and Islands Enterprise—perhaps because it is a slightly smaller organisation—has backed the Make Tracks project, which has developed many young bands in the area. I will say a bit about Make Tracks. A project has been developed by Channel 4's Ideasfactory and goEVENTS, which is the trade group for the music industry in the Highlands and Islands. A series of workshops and showcase events in the Highlands was delivered by Make Tracks, and 12 trainees were selected to run a virtual record label. The label had an album launched in Finland at Europe's biggest trade fair for rock music, and the album went out to an additional 10,500 industry subscribers on the cover of the main trade music magazine, *Music Week*. Such examples show that bands from very small communities can find a market and can play at big festivals and in places at which agents and promoters are listening.

It is essential that the infrastructure that Pauline McNeill mentioned be permanently put in place in the full knowledge that rock music and contemporary music have been among the main means of expression for younger generations since rock and roll was invented back in the 1950s. They are also part of a wider scene about which we would expect the Cultural Commission to make firm recommendations. Cultural rights are needed so that people can play and music is one of the major means of ensuring wide participation. Young people like to participate; they do not simply want to listen—increasingly, they want to play.

I have mentioned previously the value of £6 million that has been put on Shetland's music enterprises. That is an amazing figure for a small group of islands, where there are many different kinds of music. We must ensure that the Scottish music industry takes on board all the different forms of contemporary music and that facilities are put in place so that each generation has a better chance to take off than the previous generation.

There has been a great start. Franz Ferdinand have shown a particular route, but we expect to

hear many more bands that we do not currently know about reaching the pinnacle of world success. To finish, I list Half Cousin, Spindriff, Raar from the Black Isle, Carson, Blue Gum Ears, Small Enclosed Area, The Cinematics and Croft No 5. I am talking about small bands from the Highlands, some of which are better known than others. Many of them will be better known in the future. They join a river of Scottish music that should be unstoppable.

17:22

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I, too, thank Pauline McNeill not only for lodging the motion, but for all her work in supporting the Scottish music industry over the past five years. I also thank all the members of the Scottish Parliament's cross-party group on the Scottish contemporary music industry—many of whom have made it to the debate—for their efforts in getting us to where we are now.

For the first time, we are seeing official or Government recognition of one of the United Kingdom's most important businesses. Rock and pop music have long been dismissed as being either too trivial or too commercial for Governments to take seriously and to take an active interest in, but we are challenging that attitude through the cross-party group.

The minister has identified the cultural importance of contemporary music to Scotland, and it is gaining increasing levels of support from the Scottish Arts Council. Local authorities in some parts of the country in particular have been very supportive but they, in turn, must be helped through improvements to the licensing laws, consistency in police charging for events and improving standards to meet the standards that bands and fans expect at gigs. Schools and further education colleges are already playing a crucial role, but everything must be brought together coherently.

The live music scene is alive and well—Rob Gibson referred to the Highlands. We can see in the fèisean movement the difference that a little bit of Government support and encouragement can make. However, live music is rarely enough to allow bands to make it commercially, so I want to discuss the importance of broadcasting. Without airplay it is difficult for any band, performer or songwriter to reach out to a wider audience and to make any sort of breakthrough. Some broadcasters have a good track record in supporting Scottish contemporary music. We can all think of a few individual disc jockeys who fly the flag, but we probably think of them because there are so few of them. It cannot simply be down to the BBC to provide commitment and support for the diverse array of Scottish talent that exists. The

obligation to support the Scottish music industry needs to extend beyond public service broadcasters.

I acknowledge that commercial stations must attract listeners to survive and I do not want wall-to-wall programmes of obscure indie tracks that would have us all reaching for the “off” button, but there must be commitment. In enforcing existing radio licences, the Office of Communications must ensure that current operators are committed to serving their local populations. In distributing new licences, Ofcom should prioritise bidders that will add value and diversity to the range of music that is available to us. More stations offering less choice—the bland versus the bland—is not the way forward.

I will not dwell on prescription—which is the idea that a prescribed percentage of airplay on stations should be devoted to Scottish music—because I do not believe that there is consensus on how or whether that could work. It is easy to envisage that prescription might mean that, rather than hearing more Idlewild, Travis or Teenage Fanclub, we would hear more Sidney Devine and Jimmy Shand, although I mean no offence to fans of either. Nevertheless, new opportunities are opening up in the shape of digital platforms and local TV and radio broadcasters. Through those outlets and with the support—voluntary, I hope—of existing commercial stations, we can do far more to create the broadcasting environment in which Scottish music can flourish.

It is fitting that this young Parliament and a new generation of MSPs who have grown up with rock music should find the time and the political commitment to support this vital young industry. However, we need to do more. We must move forward on a range of issues, with support from a range of public bodies for contemporary Scottish music. Above all, we must recognise that it is an industry. We need a specific music industry strategy that builds on current and past successes and on the greater potential that exists for the economic development of the sector in Scotland. If the future lies in the creative industries, it is time the Executive and Scottish Enterprise gave the music industry the support and the boost that it needs.

17:27

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives congratulate Franz Ferdinand on winning the best British band and best rock act awards. The band is an excellent example of the flourishing Scottish music industry and a reminder of Scotland’s long tradition of cultural accomplishment.

Franz Ferdinand were the first band since Oasis to be nominated for five Brit awards in a year and their appearance at the world-renowned international music festival south by southwest in Texas is another indication of how music from Scotland has gained popularity around the globe. Almost 50 per cent of the Scottish acts that applied to take part in that festival were accepted, which is a higher percentage than from any other European country except Ireland. That is an indication of the strength and quality of Scottish pop music.

Franz Ferdinand is just one example of how the contemporary Scottish music industry is prospering. The list of Scottish pop heavyweights is endless and includes Alex Harvey, Lulu, the Bay City Rollers, Texas, Primal Scream, Wet Wet Wet, Travis, Belle and Sebastian and Snow Patrol, to name but a few. The success of Franz Ferdinand is a real Cinderella story, considering that most of the big labels refused the band’s original demo tape. They were eventually picked up by a small private recording company called Domino and have since taken America by storm, which is normally regarded as the pinnacle of success by the industry. They also won a celebrated Mercury award and an NME award, which illustrates how good their music is, because nominations for those awards are made by musicians.

Franz Ferdinand and Belle and Sebastian are living proof that Glasgow is one of the world’s most stimulating centres of music. *Time* magazine lauded Glasgow as the “secret capital” of pop music and described the city as having an “embarrassment of (musical) riches”. Many people believe that, for years, the music scene in Glasgow has been brilliant, although it is only now getting mainstream publicity.

The Scottish music industry contributes about £110 million a year to the Scottish economy and has huge potential for growth. The luminaries of Scottish popular music also demonstrated their generosity and sense of civic duty when Franz Ferdinand and Travis headlined a Scottish tsunami relief concert that raised more than £300,000 for the victims of the Asian tragedy. Scottish contemporary and popular music still has room for growth, and many quality Scottish bands and acts are only now being discovered. The Scottish music industry is a burgeoning example of the creative and innovative nature of the Scottish people.

However, the Government of Scotland must do what it can to allow the Scottish pop industry to flourish. As we speak, it faces the threat of illegal downloads, which will cause the industry serious financial setbacks if they are allowed to continue unchecked. The Scottish Executive must support incentives such as iTunes, which allow for legal

downloads and create a new revenue stream back to the label, the artist and the publisher. MP3 players such as iPods are stylish systems that produce good business, but it is important that the new systems contribute to the success of the music industry, rather than undermine the livelihoods of artists and recording companies. The Executive should encourage the industry with a lower-tax economy, which would keep our musicians and artists here in Scotland.

17:30

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): I have really been looking forward to today's debate. I commend my colleague Pauline McNeill not just for securing it, but for the work that she has done since the inception of the Parliament with the cross-party group on the Scottish contemporary music industry to promote the music industry in Scotland.

I do not know whether members have had a chance to look at the online debate, but it is clear that we have captured the imagination of young people across Scotland. I will read out a brief excerpt from the debate. It states:

"What a simple and great idea and good luck to everyone, including the Scottish Executive"—

that is a first. The message continues:

"I'm pleased that we have a parliament that is interested".

That is very encouraging. People see the motion as a positive step towards constructive engagement with our communities. A plethora of e-mails has been received conveying such good wishes.

The Presiding Officer knows that I have spent a considerable amount of time in Parliament speaking about the importance of language as a mode of communication. Music is a language that transcends barriers of age, class, culture and ethnic origin. It has universal recognition and can be appreciated no matter what a person's mother tongue is. In Scotland, we are surrounded by music, from traditional folk songs of struggle to classical music and Franz Ferdinand's award-winning album. Music is indelibly linked to our culture and people. It is only right that here in Parliament we recognise that intrinsic association in our roots and culture and that we take active steps to support and nurture it.

I offer my personal congratulations to Franz Ferdinand, whose achievements over the past year have been phenomenal. I really liked the title of the motion: "Franz Ferdinand Rocks". When my staff and I drove through from Ayrshire today, we played Franz Ferdinand and rocked all the way over, just to ensure that we got into the right mood for the debate.

Franz Ferdinand's achievements have alerted us to the challenges that face up-and-coming bands that have a desire for success. Pauline McNeill spoke in detail about some of those challenges. The Scottish Arts Council assisted the band financially so that last year it could perform at the south by southwest festival in Austin, Texas. We all know what happened after that. Clearly, the festival is an important springboard for Scottish talent. I am pleased that this year the Scottish Arts Council is providing support for 10 Scottish bands, so that they can play there. They include Ayrshire's own Biffy Clyro, of whom I am very much a fan. I wish the bands all success and congratulate them on flying the flag for Scotland in the United States and on cementing the partnership between the Scottish and US music scenes.

Scotland is capable of producing world-class musicians, but it is important that we identify how we can support them and the music industry as a whole. My colleague Ken Macintosh spoke about practical issues such as policing, licensing and broadcasting, which need to be addressed to ensure that the young talent that we have in Scotland is promoted in the right way.

In having today's debate, we are sending out a clear message. The connection between the industry and the decision makers has been made. It is up to us to take decisive action to ensure that the music industry—performers, teachers and promoters—has a voice on the world stage. I congratulate Franz Ferdinand and Pauline McNeill on making Scotland proud.

17:34

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): I declare an interest, as I am an avid fan of the works of Franz Ferdinand, as well as the works of several other groups that Ken Macintosh would no doubt refer to as obscure indie bands.

I convey the apologies of Chris Ballance, who would have liked to have been at this debate but cannot be. He sends his congratulations to Pauline McNeill on her work in leading the cross-party group on the Scottish contemporary music industry, of which he is a member.

I join other members who have congratulated Franz Ferdinand on their breakthrough and agree with those who have pointed out that there is a great deal of musical talent—much of it still untapped—in Scotland. We must provide opportunities for young people to participate in music at whatever level they choose. If they aspire to the fame of bands such as Franz Ferdinand, they should be given the necessary and appropriate support to help them to achieve that.

That is not about setting up more fame academies, but about supporting the grass-roots gigging scene that Pauline McNeill talked about, which cultivates much of Scotland's musical talent. For every Franz Ferdinand, there are many bands that do not get the same breaks. Alex Kapranos of Franz Ferdinand said:

"I know lots of bands and groups that have existed in Scotland who have had great potential but who have collapsed because they have been unable to afford to get beyond those very basic stages of playing in the local pub, and maybe with a little bit of investment that could be a different state."

He is not suggesting that rock musicians should be handed unlimited pots of money. Rather, he is saying that, to develop the musical talents of the people of Scotland, we need a more structured and thought-out approach. We need to recognise that, quite often, an area's gigging scene depends on only one pub or publican and that, if they fall away, there is nowhere for local bands to get an opportunity to play. We need more Government assistance and more of the infrastructural support that is necessary for bands to make that jump.

Pauline McNeill has pointed out some of the current measures that the Executive is supporting, such as MusicWorks and support for bands to attend the south by southwest festival. Those measures are welcome. However, although arranging for Scotland to host the Brit awards would bring some benefits, we have to ensure that those benefits would go to those who most need them rather than to big business or the multinational companies that have a stranglehold on the music industry and that many musicians complain do not allow the new, innovative and—as Ken Macintosh would say—obscure bands to get their chance to be heard and to find out whether they can make it on the big stage.

We must support our future Franz Ferdinands, listen to their needs, draw on their experiences and learn about how they made it through the labyrinth of the music industry so that we can develop the right approach to support them.

One of my favourite Franz Ferdinand songs is "The Dark of the Matinee" and I would like to quote the lyrics, in the general spirit of this debate.

Mr Macintosh: Sing it!

Mark Ballard: I am not going to sing it, but I will quote the lyrics:

"So I'm on BBC2 now, telling Terry Wogan how I made it
...
My words and smile are so easy now
Yes, it's easy now".

It would be great to hear more Scottish bands saying how they made it and how it was easy for them. That would be a vision for a really rocking Scotland.

17:38

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP): I do not know how to follow that.

Mark Ballard: Sing!

Rosie Kane: No, that would kill it.

I welcome the motion in Pauline McNeill's name. Franz Ferdinand indeed rock. I am a fan of Franz Ferdinand and tend to torment folk in our corridor in the MSP block by playing their CD nearly every day. Frances Curran does not complain because she likes the band, but Carolyn Leckie complains because she does not share our love of their music. As many will know, a complaint from Carolyn Leckie is not something that is readily ignored—in fact, I was going to get the Presiding Officer to come down and chuck her out the last time she moaned about my music.

Franz Ferdinand are another entry in the line of astonishing musical talent that has emerged from Scotland in the past decade. Scotland might be a country of just 5 million people, but its musical talent is renowned and respected across the world—often, more so in other countries than in Scotland. Belle and Sebastian should be regarded as national treasures. They have an astonishing back catalogue of musical genius and last summer held a free live gig in Kelvingrove park, which for many of us was the highlight of the year. We cannot forget bands such as the Fire Engines, Aztec Camera, the Blue Nile, Primal Scream, Teenage Fanclub, the Pastels, the Proclaimers, Aberfeldy and Mull Historical Society or, indeed, Eddi Reader, who is the best female singer ever to have come out of Scotland. As other members have said, the list goes on and on.

Many of those bands were very successful, despite the fact that the odds were stacked against young working-class musicians in Scotland. However, for every band that makes it, there are dozens that founder because of a lack of resources, of places in which to practise, of venues to play in or of outlets for that music. I want a Scotland that nurtures its home-grown talent and gives young people the help that they need to develop that talent. Our housing schemes and city centres need community music projects such as Community Music in London, which gave birth to Asian Dub Foundation, whose only Scottish date on its world tour is a benefit gig for the Scottish Socialist Party at the Carling Academy on 3 April. I thank the chamber for indulging me in letting me say that.

Setting up community music projects throughout Scotland would result in young people realising their enormous musical creativity and could play an important part in diverting them away from damaging, negative and criminal behaviour

towards outlets for positive creativity that would allow them to unleash their talents.

At this point, I pay tribute to the school of sound. Since last September, Hillington Primary School, Cardonald Primary School, Sandwood Primary School and Craigton Primary School in Glasgow have been running their own record labels in conjunction with secondary 5 and 6 pupils from Rosshall Academy. The project, which is called enterprise thru music, has been developed in partnership with Stow College and has resulted in an 11-track CD compilation that has been released by Uniform Records. I look forward to the compilation's launch tomorrow night at Oran Mòr in the west end of Glasgow. I am grateful for the invitation and the indication of things to come.

There is also a wealth of musical talent in the Scottish Parliament and I have heard many a chanter here and in nearby pubs. For example, I have heard Rob Gibson; Robin Harper; Jamie McGrigor, who is actually a very good singer; Cathy Peattie, who sings beautifully; and our own Barbara Scott, who is the personal assistant of Carolyn Leckie and Frances Curran. I have even seen and heard Pauline McNeill giving it laldie on top of a double-decker bus in Glasgow. I will spare her blushes—she was not on the way back from the dancing; she was on the battlebus in Anniesland during an election campaign. I have to say that she was very good.

I congratulate Franz Ferdinand and our schools. Long may all of them—and Scotland—rock.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In order to get the remaining members into the debate, I am willing to accept a motion without notice to extend the debate by 10 minutes, if someone so moves.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended until 6.03 pm.—[*Rob Gibson.*]

Motion agreed to.

17:43

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): I, too, offer my warm congratulations to Pauline McNeill on securing the debate, which I think splits into two parts. We are right to acknowledge Franz Ferdinand's recent and well-deserved success, but it is also appropriate to acknowledge past successes of Scottish bands and solo singers. As someone who comes from Fife, I wish to record my appreciation of all the Fifers and Fife-based artists who have made their contribution to contemporary music—and, in particular, those from my constituency. Over the years, Dunfermline appears to have produced more than its fair share of rock and pop musicians and those

who know me well will know which of those acts is my favourite.

The other, more important element of the debate centres on how to nurture future talent and on acknowledging contemporary music's economic impact. Pauline McNeill was right when she refused to see a difference between high and low art. We must move away from seeing culture as being for a select few towards seeing it—particularly contemporary culture—as wide ranging and all encompassing. I argue that rock and pop music should be at the centre of that culture. For too long, such music has been dismissed too lightly. For many, it is a cultural experience. As Pauline McNeill indicated in her wide-ranging speech, it also brings real economic benefits to local communities. She listed several further education institutions that are actively encouraging contemporary musicians. To that list, I add two local colleges—Glenrothes College and Perth College—because of the excellent work that they are doing.

In the short time that I have available, I add my voice to Mark Ballard's plea that, to nurture local talent and continue the success of Scottish acts, we must have realistic venues. Although they were not a Scottish act, my seminal musical experience as a youth was seeing the Clash at the Kinema in Dunfermline. I see the minister grinning, because she has heard this from me ad nauseam. My point is not about the excellent experience that I had that night, but about the fact that that venue is no longer available to rock acts and that no other local venue in west Fife can put on the sort of music that so many young people—and not-so-young people like ourselves—wish to see.

Yes, we have to celebrate the success of Franz Ferdinand, but let us also ensure that their success is not the pinnacle of Scots bands' successes. Let us ensure that it is a platform for further success in future.

17:46

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): As my presence here proves, we do not need to be down with the kids or an authority on the hit parade to realise that the music industry—[*Interruption.*] Members are laughing. I can claim that my 30-year-old daughter is a fan of Franz Ferdinand.

Tonight, we are recognising the importance of the music industry to the economy. As Pauline McNeill and others have pointed out, we have an abundance of raw musical talent in Scotland. The question, of course, is how, in practical terms, we can harness and develop that talent. Members with an interest in the subject could do much worse than examine the great work that is being

done at Greenock's James Watt College of Further and Higher Education in my constituency. I hope that the minister will take the opportunity to visit and witness for herself at first hand the good work that is taking place there. Perhaps even the members of the cross-party group on contemporary music will visit some time in the future.

In 1999, the college shared with me its vision of a state-of-the-art community music centre for Inverclyde. It wanted a centre of excellence based in the community that was attractive to and supportive of young people. It would offer music and audio technology teaching alongside business start-up support and other services that young musicians need, such as rehearsal areas, recording studios, a performance venue and a personal computer suite.

True to its word, the college has made its vision a reality. The brand-new facility—the opening of which I attended last year—will make it much easier for young musicians to take the all-important first step into the professional music industry. As many members have mentioned, the financial outlay that is required by a new band to put on its first performance makes the experience too much of a gamble. The ready-made performance venue and the gaining of some basic business skills will undoubtedly make that leap a great deal easier, releasing more of our young talent.

Back in 1999, when the college's plans were first floated, I remember fearing and discussing with the college that the usual suspects would moan about layabouts with long hair and say, "It wasn't called a job in my day." Thankfully, the response to the investment has been far more positive. It is accepted that it is not a waste of money and is not following a fad, but rather makes perfect social and economic sense.

Music is an important part of young people's lives and can act as a stabilising factor for young people who have turbulent personal or home lives. It also helps young people to develop essential life skills. How can someone reach performance standard without self-confidence? How can they stage a live event without communication or financial skills?

I am delighted that Pauline McNeill gave us the opportunity to have this debate and I am delighted that James Watt College took such a bold step and that young people will have access to the college's wonderful resource. As a near neighbour of the college, I am also delighted that the studios are well sound-proofed and that I can live in peace.

17:50

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston)

(Lab): I thank Pauline McNeill for securing the debate and I welcome the work that she and Ken Macintosh have done on behalf of the cross-party group on the Scottish contemporary music industry. A challenge of a debate such as this one is that witnessing politicians who are probably middle-aged talking about contemporary music is as frightening as watching your dad dance at a family wedding—and possibly has equally fatal consequences.

Pauline McNeill identified Franz Ferdinand as a current Scottish-based band. Obviously, people from all over the United Kingdom have made their homes in Scotland and made a contribution to the Scottish music scene. This evening we should remember that Edwyn Collins, who was probably a key influence on Franz Ferdinand, is facing a critical situation in hospital. I hope that the Parliament will acknowledge the contribution that he has made over the years.

There has been a consistent debate about the relevance of popular music to music strategies in Scotland or elsewhere. Fifty years after the rather shy boy from Tupelo, Mississippi, exploded on to the scene, that debate still reverberates. Duncan McNeill touched on his youth; perhaps he was at Paisley town hall in 1957 when a fight erupted among teddy boys during a gig by the Ricky Barnes All Stars. The riot was quelled only by the intervention of a young man in the audience in Highland regalia, who stood up and sang some lovely old Scottish songs—I thank Sidney Devine for his contribution that evening.

Clearly, popular music has a role in our experiences and in those of the people in Scotland whom we serve. In my constituency we can follow a line from Lonnie Donegan, who was born in Bridgeton and influenced the development of early rock and roll, to Alex Harvey, from the Gorbals, who made a critical contribution to the Scottish music scene in the 1960s and 1970s. Franz Ferdinand's secret hideaway, the Chateau, is in Bridge Street in the Gorbals, which brings synchronicity to the debate.

Members have touched on the fact that there has been a sterile debate in Scotland about music development, which has assumed that either we support the top classical arts in music or we support popular music. It should not be about supporting either one or the other; we should support both, because ultimately the ecology of music in Scotland feeds off many different influences and experiences. When I was Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport I experienced a fairly futile, sterile argument about patronage, which I hope that Patricia Ferguson will not experience, which suggested that certain music

forms should be funded by the state, whereas others should be excluded. However, we must find the flexibility to address all forms of music.

The music industry's relatively fickle nature presents a great challenge. The French use the word "transitoire" to describe the phenomenon whereby last year's the Strokes are this year's Franz Ferdinand or next year's K T Tunstall—everything depends on the mood, the emotion and the experience. People in the industry ask members in the cross-party group, "How can we develop an infrastructure that genuinely makes a difference?" Many members mentioned that challenge, which we hope informs our work with the minister.

Some 11 years ago, I was involved, as a music development officer with Glasgow City Council, in the development of the BBC's sound city event. I hope that I facilitated music developments in Glasgow, our major city.

Ministers have worked on the Executive's youth music initiative during the past few years and Patricia Ferguson will continue that work, which presents an opportunity to ensure that a generation that believes that all music matters, whether it is contemporary popular music or classical music, can make a difference. I welcome the contributions to the debate and I hope that we have a more sensible debate about music development in future, for future generations in Scotland.

17:54

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): I am delighted to have this opportunity to endorse what I think is our collective admiration for and delight at Franz Ferdinand's success and our support and enthusiasm for the vibrant music scene in Scotland. I congratulate Pauline McNeill on securing the debate and on leading the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on the Scottish contemporary music industry in the way that she has done, with support from Ken Macintosh and others, for almost six years.

The past year has been phenomenal for Franz Ferdinand. Following a highly successful appearance at the south by southwest music festival in Texas last year, they were named the most influential band of 2004 by the US magazine "Spin". From there, the group went on to pick up a prestigious Mercury music prize and, more recently, best British group and best British rock act at the Brit awards. It hardly seems possible to pick up a newspaper or magazine without reading of another award that they have received or another tribute to the band. Long may it continue. It is well deserved.

Rosie Kane may be reassured—or perhaps not—to know that the ministers who share my corridor at Victoria Quay in Leith are a little bit more progressive than at least some members of the SSP. They do not object at all when I have Franz Ferdinand's album blaring out from my office. Perhaps we can discuss that some time.

There is in Scotland today a real buzz in our music industry—not just in pop or rock music, but in our traditional music. Music is something that we can all enjoy; whether we are listening to it or taking part in it, music plays a role in all our lives. It is this enriching experience that makes it paramount that we provide the right atmosphere for music to flourish.

A couple of colleagues have mentioned the diverting effect that music can have. I think that it was Mark Ballard who said that music can often be a safety valve for people. When I was thinking about my speech, I remembered various conversations with colleagues in the chamber about our shared love of music and our shared love of particular bands. When I was Labour whip, I remember talking to Scott Barrie about bands that we grew up with—even though I am slightly older than Scott. One conversation that we came back to time and again—perhaps during our more stressful moments—was on whether the band led by Fay Fife were more creative as the Rezillos or as the Revillos. Such discussions can certainly provide a safety valve for people in stressful situations.

The Scottish Executive, through our funding of the Scottish Arts Council, is committed to making music accessible to all. Frank McAveety mentioned the youth music initiative, which has invested £17.5 million over three years, up until this financial year. The initiative's target is that, by 2006, all schoolchildren should have had access to one year's free music tuition by the time they reach primary 6. That is a tremendous undertaking. I am pleased to say that we have identified another £10 million per year for financial years 2006-07 and 2007-08. The youth music initiative reference group is in the process of drafting a 10-year national youth music strategy. One of the strengths of the initiative is that it responds to local circumstances and does not try to pigeonhole young people into one particular kind of music.

We have to build on young people's natural enthusiasm for music. As we have heard, there are many examples in schools today of music departments developing projects to foster interest and develop skills. As Pauline McNeill said, she and I had the great pleasure of visiting one such project at Lourdes Secondary School. That excellent facility is designed not only to allow the students the opportunity to learn the arts of DJ-ing,

sound recording and engineering, but to provide teachers and tutors with a place to master the various arts of digital media. I would be delighted to visit James Watt College with Duncan McNeil to see the great facility that he described.

From such opportunities, we grow the seeds of creativity. There is no shortage of creative ability in Scotland. When I leave Parliament this evening, I am going to the Scottish Arts Council's creative Scotland awards, which is an annual event that celebrates and encourages the development of creative talent. This year, five of the 23 finalists are musicians.

I mentioned the south by southwest festival, at which Franz Ferdinand were so successful. Franz Ferdinand, of course, received a grant from the Scottish Arts Council towards their expenses in attending the festival. As others have said, this year another 10 Scottish bands are taking part—again with support from the Scottish Arts Council. In addition, the SAC, in partnership with members of the Scottish music community, will co-ordinate the Scottish presence at the convention's trade show. That will help to maximise the opportunity for promoting Scottish music to an international audience.

There are a growing number of events at which we are able to showcase Scottish talent. One of the many examples of which we have heard is the annual MusicWorks convention, which is the UK's leading media and business convention. It took place in Glasgow last October with support from Glasgow City Council and Scottish Enterprise.

The Scottish Arts Council, the British Council Scotland, the Musicians Union and others backed showcase Scotland during the recent Celtic connections festival, which supports traditional Scottish music. There has been a tremendous upsurge in local gatherings of traditional musicians throughout Scotland, many of which provide the opportunity to participate and to learn how to play traditional musical instruments.

When I visited the music department at the University of Strathclyde recently, I met some young people who, after playing traditional music for me in the morning, went on to take part in a jazz concert. They told me that they play in Glasgow's pubs and clubs at the weekend, in rock, pop and other contemporary music bands. That shows that having an interest in one kind of music does not debar someone from having an interest—or even a competency or proficiency—in another kind of music.

The SAC continues to consider the potential for having a Scottish presence at new events, such as WOMEX, the international professional trade fair and showcase event for world and roots music, which will take place at the Sage in Gateshead

later this year. Of course, it is not just our performers who need our support. The infrastructure of the music industry—which incorporates recording studios, promoters, record labels and distribution networks—must be in place if success is to be possible. Rob Gibson was right to mention Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the excellent support that it has provided in its area through enterprises such as the music industry development and support, or MIDAS, website and the Highlands and Islands labels, or HAIL, forum.

It is evident that many things are happening that provide a base for development in the different genres or aspects of the industry. However, a joined-up approach that provides seamless support must be the goal if we are to continue to make our mark internationally. Pauline McNeill referred to the discussion paper that was published earlier this week, which was commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council and received funding from the Scottish Executive and Scottish Enterprise. The paper sets out the proposals for the development of an organisation that will be able to represent the interests of the entire music industry in Scotland. I look forward to reading the final report when it is published later in the spring. I thank Pauline McNeill for her contribution to that work.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, Scotland has a vibrant music scene. In fact, it is positively bursting with energy, enthusiasm and talent. I agree whole-heartedly with the First Minister that it would be a wonderful endorsement of that state of affairs if the Brit awards were to take place in Scotland. To deal with Pauline McNeill's point, I know that EventScotland is taking that possibility very seriously.

In the meantime, I am pleased to add my best wishes to the bands who are performing at south by southwest this year and to all our other performers who raise the profile of Scotland around the world and contribute to the richness of our musical life. If recent press reports are to be believed, I look forward to hearing them not too far from here in the near future.

Meeting closed at 18:03.

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