

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Wednesday 14 November 2007

Session 3

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## Scottish Parliament

*Wednesday 14 November 2007*

[THE DEPUTY PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

### Time for Reflection

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is Imam Mustaqeem Shah, from the UK Islamic Mission.

**Imam Mustaqeem Shah (UK Islamic Mission):** Bismillah-hir-Rahman-nir-Rahim. In the name of Allah, all-compassionate, all-merciful.

I greet you all with the universal greeting of Islam, assalam alakom—peace be with you.

I am grateful and honoured to be given the opportunity to introduce to you the holy prophet of Islam, Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. He came at the end of the chain of approximately 124,000 prophets of Allah that started in the beginning of time with Adam, and 570 years after Jesus—peace be upon him—with one goal: to guide mankind to the straight path of our Creator.

I hope that I will fulfil my duty to Scotland and its leaders, as I believe that it is crucial to recognise the place that this man holds in the hearts and minds of Muslims. I believe that that will facilitate peace and justice not only here in Scotland but worldwide, as people appreciate the true character of this great man and everything that he stood for. With understanding will come the reluctance to insult a faith ignorantly simply for the sake of it, under the guise of freedom of speech.

Muhammad is dearer to Muslims than their own selves and anything in the world. He—peace be upon him—says:

“By Him in Whose Hands my life is, none of you will have faith till he loves me more than his father and his children and all mankind.”

Allah says in the holy Qur’an:

“O believers! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor speak aloud when talking to him as you speak aloud to one another, lest your deeds should come to nothing while you do not even perceive it.”

Muhammad is a role model for Muslims and of mercy for humanity. By studying his life we can understand him, and by doing so we can relate better to the Muslim community of Scotland and beyond.

I suggest a read of Martin Lings’s book “Muhammad: His life based on the earliest

sources”. To make the job easier, I shall quote Michael H Hart in his book “The 100: A ranking of the most influential persons in history”:

“My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world’s most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels.”

In “The Genuine Islam”, George Bernard Shaw says:

“I have studied him—the wonderful man ... he must be called the Saviour of Humanity.”

I shall conclude by presenting a couple of sayings by Muhammad, peace be upon him. The first is:

“None of you will have faith till he wishes for his brother what he likes for himself.”

He also says:

“Facilitate things to people, and do not make it hard for them and give them good tidings and do not make them run away.”

I will end with a prayer. May the mercy of God bring us closer to him and closer to one another; may he help us love for others what we love for ourselves.

Amen.

## Business Motion

14:03

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-838, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 14 November 2007—

after

2.00 pm                      Time for Reflection

*followed by*                Parliamentary Bureau Motions

insert

*followed by*                Ministerial Statement: Scotland's successful bid to host the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow—  
[Bruce Crawford.]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Commonwealth Games 2014

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The next item of business is a statement by Alex Salmond on Scotland's successful bid to host the 2014 Commonwealth games in Glasgow. The First Minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions. First Minister, you have 15 minutes.

14:04

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** It gives me enormous pleasure to make this statement. First, I take the opportunity to put on record our thanks to the Sri Lankan national Olympic committee for hosting us last week. It did a wonderful job. I also offer my commiserations to the Nigerian Government and the team from Abuja, which ensured that we had a terrific contest that was held in the best possible spirit—one that was worthy of the Commonwealth games. Ultimately, though, Scotland was victorious, therefore it gives me great pleasure formally to offer my congratulations to everyone who worked so hard on Glasgow's bid to host the Commonwealth games. [*Applause.*]

As chair of the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland, Louise Martin's role in securing the games cannot be overstated. Her detailed knowledge of the delegates from each of the other 70 Commonwealth games associations was quite breathtaking and allowed us to mount the most effective canvassing campaign that I have ever seen. Derek Casey, as bid director, also worked tirelessly over the past couple of years. Allied to Louise's knowledge of the delegates, Derek's encyclopaedic knowledge of every element of the bid—all 240 pages of it—was a decisive factor.

They were the figureheads of Glasgow's bid, but it should not be forgotten that there were many other unsung heroes, including officials from Government and from Glasgow City Council, as well as athletes past and present. All of those people deserve our thanks. Neither should it be forgotten that Glasgow's bid was supported across all political parties in the Scottish Parliament. Last week, the Deputy First Minister put on record her thanks to the former First Minister. I want to underline those sentiments and hold up the games as an example of what Scotland can achieve when united in a common goal. We should acknowledge Jack McConnell's contribution. [*Applause.*]

Make no mistake that Friday's announcement was a huge vote of confidence from the international community in Scotland and its people.

I have already paid tribute to the chair of the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland, Louise Martin, but I also want to pay tribute to the leader of Glasgow City Council, Steven Purcell, whose dedication to the task of securing the games has been an inspiring example of civic leadership and initiative. *[Applause.]*

Friday was a great day for Scotland. Seventy other countries from around the world have placed their faith in us. As a result, we have great responsibilities as well as great opportunities.

Over the next 100 days, we will start to redeem our promises without delay. Tomorrow, I shall meet Steven Purcell, Louise Martin and Derek Casey to start implementing a plan for the first 100 days following the announcement. Within that period, we aim to make the first major appointment—the chair of the organising company—and set in motion the recruitment of other key personnel who will take the lead on delivering the Glasgow games. Within the 100 days, we will also develop a business plan for the first three years of the operation of the organising company and consult on our plans to secure a lasting legacy from the games for all of Scotland.

Subject to the parliamentary timetable, we hope to have the Glasgow Commonwealth Games Bill on the statute book before the summer recess. As members will know, the bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament within minutes of the announcement in Colombo and was published yesterday. It will ensure that Scotland delivers the games that the members of the Commonwealth Games Federation voted for on Friday. The games will be protected from ambush marketing and ticket touting. They will be commercially attractive but not commercially cluttered games that everyone in Scotland—and our many visitors from across the world—can access and enjoy.

The bill will also ensure that a games transport plan is developed and implemented, so that athletes, officials and spectators can travel between venues efficiently and with minimum disruption to everyday life. Under the bill, the ownership of land that is needed for the games will be secured and projects will be delivered in time and on budget. The bill will also put in place funding mechanisms to allow the organising company to make the games a reality while protecting the public interest. Finally, as the bill is designed to deliver the Glasgow games specifically, it provides for its own repeal once the Glasgow 2014 games are complete.

The bill is one of two formal mechanisms that will enable us to deliver the Glasgow games. The other will be the organising company, which is crucial to the delivery of the games. The company, Glasgow 2014 Ltd—I am sorry that we could not think of a more ingenious title, but it sums up what

is happening—has already been incorporated as a company limited by guarantee. It is owned by the Scottish ministers, Glasgow City Council and the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland. That tripartite approach has been crucial in securing the bid, and it will now be crucial in delivering the games.

The organising company is charged with turning the 240-page bid document into reality. That is not a simple task, so the company will be required to produce detailed business plans setting out precisely what will be done, when and at what cost. Those plans will be scrutinised in detail by the Glasgow 2014 strategic group, which I will chair. The Deputy First Minister will also be a member of the group, along with the leader of Glasgow City Council, the chair of the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland and the chair of the organising company. The Scottish ministers will report to Parliament regularly on the preparations for the games. Parliamentary committees will have a key role in scrutinising the Glasgow Commonwealth Games Bill and the plans for the legacy effect, which are soon to be published.

I turn to budget details. The parliamentary scrutiny to which I have referred will have an important role to play in ensuring the integrity of the budgets that have been developed for the games. The net public cost of hosting the games is £298 million at 2007 prices, 80 per cent of which will be met by the Scottish Government and 20 per cent by Glasgow City Council.

As part of the bidding process, the budget—like every other area of our submission—was subject to the most rigorous examination by the Commonwealth Games Federation's evaluation commission. As members will recall, its report expressed confidence in the overall budget figures. Unlike many other major games, we are fortunate that more than 70 per cent of the venues that will be used for Glasgow 2014—such as Hampden Park, Celtic Park, Ibrox, the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre, Kelvinhall and others—already exist. Around another 20 per cent of venues were already committed to before the decision on Friday, meaning that the Glasgow 2014 games have a low element of high-risk capital construction costs. However, great discipline will still be required to ensure that we deliver the games in time and on budget.

We can be confident that we will not see the sort of escalating costs that other projects have seen. Glasgow's bid was built on a solid foundation—bricks and mortar, not pie in the sky. That is one reason why, unlike other games, we do not depend on lottery funds to pay for Glasgow 2014. However, the lottery should and must be used to help the development of grass-roots sports. We

cannot allow lottery funding to decline just as the greatest opportunities in sport beckon.

I move on to the legacy. I make one thing clear: making the best use of venues that are already at our disposal does not and should not mean minimising the potential legacy from the games. I have said that Friday's result gives us great responsibilities and great opportunities. This Government is committed to ensuring not only that the games in 2014 are the best sporting event that this country has ever seen, but that they are a catalyst for regeneration, social change and economic development, and that they encourage a new generation to become Scotland's sporting heroes of the future.

The most obvious legacy benefit from the games will be the physical regeneration of a large part of the east end of Glasgow. The athletes village, the national indoor sports arena and the velodrome will all be constructed in Dalmarnock, at the heart of the Clyde gateway, creating an on-going infrastructure legacy for the area. After the games, the village will be made available for a mix of social and private housing. The games offer the potential to transform one of our most deprived areas and to provide superb new facilities and opportunities to local people.

The sense of pride does not stop in the east end of Glasgow. The reaction to the announcement on Friday throughout Scotland was quite incredible. It was the latest demonstration that, as a country, we are once again gaining a sense of self-confidence, and that optimism and energy are returning to this nation. Scotland has a long tradition of enterprise and innovation. The games should be held up as an example to our young people that they should not be afraid to try; they should have confidence in their ability to achieve their goals, in whatever field they choose. The days of Scotland so often being a plucky loser are drawing to a close. Winning the bid is an indication that, in a much wider sense, Scotland is heading towards a better sporting future.

The games will offer new opportunities for individuals. Around 15,000 volunteers will be needed to run the games. All the volunteers, no matter their background, will be able to develop new skills and gain new experiences and confidence.

Scotland will welcome tens of thousands of visitors to the games in 2014. It is vital that we encourage them to see as much of the country as they can while they are here, to experience the great Scottish hospitality and to come back again and again.

In addition, it is predicted that the games will lead to 1,200 new jobs in Scotland, around 1,000 of which will be in Glasgow.

The most important legacy, however, should be in the field of health and healthy living. We now have an unrivalled opportunity to use the power of sport to inspire people of all ages, but particularly the next generation, to lead active and healthy lives. It is not an exaggeration to say that the games have the potential to change materially the course of that generation.

More participation in physical activity and sport will also increase Scotland's ability to produce world-class athletes. We want Scottish athletes to compete with the best in the Commonwealth games of 2014 and to add to Scotland's impressive list of medal winners at previous games and, we hope, in Delhi in 2010.

Within 100 days, we will consult on our initial plan to secure those legacies from the Glasgow games. When we do so, I will once again ask the whole of Scotland to unite behind the Glasgow games.

On Friday, we got a glimpse of what can be achieved by working together—that should be only the start. The games are a ringing endorsement of this nation and its people from the entire Commonwealth. Scotland's athletes and, no less, Scotland's people must use this achievement as an inspiration, and be confident in our own potential and in the unlimited potential of this nation. [*Applause.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The First Minister will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I will allow 30 minutes for such questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business.

**Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab):** I thank the First Minister for his statement and his personal efforts to secure the 2014 Commonwealth games.

As he graciously acknowledged, last Friday's success was the culmination of years of hard work by many people—Louise Martin, the bid team, the First Minister's predecessor Jack McConnell, former ministers and Glasgow City Council, which had the vision to place sport at the heart of its regeneration agenda more than a decade ago.

The First Minister acknowledged how it was the strong unity of purpose on an all-party basis that delivered success for Scotland. Will he now consider having all-party representation on his new strategic group to maintain that unity of purpose throughout the next seven years? If he is reluctant to agree to that, will he at least consider an all-party liaison group with party spokespeople to maintain the cross-party consensus that has served the nation so well so far?

I am conscious that the First Minister's statement ignored entirely sportscotland's role. I



am also conscious that the SNP manifesto promised its abolition, and that sportscotland's future is now under active review. Given sportscotland's proven expertise in promoting sport in Scotland, will the First Minister today end the continuing uncertainty about its future and allow it simply to get on with the job of promoting sport in Scotland in the run-up to the games?

Many people will welcome the games transport plan. Does the First Minister agree that the speedy completion of the northern extension of the M74 is a vital part of delivering that plan and meeting the commitments on athlete travel time that were made in the bid document?

**The First Minister:** I thank Wendy Alexander for acknowledging the people who have been responsible for securing the games for Scotland.

On the question of all-party representation, the strategic group is a continuation of the First Minister's 2014 group, and it contains the same partners that were on the strategic body that the former First Minister established. As those partners have ownership of the organising company for the games, I do not think that it would be appropriate to follow Wendy Alexander's suggestion of having all-party representation on the group. Indeed, there was no precedent for that when her Government was in power.

However, parliamentary co-operation on the games is absolutely fundamental. As members will have noticed, I committed in my statement to making regular reports to Parliament and to ensuring parliamentary committees' active role in scrutinising not just the Glasgow Commonwealth Games Bill but the Government's plans for securing the games' legacy effect. The committees are probably the appropriate mechanism in that respect, but I will consider Wendy Alexander's proposal for establishing another kind of liaison group, perhaps after the initial scrutiny details have been completed.

With regard to sportscotland, it is part of our wider review of the public sector, which includes not only it but the Scottish Institute of Sport and the regional institutes. We will have an answer that gives clear direction on the matter by the end of the year. However, whether sportscotland, another body or the Government itself is responsible, we will implement what is required to run a successful games in Glasgow in 2014.

As for transport connections—which, I should point out, include not just the M74 but a range of other transport projects—the Government is committed to them. However, I am sure that Wendy Alexander agrees that although such projects and infrastructure obviously must be in place in time for the games, they must conform to a budget and to competitive conditions. If we do

not ensure that that happens, it will send substantially the wrong signal across a range of infrastructure projects, not least of which are the regeneration projects in the east end of Glasgow. That is the responsible way of dealing with her points.

**Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** I, too, welcome the First Minister back from Sri Lanka and thank him for the role that he played there on behalf of Scotland. He said that Friday was a great day of celebration—it certainly was. I never thought that on the same day I would be required to embrace Nicola Sturgeon and Wendy Alexander. The First Minister was probably immensely relieved to be thousands of miles away.

I echo the First Minister's congratulations to the bid team and all the other individuals at local and national level who, whether in a political capacity or otherwise, contributed to this triumph. It is also a tribute to Glasgow's greatest asset—its people—and it is certainly a feather in Scotland's cap.

However, I think that the First Minister will agree that, amidst the jubilation, serious issues have to be addressed and challenges met. I listened with some concern to his response to Wendy Alexander on the M74 extension. If we are to have the games at all, the extension will have to be completed and open long before 2014, to ensure the movement of essential goods and services that will be necessary for the construction work. Can he confirm that the transport project will happen, and is there a timescale for it?

Does the First Minister also agree that, as well as the physical legacy for Glasgow that will arise out of the games, there will be an important sporting legacy in terms of the thousands of young Scots who, I am sure, will be inspired to take up sport? What will be done actively to channel, nurture and support that enthusiasm throughout Scotland?

**The First Minister:** On the M74 extension, yes, it will happen in good time for the games. I am sure that Annabel Goldie agrees that we have to ensure that there are competitive conditions not only for the M74 extension but for the wider transport infrastructure that will be required for the games.

On Ms Goldie's first question, I should have acknowledged the role of lord provost Bob Winter, who was a tremendous asset not only to the efforts in Sri Lanka but in receiving delegations from all over the Commonwealth to the great city of Glasgow during the summer. I happened to be doing an interview with the lord provost when a vision came on our screens of the Deputy First Minister in what seemed like a close dance with Glasgow's deputy lord provost. We had a debate

as to who was more damaged by that, but both the lord provost and I came to the conclusion that our deputies were doing a fine job in our absence. I have no knowledge of the other embraces that Annabel Goldie mentioned, but I am sure that they were equally close and equally effective.

In mentioning the inspiration effect throughout Scotland, Annabel Goldie touches on something of huge significance. I visited a primary school in East Lothian today, and I took the opportunity to ask the various classes, from primary 2 to primary 7, what they thought of last week's events. There was virtually 100 per cent knowledge among the children about what happened last week—tremendously detailed knowledge, right down to the number of voting countries and what the vote was, which was heartening. That is an indication of the inspirational effect that the games can have, particularly for the next generation, not just on sports but on attitude to life and attitude to Scotland and its place in the world. The legacy consultation document that we will publish in the next few weeks will centre on that effect, so that we can grasp that huge opportunity with open arms. I am certain that all parties in the chamber will greet it with great enthusiasm.

**Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD):** I welcome the First Minister's statement and extend my congratulations to everyone who was involved in the bid, particularly to Louise Martin, Derek Casey and Steven Purcell, who all showed tireless drive and leadership in winning the bid for Scotland. As the First Minister did, I acknowledge the work of the former First Minister, Jack McConnell, in developing the Scottish bid. I was particularly pleased that he was on the stage at the Old Fruitmarket when we heard that single word—"Glasgow"—announced over the satellite link and the whole place went wild.

Gaining the Commonwealth games is a fantastic success, not just for Glasgow but for the whole of Scotland, so I ask the First Minister to do all that he can to ensure that the benefits are delivered across all Scotland.

With both the Commonwealth games and the Olympic games now coming to the UK, does the First Minister agree that it is vital to have facilities right across our nation that meet the challenge? Will he confirm that his Government will now fund projects such as the 50m swimming pool in Aberdeen, and increase investment in sports facilities in all regions of Scotland? That would be the first step in ensuring that future Scottish medallists, wherever they live, have access to high-quality international standard facilities.

The next step is to build on community and grass-roots sport. I am encouraged by the First Minister's reassurance that lottery funds will contribute to building grass-roots sports, but there

have been cuts, as he knows. I ask him to make the further commitment today that all unclaimed assets in dormant bank accounts that will now be made available to the Scottish Government—a likely £60 million—will be directed, through the lottery, to young people and in particular to young people's sport.

**The First Minister:** I shall consider Nicol Stephen's last suggestion carefully.

On lottery benefits, there is concern about the impact of the Olympics, as the leader of the Liberal Democrats will know. I know that he has been extremely concerned about the subject and has made a number of speeches on it. That is something that we will be discussing on a tripartite basis at the strategy committee tomorrow. As I said in my statement, we cannot allow a situation to develop in which funds are drained away from the grass roots as opportunities open up. We will have more to say about that in the near future.

Nicol Stephen asked about facilities around Scotland. As an MP for the North East of Scotland, I am obviously keen that there be a 50m pool in the area, but it must be designed for the task in hand and it must be cost effective. I am sure that discussions will continue with Aberdeen City Council to achieve that, in much the same way that discussions about the diving facilities—the last of the specific games venues for which agreement has yet to be reached—must continue with City of Edinburgh Council. The effect around Scotland should be seen in grass-roots facilities, in addition to our existing facilities. As Steven Purcell said, the games are not just Glasgow's games but Scotland's games, and our forthcoming document will touch on how their impact and legacy can be spread right across the country.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I wish to call as many back benchers as I can, so I ask for brief questions.

**Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP):** As others have done, I congratulate the bid team on securing the games and I welcome the First Minister's intention to ensure that the 2014 games is the best-ever sporting event in Scotland—although I suspect that the right result against the world champions on Saturday will be difficult to surpass.

Does the First Minister agree that it is not only about having the best-ever games in Scotland, and that we should aim to have the best Scottish team competing in the Commonwealth games when they come to Glasgow? Can the First Minister assure Parliament that his Government will work with the various national sporting bodies to ensure that we develop our athletes over the next six years and have the strongest possible Scottish team competing in 2014?

**The First Minister:** Yes, I can give that assurance. Much of that will be covered in the legacy document that we publish over the next few months.

My view is that the impact and the inspirational effect of Glasgow 2014 will not be confined to the 17 competing sports in the games, but will apply to other sports. Many of the messages that are broadcast will apply equally to non-Commonwealth games sports.

I will be at the game on Saturday—I am extremely hopeful that the feel-good factor that is sweeping the nation will continue.

**Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab):** I thank the First Minister for his statement and put on record our appreciation of the work that was done by all who were involved in the bid and its success.

Our ambition was to make a generational difference to the city of Glasgow, to showcase the best that our nation can offer in holding international events and, as the First Minister rightly said in his statement, to make a difference to sport throughout the country.

The document that was signed includes a key infrastructure component: that athletes should be within 20 minutes of their venues. Key elements of that will be a successful M74 extension and a successful east-end regeneration route. Can the First Minister give a commitment that, in order to ensure that the games are fit for purpose, there will be no delay in the construction of either of those major transport infrastructure projects?

Many members have referred to the appreciation of the success throughout the country. I shared with my constituents in the east end of Glasgow the funny experience of cheering a victory in which the First Minister was involved. That was the right thing for Scotland. We also believe, however, that the headquarters of our national sports agency would be best placed within the national arena in the east end of Glasgow. We were with the First Minister when he travelled the 5,000 miles to Sri Lanka. We are not even asking for 500 miles this week, of all weeks, given the international event that will take place on Saturday. We are asking him to go that extra 40 miles and to put the national sports agency headquarters in our national arena to ensure that, in his own words, we have the “best games ever”, because of the role that sportscotland and its HQ could play for the people of Glasgow and Scotland.

**The First Minister:** The legacy effect of the games will be felt, first and foremost, in the city of Glasgow. As Frank McAveety will have noticed, my statement dealt with the economic impact analysis, which suggests a net increase of 1,200

jobs across Scotland, 1,000 of which will be in Glasgow.

The projects that Frank McAveety mentioned are extremely important. They are part of the Government’s programme and will be built in good time for the games. They must be built competitively—if they are not, that will have implications for all the infrastructure projects in Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland.

The decision on sportscotland will be made by the end of the year. I am sure that Frank McAveety and others will contribute to the on-going consultation.

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** As many other members did, I knew that the bid had been successful when I saw my three formidable parliamentary sisters dancing together.

Does the First Minister agree that, apart from stimulating competitiveness at grass-roots level, the games provide a unique opportunity to increase the fitness of this generation of our children, at a time when obesity and the consequential increase in, for example, type 2 diabetes are of such concern?

I advise the First Minister that the Health and Sport Committee, subject to the agreement of its members, might want to be involved in the project, as appropriate, given that the project impacts on the committee’s remit.

**The First Minister:** I will welcome scrutiny from the Health and Sport Committee and other parliamentary committees. On Scotland’s health record, I am sure that there will be a benefit across a range of conditions, of which Scotland currently has too many.

I have no knowledge of the dancing that Christine Grahame mentioned, which unfortunately was not shown in the pictures that were beamed back to Sri Lanka, although I dearly wish that it had been shown, given what has been said. I am sure that I can get a DVD—that will be another legacy effect of the games.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** In passing, I wonder how the First Minister squares his comment that a decision on sportscotland will be made by December with the commitment that he made to me in Parliament that there will be a full consultation on sportscotland’s future. As I understand it, that consultation has not yet begun.

Will the First Minister acknowledge that the potential talent of many youngsters in Scotland, including those who cheered most loudly on Friday in Glasgow, might not be realised, because of the challenges that they face as a result of disadvantage and deprivation in their everyday lives? I agree with the First Minister that there is a need to sustain grass-roots sports activity and I

welcome the importance that he places on physical regeneration of the east end. Will he ensure that in his broader budget he continues and sustains financial support for crucial local community regeneration initiatives, which reach out to young people, some of whom live in the most isolated and unsupported families and who also perhaps face domestic abuse? Will he support such initiatives, so that those young people can reach a stage at which they can begin to think about being involved in a sporting adventure that many other youngsters are already welcoming and embracing?

**The First Minister:** The consultation on sportscotland is on-going. I know that Johann Lamont will agree that there should be no unnecessary delay in making a decision on the matter. To make the decision by the end of the year seems to be a reasonable timetable.

On the regeneration effect, community planning partnerships are very much part of our plans. A statement on the spending review will be made in Parliament this afternoon. I advise Johann Lamont to listen carefully to it—I suspect that she will find the answer to her question in it.

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I thank the First Minister and the ex-First Minister for their terrific efforts to secure the Commonwealth games, and I thank many other people, including the individuals who were seconded from sportscotland.

In considering preparations for the games, will the First Minister consider the creation of sports schools to develop our most talented young people, as the Scottish Institute of Sport suggested after a recent study? Does he agree that the specialist sporting experience of sportscotland would be invaluable in developing the legacy of which he speaks and in connecting Scotland's communities to the games in the context of sport and recreation?

**The First Minister:** On Jamie McGrigor's first point, the matter is under consideration. The question is whether to put the emphasis on developing existing schools with existing specialisms or on setting up new specialist schools.

Connectivity throughout Scotland is very much part of the plans for the games.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** We all hope that Scottish youngsters will be able to cheer on their sporting heroes and role models and that those role models will inspire youngsters to take an active interest in sport. We also hope to showcase the best of Scotland and Scots and to welcome visitors from abroad during the Commonwealth games. Will the First Minister endeavour to ensure that ticket touting, which is the scourge of many

people who support their clubs and country, is tackled? Will he try to stop that iniquitous trade and ensure that the Commonwealth games in Scotland offers an affordable and positive experience for spectators and participants?

**The First Minister:** The Glasgow Commonwealth Games Bill has been published, as I know Bob Doris appreciates. It creates a new criminal offence that prohibits unauthorised sale of Commonwealth games tickets

"for an amount exceeding the ticket's face value, or ... with a view to making a profit."

On summary conviction, an offender

"is liable to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale",

which is currently £5,000.

Bob Doris made a good point in saying that games elsewhere have been deeply afflicted by the problem, but there have also been good examples. In devising the bill, we looked at best practice elsewhere—the most successful examples—so that we can try to limit, or eliminate, the scourge of ticket touting.

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** I also thank the First Minister for his statement. As he knows—he has touched on it—hosting the Commonwealth games presents huge opportunities, but also huge challenges, for Glasgow. Does he agree that one of the biggest issues is to ensure that the inspiration and role model that the Commonwealth's superb athletes provide gives us a major opportunity—building on the London Olympics of 2012—to make a step change in the attitudes of young people, not only the elite, but those at the grass roots, to exercise and to take part in sport, competitive endeavour and life motivation?

Does the First Minister accept that a key driver will be building of capacity in the network of local sports clubs and youth organisations, particularly in Glasgow, but across Scotland? If so, does he also accept that that will require funding beyond existing lottery and other provision? What is his Government prepared to do, or to consider, to ensure that infrastructure investment—as Nicol Stephen mentioned—and expertise investment are made in local sport and youth organisations to meet those opportunities, and to meet them for the long term?

**The First Minister:** That is a matter for all Scotland—the legacy effect of the games must be felt across the country. I advise Robert Brown to listen very closely to the spending review statement that is about to be made and in which he will hear how funds will be distributed across Scotland and what increases can be expected.

On lottery funding, as I said to Nicol Stephen, the significant problem about which there is a question is that an estimated £150 million that was expected for support of grass-roots facilities may be lost. As I also said, the strategy group—the tripartite arrangement—will discuss specifically that matter tomorrow. I hope to have something else to say to Parliament on how we can avoid grass-roots facilities being starved of lottery funding just when this enormous opportunity beckons for the Scottish people.

**George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab):** I also warmly congratulate the First Minister on his important part in Glasgow's successful bid, particularly his sacrifice in missing Hearts' great victory over Aberdeen on Sunday.

I will pick up on the point that Nicol Stephen, Johann Lamont and Robert Brown made—which was also made to me by the unite the clubs campaign in Lothian—on the importance of local sports facilities in which young Scots can train to compete with the best in the Commonwealth. Will the strategy group, at its meeting tomorrow, agree to bring together representatives of local authorities, clubs, sporting bodies, the Big Lottery Fund, and private interests such as the Royal Bank of Scotland, to consider a seven-year plan to build up young Scottish sporting talent? I hope that he considers that to be a constructive suggestion.

**The First Minister:** That is a very constructive suggestion. It will very much be part of the legacy document that will be published in the coming weeks. On the first point, I celebrate any Heart of Midlothian victory. I am not sure, but I think that some of my constituents might find George Foulkes's endorsement of the north-east of Scotland to be guilt by association.

**Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** I also sincerely thank and congratulate the many people who have brought the Commonwealth games to my home city of Glasgow. The First Minister mentioned that we now have great responsibilities and opportunities. I could not agree more, particularly in terms of regeneration and the environment. What environmental impact will the games have? Can he assure Parliament that one legacy of the games will be environmental sustainability?

**The First Minister:** That is a hugely important point and it was uppermost in our minds as we prepared for the bid. That is why the Scottish Government supported an environmental forum for the 2014 games, which included representatives of the Worldwide Fund for Nature, the RSPB Scotland, Glasgow City Council, the Glasgow 2014 bid team, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, the Ramblers Association Scotland, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, the Soil Association, Scottish Natural Heritage, and

the Scottish Wildlife Trust. That forum was important in advising the bid partners on all matters relating to the environmental impacts and sustainability. It will continue to play an advisory role in delivering the 2014 games. Environmental aspects in Glasgow's bid were heavily complimented during the decision-making process: not only was it the right thing to do, it was effective in arguing the case for Glasgow and Scotland.

**Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab):** Other members have thanked the partners who delivered the successful bid, but I add my thanks and praise to them. I also place on record my thanks to the officials of the Government's sports division, who have worked hard over the past three years to help to secure the games for Scotland.

The First Minister will be aware that, in sport, good preparation often makes the difference between winning and losing. Given that our athletes will compete in the New Delhi Commonwealth games in 2010, will he ensure that the Commonwealth games endowment fund will be maintained—or, indeed, enhanced—so that our athletes have the best chance of improving on their record performance in Melbourne in 2006 in setting the scene for 2014?

**The First Minister:** I will look very closely at what Patricia Ferguson suggests. She should pay particular heed to certain aspects of the budget statement later this afternoon. I do not want to pre-empt that statement, so I will leave it to John Swinney to announce.

On Patricia Ferguson's general point, of course we must give maximum support to our athletes and competitors in order to continue the run of sporting success in Scotland.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** To save time, I will just say well done to everyone.

Will the First Minister assure me that the decision on whether to retain sportscotland or amalgamate it with the Scottish Institute of Sport will not hinge solely on the role that sportscotland will play in the Commonwealth games? Sportscotland's primary purpose is to build up community sport, while the Scottish Institute of Sport's purpose is to protect elite athletes. Both objectives should be safeguarded. We would safeguard them better where the expertise has been accumulated—in Edinburgh—but I will not argue about that if the First Minister assures me that the percentage split for the cost of providing the diving facility at the Royal Commonwealth pool will be fair and certainly not detrimental to the City of Edinburgh Council, which, as I am sure he knows, has a great deal of manoeuvring to do to cope with the change at Meadowbank.

I make a direct plea to the First Minister not to listen to all the siren voices that say that simply having the games will inspire young Scots to become physically active. If that were the case, obese young Scots and young Europeans of other nationalities would not be wearing Ronaldo and Ronaldinho strips. We need good coaching and good local facilities to get people into a healthy lifestyle.

**The First Minister:** I will not listen to siren voices. The last point that Margo MacDonald made is extremely good.

It has been suggested that the Government could pay 100 per cent of the cost of refurbishment of the diving pool at the Royal Commonwealth pool in Edinburgh. That would be unprecedented and would apply to none of the other facilities that are being developed for the games—or, indeed, to any sports facilities that are being developed across the country. Discussions will continue with the City of Edinburgh Council to provide a proper outcome and a fair distribution of funding. I should say that the diving facility is the last remaining facility in the games bid document on which agreement in principle needs to be reached. We are hopeful that that can be done and that discussions with the City of Edinburgh Council on an equitable sharing of funding will continue.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That ends questions to the First Minister. I apologise to the three members whom I was unable to call.

## Strategic Spending Review

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The next item of business is a statement by John Swinney on the strategic spending review. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions.

14:50

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** Yesterday, at the University of Glasgow, the First Minister and I launched our Government economic strategy. The strategy brings together every strand of policy to support our purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth in Scotland. It is designed to raise the level of economic growth in Scotland to equal the rate of economic growth in the United Kingdom by 2011. Of course, we want to go beyond that, to ensure that Scotland equals the economic success of small independent European countries. That is what the Government means when we talk of a new age of ambition for Scotland.

A day on, I am proud to deliver to Parliament the first budget of the ambitious Scottish National Party Government. Our economic strategy sets out the route map for higher growth for our nation; the budget sets out how we will invest to deliver greater prosperity for Scotland, to deliver our commitments and to deliver on the hopes and aspirations of the people of Scotland. A copy of the budget is available for each member at the back of the chamber and in the Scottish Parliament information centre.

Since May, we have already taken a number of crucial steps toward delivering on the Government's strategic objectives. To build a wealthier and fairer Scotland, we have refocused the enterprise networks, we have provided this year an additional £100 million investment in our university and college estate and we are legislating to remove the unfair tolls on the Forth and Tay road bridges. To ensure a healthier Scotland, we have taken action to remove hidden waiting lists and we have protected local accident and emergency units that were threatened with closure. To create a smarter Scotland, we have invested an extra £40 million in school buildings, employed more teachers and introduced a bill to scrap fees for students in higher education. To make Scotland's communities safer and stronger, we have committed to invest in our prison estate, we are taking action to tackle the scourge of alcohol-related crime and we have plans to deliver 1,000 extra police on the streets of Scotland, which the Cabinet Secretary for Justice set out earlier this week. To deliver a greener Scotland,

we have set an ambitious target of an 80 per cent reduction in emissions by 2050, we have outlined our plans to invest £1.6 billion over seven years in a sustainable rural economy and we have made clear our opposition to new nuclear power stations in Scotland.

The Government already has a record to be proud of, and it is just the start of what we intend to deliver for the people of Scotland. However, our plans for the next three years must be set against the background of the worst financial settlement since devolution. Next year, our budget will rise in real terms by only 0.5 per cent, in comparison with the 11.5 per cent increase above inflation that the previous Administration received in 2003-04. The annual average real-terms increase for Scotland over the next three years is only 1.4 per cent. That situation, when oil prices are at a record high, reminds us of what Scotland could achieve if we had the ability to balance our own revenues against our own spending. It is some contrast that Scotland's budget is increasing in real terms by 0.5 per cent next year, when the budget of equally oil-rich Norway is increasing by almost 10 times that rate, which shows what small independent countries can achieve for themselves.

The budget is delivered against the backdrop of inherited spending pressures from the previous Administration and spending decisions that have been taken in this session of Parliament against the wishes of the Government, such as that on the Edinburgh tram project. No previous Scottish Government has had to plan as tightly or draw on such financial discipline. Against that background, I have acted to ensure that maximum resources flow to key public services.

First, the Government has faced difficult decisions. We are in a tough financial climate and we will not be able to deliver on all our commitments, as we would have liked. We are a minority Government and our budget proposals must be endorsed by Parliament. Therefore, we must consider, in a tight settlement, where policy commitments will also command parliamentary support.

I know that there is insufficient parliamentary support for student debt servicing or for moving from loans to grants, and we must therefore prioritise funding on policies that we can deliver and which will be supported by Parliament. I am therefore not allocating funding for student debt servicing in the period covered by the budget. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Order. This is a statement, not a debate, and it should be heard as such.

**John Swinney:** However, despite the constraints that we face, we will deliver funding for

a phased transition from student loans to grants, starting with part-time students. We will consult on further student support and graduate debt proposals in 2008, with £30 million available in year 3 to take forward the policy. As I say that, I remind Parliament what we are delivering for Scotland's students by abolishing tuition fees. That measure will go a long way towards providing a better deal for students in Scotland's universities and colleges, and it would not have happened without the SNP in government.

Secondly, in this budget, we will pursue a much more prudent approach to financial planning. We are obliged to—and will—live within the budget that we have been allocated, but we inherited an overallocation in the budget of £220 million. I intend to retain less than half of that overallocation as a key element in my plan to avoid future underspends in the budget. I want all of Scottish taxpayers' money to be used effectively. This Government does not want Scottish taxpayers' money to be locked up in the UK Treasury.

Thirdly, this Government came into office committed to a sustained programme of efficiency savings at a level of 1.5 per cent on an annual basis. In the light of the tighter financial situation, I have decided to increase the level of efficiency savings that will be required across the public sector. The target efficiency savings will now be set at 2 per cent each year, releasing £1.6 billion by the end of the spending review period for investment in front-line services. The achievement of that target will be a significant challenge and I make it clear that everyone in the public sector must play their part in delivering the clearer and simpler government that will make those savings.

Fourthly, I have negotiated with the UK Treasury an unprecedented agreement—an agreement that my predecessors were unable to negotiate—which will give access to our remaining resources, which are currently held at the UK Treasury. That amounts to almost £900 million of end-year flexibility that has been lying in Treasury coffers in recent years. It is Scotland's money and this Government has secured it on Scotland's behalf.

Those four decisions will build on our on-going work to streamline and declutter the government and public sector of Scotland. They will also build on our new approach to government, which will involve reducing significantly the number of quangos, simplifying the scrutiny and inspection regime and introducing a new performance framework based on outcomes for the people.

A key part of this budget and this approach is the development of a new and constructive relationship with local government in Scotland. I am therefore delighted to tell Parliament that I today signed a concordat with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on proposals that we

both believe will deliver clear benefits for the people of Scotland. It is an agreement based on mutual respect and belief in our shared responsibility to the people of our country. Scotland's local authorities are key partners and that is why this Government will reduce ring fencing, enabling councils to allocate resources according to local priorities; allow local authorities to retain for the first time the full amount of their efficiency savings to redeploy to other pressures; recognise the democratic legitimacy of local government and devolve authority to it to make decisions that reflect local needs; and establish new outcome agreements with local government, aligned with Scotland's national priorities, which will be focused on what we want to achieve together for Scotland.

In return for this new approach to the governance of Scotland, local authorities will work together with the Scottish Government to implement a number of the Government's key manifesto commitments, which I will set out in my statement. In the Scottish Parliament information centre and at the back of the chamber I have placed copies of the concordat that I have reached with COSLA and which all Scottish local authority leaders will be invited to endorse. I stress to Parliament that the package on offer is conditional on the agreement of local authorities to all elements of the proposal.

The concordat between COSLA and the Scottish Government says that this

"represents the best outcome that can be achieved".

It represents for this Government an historic opportunity for national and local government to develop a cohesive agenda—an agenda of common purpose—that will improve the lives of the people of Scotland.

The Scottish budget that I am setting out today represents a crucial staging post on the journey toward a new approach to government. Unlike previous budgets in Scotland, this one will match our spending with the overarching purpose of government, which, for us, is to increase the level of sustainable economic growth. We will do that through each of our five strategic objectives. This is a new and joined-up approach to public spending in Scotland, which will focus all public spending on, and align it with, the achievement of greater Scottish success.

The framework helps national Government, local government, the Parliament and the public to understand our priorities and to hold us accountable for them. As a Government, we are ready to be held accountable for our actions by the people who matter—the people of Scotland.

In our election manifesto we set out our ambitions to build a greener Scotland and, in this

budget, we are delivering. Investment will be targeted to help us make much greater use of our substantial renewable energy resource, reduce the climate change emissions from transport, housing and business and improve Scotland's record on waste management and recycling.

We will protect our environment through record levels of investment in Scottish Water's infrastructure programme and we will provide additional funding for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency's efforts to reduce pollution. Further, we will invest record amounts in public transport, providing a total of £2.65 billion over the next three years for our railways, including Parliament's funding for the Edinburgh trams. We will also invest a total of £740 million over the period to support bus services and bus travel and we will increase by 40 per cent spending on direct support for sustainable and active travel. This, along with the work of local authorities, will reduce car dependency and increase the proportion of people using public transport, walking and cycling. That is investment that is good for our economy and the right choice for our environment.

We will do more. Over the next three years, we will invest a total of £154 million as we move towards becoming a zero-waste society, we will provide a total of £45 million for new woodlands, in order to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and we will create a new sustainable development and climate change fund worth a total of more than £30 million. We will treble support for community and household renewables generation to £13.5 million each year.

Further, because our climate and our environment are important to this Government's purpose and agenda, we will do still more. Our manifesto proposed a saltire prize to encourage innovation in renewables generation. I am proud to confirm today that we will deliver an annual prize fund of £2 million to reward on-going excellence in research. We will also deliver a £10 million horizon prize to attract the cream of the world's scientists, in order to put Scotland firmly on the international map. That will be the largest renewable energy innovation prize in the world, and it will be founded here in Scotland.

Our manifesto also set out our determination to make Scotland's communities safer and stronger and, in this budget, we are delivering. Our spending will help communities to thrive and become better places in which to live and work. We will equip our fire service to respond more effectively to local and national emergencies, with an extra £51 million over the next three years for a state-of-the-art communication system. We will invest an extra £107 million over the next three years in new prisons and an improved prison estate. We will develop a more cohesive approach



to tackling the problems of drug misuse, with increased investment in the health and justice portfolios delivering £94 million in total over three years. Further, we will support a more coherent policy on punishment and prisons, including a shift away from short custodial sentences to tougher community penalties, backed by additional funding of almost £8 million over three years.

Before the election, we spoke of growing and vibrant communities across Scotland, and those are what we will deliver. A total of £54 million over the next three years will be made available to increase the capacity of our police service to protect the communities of Scotland and deliver 1,000 more police officers on Scotland's streets. We will take targeted action to help regenerate the most disadvantaged communities with the support of £145 million each year to tackle poverty and deprivation and help more people overcome barriers and get back into work.

The Government has set out how we will work with local authorities, developers and builders to increase the rate of house building in Scotland to 35,000 a year by the middle of the next decade. To meet Scotland's housing challenge, I can announce today investment of £1.47 billion in new and better housing as the Government's contribution to achieving that target.

In our manifesto, we set out the ways in which we would make Scotland smarter. We will work with local government toward improving the learning experience for children and young people by improving the fabric of schools and nurseries and by developing and delivering the curriculum for excellence. An increase to 570 hours of nursery provision in 2010 will benefit 100,000 three and four-year-olds and put us well on the way to meeting our commitment of 50 per cent more nursery provision by 2011. We will work towards ensuring access to a teacher for every pre-school child.

In partnership with Scotland's local authorities, I am delighted to announce that we will move as quickly as is possible to reduce class sizes in primary 1 to primary 3 to a maximum of 18—just as we promised we would do.

We will do more: we will legislate to extend entitlement to nutritious free school meals to all primary and secondary school pupils of families who are in receipt of maximum child or working tax credit in 2009. Following the successful conclusion of this year's pilot, we will further extend free nutritious school meals to all P1 to P3 pupils in 2010. We will give more school pupils opportunities to experience vocational learning, and, in collaboration with other parties in the chamber, we hope to improve support for children, young people and families at risk, including

providing allowances for kinship carers of looked-after children.

A smarter Scotland is a key element in meeting our overarching purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth. In order to achieve that, we will once again do more. We will invest a total of £5.24 billion over three years in the further and higher education sectors in Scotland—a cash increase of almost 11 per cent. On capital, with the extra £100 million funding package that has already been announced this year, we will deliver 20 per cent more investment over this parliamentary session than previous plans would have done, maintaining the competitiveness and effectiveness of those sectors. That is record investment in Scotland's future from the SNP Government.

Before the election, we said that Scotland could be healthier, and in our manifesto we set out a series of proposals to deliver the faster local access to health care that people expect and deserve. In this budget, we are investing even more to achieve that healthier Scotland. We will target our spending to support people to lead healthier, longer lives that are economically productive. Our investment is focused on supporting better health across Scotland, reducing inequalities in healthy life expectancy and further improving our health service. That is why we will invest a total of more than £37 million over three years to strengthen primary health care in the most deprived areas of our country. It is why, as part of an overall package of more than £350 million over three years of new money in health improvement and better public health, we will invest a total of £85 million to reduce the harm done by misuse of alcohol, a total of £9 million for further action to reduce smoking and a total of almost £35 million on diet and physical activity for health and to help prevent obesity.

As the First Minister said a few moments ago, there will be additional funding for sport—extra money, increasing funding from £34 million to £43 million each year—over and above the £22 million over three years that is now earmarked to deliver a successful Commonwealth games in Scotland in 2014. Of course, there will be more significant investment, outwith this spending review period, in the Commonwealth games.

There will be extra investment over three years in prevention, screening and early detection of serious illnesses, and investment of £64 million for an immunisation programme to protect women against cervical cancer. We will provide £54 million to screen, for MRSA, people admitted to hospital and to help prevent the spread of infection. We will invest £41 million in a national screening programme to detect serious illnesses early.

There is more. Over the spending review period, there will be £30 million to ensure more flexible, out-of-hours access to primary care and £97 million to phase out prescription charges in order to ensure that sick people are not financially disadvantaged. Further, £20 million will be invested in better access to national health service dental services by introducing a prevention-based school service, starting in the most deprived areas, and by establishing a third dental school for Scotland in Aberdeen.

Central to our manifesto was a commitment to the people of Scotland for faster treatment on the NHS. That is why I am proud to confirm today that the Deputy First Minister has also identified £270 million—£90 million each year—to ensure that by the end of 2011 nobody will wait longer than 18 weeks from general practitioner referral to treatment for routine conditions. That is real progress under the SNP Government.

Before the election, we said that we would make Scotland wealthier and fairer, and we will deliver on that promise. The Government has made sure that we are targeting our spending effectively to increase our competitiveness; to make Scotland a more attractive place in which to live, work and invest; to generate more opportunities for work; and to ensure that the benefits of a wealthier Scotland are shared fairly throughout the nation. The enterprise networks, which were recently refocused by the Scottish Government, will receive £1.6 billion over the next three years to support the process of economic development throughout Scotland, supported by other measures to stimulate economic growth.

That is why we are increasing investment in Scotland's strategic transport networks and will provide more than £2.5 billion by 2010-11 to support the efficient movement of goods and people. It is why we are increasing support for ferry services from £74 million this year to £111 million by 2010-11, which, among other measures, will allow us to take forward our proposed Western Isles road equivalent tariff pilot. It is why we are providing record levels of funding for an enterprising third sector, with a £63 million development programme and a £30 million investment fund to encourage greater investment in assets, business development and the skills of those who work in the sector. It is also why we are supporting record levels of investment by Scottish Water to ensure that it delivers the levels of customer service and efficiency that we require in Scotland.

We entered the election in May offering a social democratic contract with the people of Scotland. Throughout my statement, I have highlighted the many ways in which we are honouring that contract, with higher levels of investment in front-

line public services. The second part of that contract was our commitment to lower and fairer taxation. Our small businesses are the life-blood of our local town centres and the beating heart of our communities. To provide the competitive advantage that those small companies require, I am delighted to announce to Parliament today that, from April next year, 150,000 small businesses throughout Scotland will have their business rates reduced and, in due course, for many, removed by the SNP Government. *[Applause.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**John Swinney:** I am also delighted to announce that, as part of the historic agreement that we have reached with local authorities, I am putting in place the resources to deliver a freeze in the council tax, just as we promised.

I have taken the right decisions to release resources for key public services, and I have constructed a package that will create new opportunities for the people of this country. The budget represents the start of a new era in Scotland's Government. Today, we take a major step toward aligning the whole public sector in support of the Government's purpose and objectives.

We are fulfilling our promises to deliver shorter waiting times for health care, smaller class sizes in the early years, reduced rail journey times between our major cities, better support for drug rehabilitation, an ambitious programme to tackle climate change, and the reduction and then removal of business rates for many of our small businesses, and we have put in place the resources to freeze the council tax, as we promised.

This is a budget to set Scotland on the route to growth. It heralds a new era of optimism, opportunity and delivery for all of Scotland. With investment in our public services matched by lower and fairer tax, I believe that it meets the aspirations of the people. I commend the budget to Parliament. *[Applause.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow about 50 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business.

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement and for the advance copy of it.

On hearing today's statement, there is a real sense of "At last!" On at least 60 occasions in the chamber, ministers have been asked about their policy intentions and have told us that we must wait for the strategic spending review. That is what

we have done. The implication was that, come that day, all would be revealed. It was not. In fairness to Mr Swinney, all budget statements produce more questions than answers.

For 18 months, the SNP told Scottish students that they would write off their debt immediately. This afternoon, it took Mr Swinney 18 seconds to ditch that pledge. Does he agree that he has let those students down?

On 5 September, the First Minister confirmed that class sizes in all primaries 1 to 3 would be 18 or fewer by 2011. Will Mr Swinney confirm that that pledge has been broken today?

Mr Swinney referred to the Government's economic strategy, launched yesterday, which rightly pointed to the importance of skills in building economic growth. How many new apprenticeships, how many more graduates, and how many more schools-based vocational courses will the budget fund to drive forward that economic growth?

**John Swinney:** If Iain Gray has had all those weeks and all those opportunities in which to prepare, I would have thought that we would have a little bit more than we got in that question.

I have come to Parliament on the issue of student debt, and I have completely answered the point about student debt. I have set out what the Government is doing. It is a bit rich for Labour members to lecture me about students, when—having said that they would never do so—they introduced tuition fees. I will take no lessons on that.

I thought that Iain Gray of all people would have welcomed the signing of a concordat between the Scottish Government and COSLA—it is an excellent document, which brings together national and local government to deliver a variety of strong policy commitments, including the reduction of class sizes to 18 for primaries 1, 2 and 3.

One of the strengths of this Administration's new way of governing is that it brings together all the areas of policy to support our economic growth agenda, which will deliver the increases and improvements in skills that are required. It is essential that the process of investment that the Government has set up will deliver on those ambitions and, most crucially when it comes to graduates, guarantee that there are decent economic opportunities for those young people to stay in Scotland, make their lives here, and make their contribution. The Government will be right behind them.

**Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):** I have three straightforward questions. First, the concordat with COSLA sets out spending plans for three years. Will the cabinet secretary confirm

whether the council tax freeze will last for three years? If so, what does that mean in relation to the local income tax?

Secondly, also on the concordat, there have been many discussions in the chamber over previous local government settlements. Councils always say they need more money and the Government always says that they have more than enough. No doubt the cabinet secretary is confident that he is supplying enough additional money in the spending plans to allow all local authorities to freeze the council tax without reducing their current level of spending. If he is confident of that, does he agree that an independent assessment of that, by an independent body, would be a useful contribution to public debate on the public finances?

Finally, on the three years in the spending review document, will the cabinet secretary set out how much it would cost if, in each year, we were to go above and beyond what the Cabinet Secretary for Justice outlined on Monday in relation to police numbers, and recruit 500 additional, new, extra police officers?

**John Swinney:** I have given COSLA a three-year financial agreement. Every local authority sets its council tax annually—each authority must make that decision. I accept that each authority has the right to make that decision annually. The arrangement that I have put in place provides adequate funding to freeze council tax for three financial years, but each council must take its own decision. I stress what I said in my statement: the package that I have offered and to which COSLA has agreed is conditional on a local authority's accepting all its elements.

On the local government settlement, Mr Brownlee might have heard COSLA's president say on the radio this morning:

"I would not do a deal with any government that left local government short".

We have reached a point of agreement at which local authorities are adequately funded.

Mr Brownlee's final point was about police numbers. The Government has set out its commitments on police numbers, which are contingent on putting 1,000 more police officers on Scotland's streets. That is what we said that we would do. If other parties or voices come together with alternative proposals to those that the Government has made in its balanced package, it is up to them to advance those proposals in the parliamentary process. As I have told the Finance Committee, I will seriously consider propositions from that committee on the budget. However, I remind Mr Brownlee and the whole Parliament that if any provisions in the Government's budget are to be changed to allocate more money to one

priority, that money must come from somewhere else.

**Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD):** John Swinney should have used his statement to admit what we all know: that the SNP's sums simply do not add up. That would have been difficult, but it would at least have been honest. Instead, he presents a budget of sham promises and shifty auditing—a budget of deception, spin and half-truths.

On public services, which people care about most, the budget deceives the most. On class sizes, police officers and nursery schools, the SNP has failed to fund its commitments. The SNP promised everything to everyone and now it cannot deliver.

On the environment, housing and free personal care, the SNP's promises are unravelling. Student debt remains the ultimate SNP sum that never added up. Our students have been betrayed and, according to the figures, our universities and colleges have been betrayed, too.

We know that they know. It is shocking that SNP members now do not care. They have spent the past three weeks telling journalists that they will be forgiven for all their broken promises if they can freeze the council tax.

**Members:** Question.

**The Presiding Officer:** A question please, Mr Stephen.

**Nicol Stephen:** Today, the SNP has not even delivered that freeze. So to ask—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Nicol Stephen:** How many councils throughout Scotland have given John Swinney a commitment to freeze council tax? Answer? How many councils throughout Scotland have given a commitment to deliver class sizes of 18? How many councils have promised to deliver 1,000 new police officers in Scotland?

**Members:** Each?

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. Questions to the minister, please.

**Nicol Stephen:** Look at the fiasco of Monday's announcement on the police. The SNP started the day with the promise of 1,000. By lunch time, the figure was down to 500. By the end of "Newsnight Scotland" it was possibly zero, although it was hard to say precisely because, said the bold MacAskill, officers are sometimes away on training courses and can be hard to count. The SNP was crystal clear in opposition, but now its promise unravels.

John Swinney, the question is: deal or no deal? Is there a deal with councils so that, by 2011, not a single young child will be in a class of more than

18, or has that been dropped? Is there a deal to deliver 1,000 extra police, or has that been dropped? Will John Swinney take responsibility if council tax rises by a single penny anywhere in Scotland in the next three years? Deal or no deal?

**John Swinney:** If anyone needs to go on a training course, it is Nicol Stephen. I am all for ensuring that we have more police officers on the streets of Scotland, but even I accept that having 1,000 new police officers in every council area would result in our streets getting a bit congested. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**John Swinney:** I think that Nicol Stephen's contribution left a little bit to be desired.

Over the summer, the Government has engaged in a process with local authorities that, based on their record in Government, Labour and the Liberal Democrats would not recognise. With local authorities, we have recognised that many issues such as nursery provision, class sizes and police numbers require local authorities and national Government to co-operate and work together. That is what I worked to create over the summer, so I am absolutely delighted that the concordat has been agreed and signed not just by the president of COSLA, but by its vice-presidents: Councillor Neil Fletcher, who is a Liberal Democrat; Councillor Alex MacDonald, who is an independent; Councillor Corrie McChord, who is from the Labour Party; and Councillor Rob Murray of the Scottish National Party. The concordat was signed on the Government's behalf by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning and myself.

The concordat is evidence of local authorities coming together to share objectives and purpose with the Government. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**John Swinney:** It is important that we ensure that the priorities that we have agreed under the concordat are taken forward to deliver the important investments in public services that all of us—in national Government and local government—want to see happen.

**The Presiding Officer:** We come to questions from back benchers. Understandably, an enormous number of members want to ask questions, so I will appreciate it if questions can be kept as brief as possible.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I remind the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth of the old election song, "Things Can Only Get Better." Let me say that they just have. Things have just got much better for Scotland.

Will the cabinet secretary join me in congratulating Pat Watters and his colleagues on

signing an agreement that freezes council tax while bringing about a 13 per cent increase in the capital spend of local authorities?

Finally, given that oil is now up to \$100 a barrel, will the Scottish Government go back to Westminster to demand the rest of our oil money so that we can spend even more on not only meeting but exceeding our promises to the Scottish people?

**John Swinney:** Obviously, I am pleased that we have reached an agreement with COSLA and look forward to its being agreed with local authorities in the days and weeks to come.

On the oil question, Mr Neil will have heard me point out how our situation contrasts with that of Norway, where a very different budget picture is emerging despite our complementary positions as regards oil. Of course I share Mr Neil's aspirations and look forward to their being realised in the period ahead.

**Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** Just a few moments ago, the cabinet secretary said that he recognises the democratic legitimacy of local government and will devolve authority to it to ensure that decisions reflect local needs. However, he then says, "If you don't do the deal, you don't get the money." There is no democratic accountability in that process, Mr Swinney—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Andy Kerr:** I can tell members how the cabinet secretary made the deal: he sold out on every one of his manifesto pledges—on class sizes, nursery access and all the rest—that were to be delivered through local government.

In its economy booklet—which was, I must say, a fairly slim volume—the SNP indicated that it would allocate £955 million to freeze council tax and introduce a local income tax. The budget that is before us today indicates an increase of around £480 million in real terms. First, is the SNP backtracking on when a local income tax will be introduced? Secondly, does that backtracking change the calculations that the SNP put before the people of Scotland about how much hard-working families would have to pay as a result of the local income tax?

**John Swinney:** A consultation document on the local income tax legislation will be issued before the turn of the year. Mr Kerr will have an opportunity to contribute to that consultation. As always, I look forward to reading what he has to say. I have been reading a lot of what Mr Kerr has been saying—I will come back to that point in a moment. We must consult and legislate in Parliament on the local income tax proposal. It is no secret that there is division in Parliament on the

subject. Our plans will be set out as Parliament takes decisions on the legislation, as is proper and correct.

I return to what Mr Kerr has been writing in the past few days. My Sunday afternoon was interrupted by this bold statement from Mr Kerr, in a press release from the Labour Party. He stated:

"It's now clear what is happening. The SNP are prepared to drop all their manifesto pledges".

Mr Kerr should listen to my statement, see the manifesto pledges delivered and compliment us on our achievements for Scotland.

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I thank in advance the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing for agreeing to appear at a joint meeting of the Health and Sport Committee, the Justice Committee and the Local Government and Communities Committee to answer detailed questions on their budget lines for alcohol and drugs issues, which cost the Scottish taxpayer several billion pounds per annum.

I welcome the additional investment for children at risk, better support for drugs rehabilitation and funding to tackle alcohol abuse. Will the cabinet secretary focus specifically on the 70,000 or so children who, as the Health and Sport Committee learned today, are living in households with substantial drug and alcohol problems? Without intervention, those children may well become fourth-generation addicts.

**John Swinney:** I thank the convener of the Health and Sport Committee for her question. I am pleased that the three cabinet secretaries will appear before the three committees to explain the Government's position on the drugs and alcohol issue. That is a great innovation from the committees, and I look forward to the discussion.

Christine Grahame heard the points that I made in my statement about children at risk and how we will take action, in concert with local authorities, to tackle the issue. An element of parliamentary activity is required in that respect. I hear what she says about the 70,000 children who are living in households with severe drug and alcohol issues. The Government is determined to tackle that enormous problem and to work as effectively as possible on it. I hope that the discussions that we will have in committee, which I am sure will be constructive, will help us to find more of the answers, as we all accept that that is difficult. The contribution and perspective that different shades of opinion provide will be welcome in that discussion.

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** The SNP Government said that it believed in building

safer communities and tackling antisocial behaviour. Where exactly will we find that commitment in the budget? Can the cabinet secretary point us to the evidence? Can he explain why the safer communities budget appears to have been halved from £71 million to £32 million?

The First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice have said that they believe in increasing the number of community wardens. Does the Government intend to do that, and where are the resources in the budget to meet the commitment?

Finally, what has happened to the community justice services budget—a key budget that covers the roll-out of drug treatment and testing orders, drugs courts and so on? The plan was for £103 million to be available in 2007-08. There may be smoke and mirrors here—I would like to know whether there are—but the budget for community justice services now appears to be £21 million. Where has the missing money gone? Can the cabinet secretary assure me that central Government still believes that it should have a direct policy bearing on the commitment to community sentencing, or is this just smoke and mirrors?

**John Swinney:** There is a fundamental point about the budget that members will have to take into account in relation to strategic decisions that the Government has taken on the ring fencing of budgets. The Government does not believe that we should have the degree of ring fencing of budgets that has existed historically. We believe that those resources are better deployed and controlled by local decision making in local authorities. That might sit uncomfortably with members who used to sit in this Parliament micromanaging the work of local authorities throughout the country, but it does not sit uncomfortably with this Government. We believe that local authorities should be able to break out of the constraints of ring fencing and to deploy resources as they think fit.

On Pauline McNeill's specific point regarding that particular budget line, I undertake to write to her as quickly as I can, as I cannot give her a definitive answer now. I will write to her in early course.

**Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP):** The First Minister and the cabinet secretary have set out the priority of tackling climate change and introducing a greener Scotland culture. Will the cabinet secretary elaborate on those aims that are represented in the budget and say which specific measures will be taken to promote sustainability in Scotland? Does he agree that a sustainable environment goes hand in hand with sustainable rural communities and, in so doing, does he agree that communities in the Western Isles, long weary of politicians merely talking vaguely about a road

equivalent tariff, will be delighted with today's announcement that such a tariff is on its way and will transform those islands' economies?

**John Swinney:** A number of measures to tackle climate change will be encompassed in the bill that we will introduce as a mechanism for applying statutory targets for reducing emissions. I have announced a tripling of the funding for community renewables and microregeneration. Many elements of the £1.6 billion rural development programme will structure many of the Government's interventions in the rural economy and environment, which will help the sustainability of the rural and island communities that Dr Allan represents.

In addition, I welcome the member's comments on the road equivalent tariff. That work is under way in the Government today.

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** Governments come and Governments go, but sometimes the same old mistakes are repeated. Will the minister give me a guarantee that he is not making the same mistake that at least two of his Liberal Democrat predecessors were keen on—mistaking public sector growth for broader economic growth? The two are very much not the same.

Will the minister give a specific undertaking that he will take every action possible to accelerate the delivery of business rates reduction for small businesses to ensure that no small businesses are left waiting another year to have their business rates cut?

**John Swinney:** Mr Johnstone was looking at the document so closely when he spoke about repeating mistakes that I thought we had made a typing mistake. That would depress those of us who have been looking at the document for a long time.

Mr Johnstone's point about public sector growth is very interesting. If we were to take the view that the public sector has nothing to contribute to economic growth, we would be missing a trick. Tremendous collaboration is going on at the Edinburgh royal infirmary at Little France between the University of Edinburgh, NHS Lothian and Scottish Enterprise in drawing together a variety of medical research activities that are resulting in formidable pharmaceuticals and health research in Scotland. [*Interruption.*] Mr Kerr mutters from the side, as always, but I am perfectly prepared to pay tribute to the previous Government for some of the steps that it took to draw together such work.

The First Minister and I discussed with the international advisory board of Scottish Enterprise a week past Thursday using the public sector, and particularly the health research that it carries out, for many more commercial applications. Let us not

take the view that public sector activity somehow does not contribute to economic growth, because that misses the point entirely.

Mr Johnstone's second point was about small businesses. I set out in the document that the small business scheme will be implemented fully by April 2010, but I have included the caveat that if there is any increase in resources—particularly through the medium of non-domestic rate income—that means I can accelerate the implementation of those business rates cuts, I will do so and report to Parliament in due course.

**Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary said in his statement that he was making a record investment in Scotland's future. However, what we have seen today is a budget of broken promises on, for example, student debt and class sizes. Will he confirm that the Government has today scrapped the national priorities action fund of £250 million, which ensured that funding was spent on, among other things, additional support for learning, discipline, new technology, support for parents and additional support staff?

Parents and teachers who look at this budget will see that there is a real-terms cut of around 5 per cent in the schools budget and of almost 20 per cent in the children and young people budget. Will the cabinet secretary confirm whether there is such a cut in the schools budget—yes or no? Is there a 20 per cent cut in the children and young people budget—yes or no?

**John Swinney:** I think that Rhona Brankin asked two questions that required a yes or no answer—and the answer to both is no.

In response to Pauline McNeill, I said that we have changed the way in which the budget document is developed. We have removed ring fencing from a variety of funds and passed those funds to local authorities for their consideration. With regard to the national priorities action fund and the schools fund that Rhona Brankin highlighted, my question to her is: who does she think was spending the money in the first place? It was being spent by local authorities. We are simply giving them opportunities to decide their own local priorities.

The other thing that amazes me about Rhona Brankin's question is that Iain Gray and others have been telling me for weeks that I would have much more money at my disposal than Donald Dewar ever had. Well, I have—and I have spent it wisely. I would have thought that Rhona Brankin would have given me a few plaudits for that.

**Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** In that case, I will begin by giving the cabinet secretary a few plaudits. I welcome his comments on fire and rescue services, drug misuse and tougher community sentences. However, there the plaudits end.

Having ditched your manifesto commitment to provide 1,000 more police officers for Scotland, will you please explain how you intend to deliver the watered-down plan for 500 recruits and 500 redeployed or retained officers that you have replaced it with? In response to questions at yesterday's meeting of the Justice Committee, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice admitted that this year there would be only 726 new recruits, which is the smallest number in any of the years since devolution. Moreover, although he said that the present scheme to retain retiring officers was not working and that a new scheme would be needed, he crucially could not give us any detail about that scheme or a timetable for when it would start having an impact on the numbers retiring. Moreover, the Scottish Police Federation has said that, given the significant work done by the previous Administration in this area, it thinks that the scope for further redeployment is minimal. Given all that, can you please explain how you intend to deliver on your watered-down commitment on police numbers?

**The Presiding Officer:** I cannot, but I am sure that the cabinet secretary can.

**John Swinney:** I am sure that you would relish the opportunity to be where I am today, Presiding Officer.

Let me say ever so delicately to Margaret Smith that, as far as police numbers are concerned, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice inherited the recruitment plan from the previous Government. I am rather surprised to find her savaging the previous Government's record in Parliament today.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice has explained very clearly how the Government intends to proceed on this issue. Through a combination of recruitment, retention and redeployment, we will put 1,000 more police officers on to the streets of Scotland. That is what we said we would do and I am sure that that will be welcomed in the communities of Scotland, which will benefit from the presence of those officers.

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** With the announcement of an agreement between local government and the national Government, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth has delivered an historic budget for Scotland. I am sure that parties on all sides will recognise the need for such a constructive relationship. In agreeing the concordat and funding arrangements for local government, will the cabinet secretary detail what specific areas the partnership approach will deliver on and how it will deliver across all departments?

**John Swinney:** Mr Adam will forgive me if I do not read out the whole concordat, which stretches

to quite a number of pages, but it sets out clearly the nature of the relationship that will exist between local and national Government and the priorities that will be focused on. There are clear mechanisms in the concordat for extensive dialogue between the leadership of COSLA and ministers. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning and I will see the COSLA presidential team on a bimonthly basis, and the Cabinet will meet the presidential team of COSLA annually to discuss issues of mutual interest.

The concordat sets out the various policy commitments that local authorities will work with Government to deliver under the arrangements that we have put in place. It also sets out the way in which we will develop outcome agreements, so that we focus on what is achieved and delivered, and what needs to be delivered, in specific areas for the benefit of local communities.

**Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab):** I would like to ask the cabinet secretary about his comments this afternoon on ring fencing, to which I paid great attention. I note that there does not seem to be an increase in the budget for services for mental health, despite the great resources that he claims to have at his disposal, and it would appear that the mental health specific grant is being abolished. In its manifesto, however, the SNP promised:

“An SNP government will support the development of mental health ... services ... in each community health partnership ... backed with ring-fenced funding”.

Perhaps he could explain that inconsistency of approach.

Further, in relation to waiting times, I would like to ask why he said in his statement this afternoon that

“nobody will wait longer than 18 weeks from general practitioner referral to treatment for routine conditions.”

Why does he use the word routine? Surely his promise applies to all patients.

**John Swinney:** The Government recognises that mental health issues can often be a factor in getting back into employment and I made the point that we are taking steps to ensure that more people are able to do that. We are serious about supporting individuals with mental health issues. Removing the ring fencing from the mental health specific grant means that a fund that is currently delivered through local authorities will be delivered in the same fashion, with control devolved to the localities. I cannot understand why the Labour Party seems to be so resistant to giving local people control and accountability.

Margaret Curran also asked about the health point that I made in my statement. That reference used the current terminology for waiting time

arrangements, which we inherited from the previous Government, so if she is surprised by that I suggest that she checks some of her old papers.

**Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP):** I commend the cabinet secretary for his statement and, in the context of the limited powers of this Parliament, for having done so much with such a poor settlement from Westminster. He mentioned the third sector, including the voluntary and community organisations that play a vital role in delivering services and caring for many of Scotland's vulnerable communities. Can he confirm that he has announced that hugely increased resources, including £93 million for investment and development, will go to that sector, and that the many organisations that have been concerned about their future, given the scaremongering predictions of some members of the Parliament that organisations would lose funding, can be assured that the third sector has the whole-hearted and tangible support of the Scottish Government?

**John Swinney:** The third sector is close to my heart. I greatly enjoyed the work that I undertook with the third sector over the summer, when I visited a number of fascinating projects. Indeed, I believe that I will be visiting a third-sector project in Keith Brown's constituency in the next few weeks, and I very much look forward to that.

There is an increase in the third-sector development budget, and a new Scottish investment fund is being created to make available, by 2010-11, £16 million of resources for investment in business development and skills in the social enterprise sector, which will be welcome. I want to make it clear that the Government has the strongest regard for the work undertaken by the third sector and that we will do everything in our power to work with third-sector organisations to realise their ambitions.

**Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** When the cabinet secretary referred to tough choices, did he mean choices about investment in flood prevention and coastal protection? How can he justify leaving 100,000 households at risk of flooding without the guarantee of investment? Will he confirm that investment in flood schemes will no longer be ring fenced but will, in every local authority in Scotland, compete against schools, roads and a host of other vital services? How much does he expect to be spent by local authorities on flooding in each of the next three years? Will it include the extra £20 million that should come from the Barnett formula? Will the sum take into account specific needs, which vary substantially across urban and rural Scotland?

**John Swinney:** The Government has transferred to local government the responsibility



for the flood prevention budget. That is part of ensuring that local authorities are better able to take forward the issues that they are concerned about in relation to flood risk and flood management. I point out that in the past there has not been a terribly good record in the deployment of funds on projects to meet the expenditure that has been allocated to deal with flooding. We want local authorities to be involved in taking the work forward and the budget provides the flexibility for them to do that.

**David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con):** The cabinet secretary said in his statement:

“The annual average real-terms increase for Scotland over the next three years is only 1.4 per cent.”

Can he confirm that that means, in plain English, that this Government has more money at its disposal to finance devolved services in Scotland than any previous Government in the history of our country, before or since the establishment of this Parliament? It is about time that this Government took responsibility for its decisions and actions, rather than always trying to blame somebody else.

**John Swinney:** I am very surprised at Mr McLetchie asking such a question—that does not seem like the Mr McLetchie that I listen to all the time.

I thought that I had answered that question in my statement. There is a real-terms increase in the budget: more money, above inflation, has come to the Scottish Government. I point out to Mr McLetchie that the spending profile is not an even 1.4 per cent in each of the three years; it is 0.5 per cent, 1.6 per cent and 2.3 per cent, so spending is weighted towards the latter part of the session.

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** It is more than ever before.

**John Swinney:** I have no idea, Presiding Officer, whether Mr Rumbles is trying to catch your eye to ask a question, but he is terribly exercised about the whole thing.

I am happy to confirm, for the benefit of Mr Rumbles, as he seems to want to hear it directly, that there is more money in the budget—above inflation—this year, next year and the year after. All I say is that it is a bit odd that, within the precious United Kingdom, which I know is so important to Mr McLetchie and Mr Rumbles, the increase is 0.5 per cent in the next financial year, when in independent Norway it is 10 times that rate.

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** Why is it that the figure for residential accommodation for children, which appears on page 127 of the cabinet secretary's budget document, shows no increase? There is

not an increase of 0.5 per cent, 1.4 per cent or 1.6 per cent—there is no increase over the budget period.

In Parliament on 13 September, Maureen Watt confirmed to my colleague Robert Brown that the education ministers had made a funding bid to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth to deliver in full the commitment to reduce class sizes in P1, P2 and P3. What is the figure that they bid for and will he publish it? How much has local government been told that that commitment will cost?

Finally, with reference to figures in annex B of the budget document, why is it that under this Government the proportion of the Scottish budget for education and lifelong learning will fall from 7.89 per cent this year to 7.56 per cent in 2011? Why has the proportion of the budget for education and lifelong learning been decreased?

**John Swinney:** On residential accommodation, an enormous number of budget pressures have to be wrestled with—

**Jeremy Purvis:** You froze it.

**John Swinney:** I am sure that the member's colleagues who were Government ministers know that there are an enormous number of competing demands. There are all sorts of issues to do with demography and the needs of individuals that have to be met, and the Government tries its best to achieve a balance.

In a variety of areas, we have tried to make the resources at our disposal go much further and achieve much more, by ensuring that we give the people who, in the Government's opinion, are very good at delivering services locally through local authorities the freedom to deliver those services. That is exactly the route that we are taking to reduce class sizes: to deliver that reduction in partnership with local authorities.

The member's point about the education and lifelong learning budget is explained by the fact that in a host of areas there will be transfers of resources out of particular budgets into the local authority block. That reflects differences and changes in the budget.

**The Presiding Officer:** We just might get through everyone who wants to ask a question if members would please stick to one question per person from now on.

**Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP):** During recent months the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has made clear her commitment to delivering better education and care in the early years of a child's life. The next generation is the most important place to start work to deliver the Scotland that we all want. That is not just about class sizes; it is about nursery provision—

**The Presiding Officer:** Question, please.

**Christina McKelvie:** What steps will the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth take to ensure that the SNP Government will provide the best nursery provision for all Scotland's children?

**John Swinney:** In my statement I said that the Government is well on the way to achieving our targeted increase in nursery provision. We will be close to achieving our target by 2010 and on current projections we will achieve the target during this parliamentary session.

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab):** Given that significant, sustained and real-terms increases in the culture budget during the past few years meant that the culture budget was rising inexorably towards 1 per cent of the Scottish budget, why has culture's percentage share fallen back significantly this year, as a result of a minimal cash increase? What does that mean for outstanding initiatives of the previous Administration, such as cultural co-ordinators in schools and the youth music initiative? What does it mean for expanding access to cultural opportunities and for the proper support of our great performing companies? If we also consider the axing last week of the local authority sections in the draft culture bill, what kind of commitment to culture is being shown by a Scottish Government that talks big but—again—fails to deliver?

**John Swinney:** Strong support has been given to the national companies in the budget settlement. The Government has already made more money available for the development of festivals in Edinburgh. A range of significant cultural contributions will be realised by investment in such activity.

If Mr Chisholm thinks that the spending of nearly £190 million on culture is somehow insignificant, it is clear why the previous Administration was frittering money through its fingers. This Government will not do that.

**Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I declare an interest in asking this question. I welcome the cabinet secretary's commitment in the "Scottish Budget Spending Review 2007" to

"continue our work on addressing violence against women and tackling domestic abuse."

Will Mr Swinney assure me that the voluntary sector will continue to flourish, given the changes that will take place?

**John Swinney:** Gil Paterson raises an important and sensitive aspect of the delivery of policy. Support to women who are in a violent situation at home or in any circumstances is important and the Government attaches a high priority to the issue. In my response to Keith

Brown I made clear the Government's support for voluntary organisations. As part of my general message to the public sector in Scotland, I say that there is every requirement to use more voluntary sector organisations to deliver important services, because in many respects the voluntary sector does that with tremendous skill and effectiveness, to the benefit of the people whom it serves.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I understand that the cabinet secretary enjoys dismissing the comments of Labour members. However, will he ignore the comments of Shelter Scotland, the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland, the Scottish Council for Single Homeless, Scottish Churches Housing Action, and local authority chief housing officers when they say that next year's budget for new affordable homes has been cut by 6 per cent in real terms and that the new Scottish Government's budget figures will fail spectacularly to provide the 30,000 affordable rented homes that Scotland needs by 2011? Are they wrong, cabinet secretary?

**John Swinney:** The pattern of expenditure over the next few years will see significant increases in the affordable housing budget in the portfolio. Over the period that lies ahead, formidable increases in the budget will come forward. The Government is already consulting on the work that we are taking forward to deliver a significant increase in housebuilding in Scotland. In my opinion, as a result of the decisions that the Deputy First Minister has taken, the social rented sector has the tremendous prospect of being able to achieve a greater contribution. I am sure that Parliament will give further consideration to the issues in due course.

**Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab):** Does the cabinet secretary recall that the SNP promised in its manifesto to introduce a first-time buyers grant of £2,000? Many housing professionals and commentators criticised the measure on the ground that it would fuel house price inflation. I was unable to study the minister's statement in detail and I found no evidence of provision for the £2,000 grant, so will he tell me whether the grant will be introduced in year one, year two, or year three? Or did a big boy do it and run away with that promise, too?

**John Swinney:** I am not sure whether Mr McMahon was in the chamber for the housing statement by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing. If he had been, he would have heard her clear explanation that the Government is consulting on the first-time buyers grant, along with a variety of issues in this policy area. Obviously, financial decisions will be taken in light of the consultation.

**Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD):** In his statement, the cabinet secretary made much of

strategic thinking. My question is on health care. I direct him to the strategic thinking that his Government colleagues have expressed in the chamber on the shift from acute care to care in the community. Although the announcement of £37 million for primary health care in the most deprived areas, and £350 million of new money for health improvement is much to be welcomed, they are to be welcomed, nevertheless, in the context of a budget with a £10 billion heading. In the document, I am at a loss to find any significant commitment to that essential strategic shift in health care. I can find nothing that backs up the strategic thinking shift that I think the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, who is sitting next to him, appeared to make.

**John Swinney:** I recognise the significance of the point. The budget contains specific measures under which we have allocated resources to support the shift to primary care. I am sure that Mr Finnie will acknowledge that many of the costs in the existing health care provision are very much tied up in staff costs. Obviously, if we are to change the way in which services are delivered, we will do that by changing the way in which staff deliver those services.

I hope that Mr Finnie has not somehow taken from my budget statement that there is inflexibility in changing the way in which the health service is delivered. I have seen a number of examples of how a change in staff responsibility and activity in the health service can lead to a fundamentally different service—one that involves earlier intervention before problems become acute. That can be done not by changing big swathes of the budget, but by asking different people to do different things. I will leave that thought with him in respect of our ideas and priorities for the budget for health.

**The Presiding Officer:** I can take a brief final question from Richard Baker.

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Will the cabinet secretary tell the chamber where in the budget the funding can be found to match, brick for brick, Labour's policy on building new schools? On universities, I understand that the revenue increase is just 2.9 per cent over the next two years, which is well below what was asked for. Will he confirm that that is the case, or is the increase anywhere nearer to the 18 per cent additional increase that was made in the last spending review?

**John Swinney:** Richard Baker must compare apples with apples. The funding settlement that we have for the next three years is of a fundamentally different character and profile from the settlement for the previous four years. That is the reality of a much tighter financial envelope.

We have made clear in the presentation of the budget how much importance we attach to the university sector's role in the Government's wider enterprise and economic agenda. I assure him that the announcement that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning made a few weeks ago of an extra £100 million investment in the university and college estate was warmly welcomed by the university and further education sectors and contributes to dealing with the fact that we have fewer resources at our disposal in this spending review.

On the school building programme, if Mr Baker looks closely, he will see that there has been a pretty generous allocation for local government expenditure on school buildings, which I am sure that he will welcome enthusiastically.

## Strategic Spending Review

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan):** The next item of business is a debate on the strategic spending review. I call Iain Gray.

16:06

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

"I thank the minister for his statement and for providing an advance copy of it. I welcome aspects of it, as do we all, but I do so with the caveat that the devil is in the detail ... Members of all parties could make more considered and useful speeches if the debate were held some days after the statement was made. The arrangement must be changed. It is nonsense to have so little time".

That is how Mr Morgan opened the debate for the Scottish National Party on the previous spending review in 2004. Later, a certain Mr Lochhead agreed, saying:

"We have had barely a few minutes to digest the statement. I hope that we can come back to the topic in the very near future to have a proper debate on it."—[*Official Report*, 29 September 2004; c 10675, 10685.]

It is a great pity that, now that Mr Lochhead is a minister, he and his colleagues are unwilling to produce the budget and defend it in detail as we asked them to do last week. The question remains: what do they have to hide? Moreover, it is a great pity that they appear to have removed from the budget documents the real-terms spending tables that their predecessor Administrations normally included. Perhaps that was to hide what appear to be real-terms cuts in the energy budget, the enterprise budget and the tourism budget, which are hardly the mark of a Government with economic growth at its heart. Perhaps it was to hide the spending cuts that are emerging even as we speak this afternoon: the 6 per cent cut in next year's budget for affordable housing—which has been slammed not by us but by housing organisations and is hardly the sign of a Government that is prioritising housing need—or the real-terms cut in culture spending from a Government that often talks about its commitment to Scottish culture.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I am a bit puzzled: Mr Gray talks about a 6 per cent cut in the housing budget, but page 106 of "Scottish Budget Spending Review 2007" says that housing expenditure in 2008-09 will go up from £373 million to £446.7 million in a year, which I estimate to be an increase of about 18 per cent.

**Iain Gray:** My point was that, if we had more time, we could argue about the calculations. However, that is not my calculation but the calculation and considered view of Shelter Scotland, the Chartered Institute of Housing in

Scotland, the Scottish Council for Single Homeless, Scottish Churches Housing Action and the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers.

More time would have been good because this budget is of enormous importance. It shapes the investment of almost £90 billion over the next three years. We should dwell on that figure for a moment because, this afternoon, we have heard yet again the broken record of complaint that, somehow, nationalist ministers have been short changed, robbed and mugged in the comprehensive spending review. Let us look at the facts.

In March, the SNP said that it expected to get £1.8 billion extra over the three years of the review period. Even by its own arithmetic, which I do not accept, the SNP received more than 99 per cent of that. On top of that, as Mr Swinney boasted today, it has access to £900 million more in end-year flexibility funding. Therefore, the SNP has almost exactly what it expected it would have to spend.

In fact, a week before the settlement, the nationalist spin doctors fanned out to tell the media that Scotland would get only a 1 per cent real-terms increase. Even by the SNP's own dubious arithmetic, it got a 1.4 per cent increase, so it seems that in the end the SNP got more than it expected. Therefore, that single transferable excuse for every failing will not do. The Government got almost exactly the budget that it expected when it made its promises to the voters. A senator once said:

"A billion here, a billion there, and soon you're talking about real money."

Well, £30 billion a year is real money and we have a real increase year on year, so those who voted for the SNP will believe that they have every right to expect it to deliver what it said it would.

The budget is one of broken promises. The week began with the tortuous confession from the Cabinet Secretary for Justice that the true number of new police officers was not 1,000 but 500. In fact, the budget will recruit fewer additional police officers than either of the previous two Administrations recruited. Then, more quietly, in the erudite columns of *The Times Educational Supplement*, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning admitted that the First Minister's promise to have class sizes of 18 in primaries 1, 2 and 3 by 2011 also meant something different. Today, we hear that the promise might be delivered some time, somewhere, but that was not the pledge that the First Minister gave in the Parliament—to paraphrase Gladstone, a promise delayed is a promise denied.

We hear, too, that the promise to Scotland's students to write off their loans has been ditched. We always knew that that promise could not be afforded and, I suspect, the SNP always knew that, too. This morning, we had the sight of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, hours before he stood up in the Parliament, going to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities as a supplicant, desperate for a signature on a deal and gambling everything on being able to come here today with a piece of paper—the Neville Chamberlain of Scottish politics—claiming a council tax freeze. However, as he admitted, he cannot claim that, because the 32 councils will make up their own minds.

The point is that Mr Swinney does not want councils simply to deliver his council tax freeze; he wants them to deliver all his other promises, too. He is trying to pass over to local authorities responsibility for the promises on class sizes, school buildings, free school meals, increased nursery provision, carers and respite care. The First Minister visited my constituency today to open a new primary school. He was welcome and he was right to come, because it is an excellent new school that was funded and built by a Labour council under a Labour-led Executive. The Government promised to match our school building and refurbishment programme brick for brick, but Mr Swinney cannot make that promise today. He has outsourced the promise to local authorities. Our programme was for 250 schools. Will he build 250 schools? He simply cannot say.

The Government should be clear: we will hold it accountable for its promises. It will not be able to hide behind local councils when promises are broken, any more than it will be allowed to hide behind the settlement. We will work hard to examine constructively how the budget can provide more skills opportunities for our young people as well as support for respite care and for renewing our town centres. We will work with others in the Parliament to examine constructively how we do that. However, we will hold the Government to account. We once called the SNP manifesto the longest betting slip in history. Those who placed their bet on the promises on police officers, class sizes, student grants or first-time buyer grants have today seen those promises fall at the first hurdle while others disappear into the mist or into the distance. The race has some way to go yet.

16:13

**Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):**

We are only seven minutes into the debate, but I congratulate Iain Gray on what was probably the best soundbite that we are likely to hear all afternoon, when he talked about the Neville

Chamberlain of Scottish politics. I wonder what it is about representatives of East Lothian comparing SNP members with historical figures—it seems to be a bit of a habit these days.

Last week, I set out the process by which the Conservatives would scrutinise the budget. As I said last week, today has been the beginning, not the end of the process. We have set out seven key tests that we will use to assess the budget, in addition to an overall assessment. I repeat what I said last week: the Conservatives will not take a decision on whether to support or oppose the budget until we have concluded our scrutiny, the committees have reported and the Government has responded to recommendations. We will not take a decision until then and we will not announce a decision until then. We intend to make maximum use of the parliamentary process to scrutinise the budget and to consider where it can be improved.

We will seek to use the budget process specifically to establish where the resources are available to increase police recruitment beyond what the Cabinet Secretary for Justice announced on Monday. We will then challenge all parties in the Parliament—Government and Opposition—to support an increase in police recruitment for this year and future years. Police numbers is one issue; there might well be more.

I turn to the council tax freeze. After a decade of excessive council tax rises, taxpayers throughout Scotland will welcome a council tax freeze, if it can be delivered. Each year we have the ritual argument between central Government and local government. Councils say that their funding is inadequate and project terrifying cuts in services or extreme council tax rises and the Government boasts that the funding level is adequate. We need to take the political heat out of the process. The political colour of councils and the Government only adds to the complexity. It is time to move on; it is time for an independent assessment of the adequacy of this and every other local authority settlement to be built into the process. The appropriate vehicle for that might be the Accounts Commission. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth seemed to suggest that Pat Watters had attained the status of an independent arbiter, but I suspect that that is not quite how he should be viewed.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** The point that I made in response to Derek Brownlee's question earlier was that I hoped that the approach that I took over the summer would ensure that we would avoid going through the ritual ping-pong arguments, which we used to have, for the period ahead.

**Derek Brownlee:** I wish that I could be confident that in not one of the 32 local authorities in Scotland will we hear politicians talking about cuts in services or council tax increases. However, I simply do not think that it is realistic to expect that, concordat or no concordat.

The key point is that the political debate would be improved, scrutiny enhanced and accountability of politicians here and locally better served if we—and voters—had an independent assessment of the level of local authority funding that is required to maintain service levels at any given rate of council tax increase.

Earlier, David McLetchie touched on the overall funding settlement delivered by Westminster. As he said, it is not correct to describe this year's settlement as the worst since devolution. It is the lowest increase since devolution and, in that sense, it is undoubtedly a tight settlement, but in real terms it is the most generous since devolution. Labour has made much of the settlement being twice as generous as the budget received in the first year of devolution. That is correct in cash terms, but it makes no mention of the impact of inflation or the significant spending commitments that previous Executives have implemented and from which it is difficult, if not impossible, for any Government of any political persuasion to move on.

Beyond the issue of the numbers in the settlement, there is an issue about the process. The comprehensive spending review that we had this year had already been delayed by over a year. In relation to technical aspects of the settlement such as baseline or population figures, we must ask whether it is acceptable that the UK Government does not provide to the Scottish Government the final figures on the day of the pre-budget report. I do not think that that is a sound basis for a budget process, whoever is in government, north or south of the border. I note in passing the comment of the centre for public policy for regions that initially neither the Treasury nor the Scotland Office was able to supply the full details of how and why the baseline had been revised. That is simply not a suitable basis on which to run the devolved settlement.

Today marks the beginning of Parliament's scrutiny of the budget. It is the first time that we have embarked on such a process under a minority Government. In the weeks and months ahead, we will take the time to challenge and scrutinise what the budget contains. When we have reached the end of our scrutiny process—

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** You will vote for the budget.

**Derek Brownlee:** When we have reached the end of that process and we know what

recommendations committees have made and what, if anything, the Government intends to do in response, then, and only then, will we take a decision on how we will vote.

I read in one of the Sunday papers that the Liberal Democrats were playing hardball on the budget. They have already decided that they are not voting for the budget. That is not playing hardball; it is running off the pitch in tears before the game has even begun.

The process that the Conservative party has outlined is the most transparent and objective scrutiny process that has ever been undertaken by an Opposition party in Scotland. It might not make for lurid headlines or fit the wilder fantasies of other parties that make assumptions about the outcome of that scrutiny, but it is the right approach and the one that should be taken by a responsible Opposition.

16:20

**Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** On 9 February 2006, Derek Brownlee said:

"I admit that we consider the budget for a significant time already, but extending that time would be all to the good. Perhaps the nationalists will agree with me."—[*Official Report*, 9 February 2006; c 23196.]

I was pleased to hear Iain Gray paraphrase Gladstone and refer to Neville Chamberlain. Perhaps I can bring Mr Swinney right back up to Gordon Brown. When Mr Swinney was still a member of the Westminster Parliament, he would have observed a number of Gordon Brown's budgets. In recent days, many of us have admired the amount that Mr Swinney and his Government have learned from the new Labour play book of Peter Mandelson and Alastair Campbell. We can only admire the spin that they have got across in recent days because this is truly a budget of shady figures, policies dumped and commitments ignored and whose sums do not add up.

The SNP was oh-so clear in May: "Vote for us on police numbers and class sizes." Occasionally, the SNP was clear on the issue of independence. We are going to be free by 2017, we now understand. That does not rhyme as well as the ringing call to arms that Alex Neil used, which was that we would be free by '93. However, after today, the forecast will not prove to be correct, as today the SNP has confirmed that promises mean nothing, commitments can be ditched and its manifesto was not worth the paper that it was printed on.

We now enter a period of new relations with local government—or do we? This, again, takes us back to the future. Just as the enterprise network has gone back to being the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands

Development Board, so it is with local government. Instead of crude and universal capping under the Tories, we now have local decisions taken by ministerial directive. He who holds the purse strings will determine what services are delivered in every part of Scotland.

The SNP might think that it is tremendously clever and some in local government might think that all is rosy and that they have more decisions to take, but if there is no money, local services will be cut. That will not be the fault of local government—the blame will lie completely with Alex Salmond and his Government.

Not one local authority sets its council tax today. I would urge every local authority to read the fine print. Exactly what deal is available from John Swinney? I urge the Government to publish the figures. The concordat talks about freezing council tax rates in each local authority at 2007-08 levels. Note that it says, “in each local authority”. We heard today from the minister that the rates would be determined in due course, but that commitment in the concordat is already determined.

We now have government by ministerial diktat and a centralisation of decision making, which is not what John Swinney talked about today.

We also note that, after weeks of the SNP saying that it would deliver on its manifesto, there will not be delivery on police numbers, class sizes or—as John Swinney said in complete honesty today—the promises that were made to students. What really annoys me is the SNP’s Orwellian doublespeak. It keeps telling half truths on police and class sizes and it appears to believe what it says. That is quite a concerning sign in any Government at such an early stage.

What has happened to the recommendations of the Howat report, which was published with such fanfare by the Government earlier in the summer? Are those recommendations still in play? We should be told.

What of the United Kingdom settlement? What percentage of gross domestic product should be spent on the public sector? If it is less in this spending review, which is Jim Mather’s position, why does the SNP argue that it needs more UK Government spending? That is a typical nationalist contradiction. The SNP says one thing to a business audience—“we want less spent on public services”—but says the opposite to the voluntary sector, the unions and public services.

Earlier, John Swinney said that he had more money, in real terms, than any previous Scottish Government had had. Presumably, then, we will hear no more of that particular argument.

The other side to the settlement is that the SNP’s commitments are now up for negotiation. In a letter to Mr Swinney, COSLA describes a

“new category of manifesto commitments”.

There is nothing that is not up for renegotiation now that the SNP is in office.

Let us turn to a number of important figures. As my colleague Jeremy Purvis highlighted earlier, the proportion of the budget for education and lifelong learning will fall from 7.89 to 7.5 per cent. The SNP in government is reducing the priority of education and lifelong learning—that is extraordinary. The further and higher education sectors asked for £168 million in this spending review—on the basis of the settlement, they have less than £40 million. The SNP said that it would spend £100 million on students, and it will now spend only £30 million. That has nothing to do with helping students and everything to do with proving that its sums do not add up.

Even on transport, the message is clear. The SNP is cutting public transport investment and increasing the amount that is spent on roads. The assessment is there—road spending is up, public transport spending is down; there is more money for motorways and less money for railways. It is no wonder that, with the help of Alex Salmond’s little helpers, Annabel Goldie and Patrick Harvie, the Government dodged parliamentary scrutiny last week. Will the Tories back the budget, which reneges on the promise of 1,000 more police officers? Will the Greens back the budget that builds and pays for the M74?

We will scrutinise the budget, but today’s statement has confirmed that the SNP’s sums do not add up. It is a budget of shady figures, policies that have been dumped and commitments that have been ignored. The people of Scotland will see the reality of the budget, and they will pass a damning verdict.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to the open debate—I ask for speeches of four minutes only. I call Brian Adam, to be followed by David Whitton.

16:26

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** Today is an historic day, not just because it is the day of the first SNP budget, but because of how the budget delivers for Scotland—and it does. It delivers a wealthier, fairer Scotland; a healthier Scotland; a smarter Scotland; a safer and stronger Scotland; and a greener Scotland. I find it difficult to understand why the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, having spent eight years in government and with all the skills that they must have developed in that time, have not offered any alternatives. They know that this is a zero-sum budget, they are complaining that the SNP is doing this, that and the other thing, but they are not telling us what they might do. [*Interruption.*]

Is Iain Gray going to tell us what he would do? I am happy to hear it.

**Iain Gray:** I think you will find that if you had been listening you would have heard me indicate the areas in which we intend to do that, but as we discussed at some length last week, the proper place for that to happen is the committee—

**Members:** We cannot hear.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask Mr Gray to speak to the microphone.

**Brian Adam:** I am delighted to hear that you will make a positive contribution, because you are holding us to account—that is, quite rightly, your current role in life. I hope that you can support the budget or offer some realistic alternatives. Having taken £500 million out of the budget, it is now your job to tell us where you would make the cuts.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members to speak through the chair.

**Brian Adam:** I am delighted that Mr Swinney, on behalf of the Government, will make the national health service—in the words of Aneurin Bevan—free at the point of use. There is £97 million to phase out prescription charges, which I am delighted to say I am sure many members in the Labour group will find it helpful to vote for. In addition, we are getting a significant further £350 million for health improvements right across the board, particularly to tackle the scourge of alcohol abuse and the difficulties we have with that.

I am delighted that we are being serious about the issue and devoting another £85 million to address not just the binge culture but the long-term excess drinking that has a major impact on our health services.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** Is Mr Adam aware of whether the legal responsibility and legally enforceable contract between patient and health board is still part of the budget, and whether that has been costed?

**Brian Adam:** I am not responsible for the Government's decision, but I understand that a consultation is taking place on the matter. If Mrs MacDonald has views on that, I am sure that the Government will be delighted to hear them.

I welcome the £270 million for the waiting times initiative, which will deliver a turnaround time of less than 18 weeks. In addition, folk who find it difficult to access primary care in normal working hours will welcome the additional £30 million to increase flexibility in that area. In relation to the significant changes in screening for cervical cancer, the detection of serious diseases at an early stage, and particularly screening for MRSA before hospital admission, the £159 million in the next three years is extremely welcome.

16:31

**David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab):** Picture the scene. In Inverness in 1992, election fever was in the air and there was an “I was there” moment. Alex Neil, who is now known as the minister for “Newsnight Scotland”, “Politics Now” and any other programme the SNP whips can get him on, declared to the mass media, “We'll be free in '93.” To be fair to the then newly elected leader of the SNP, one Alex Salmond, he did look a little bit embarrassed.

Yesterday, however, Mr Salmond had a mad moment of his own. He declared, “I have a dream. It's 17”—2017, when he now expects Scotland to become independent. The economic strategy that he and his Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, Mr Swinney, had just announced is full of bold targets to increase Scotland's gross domestic product growth to the UK level by 2011 and to match the economic growth of small independent European states within a decade—by which time, Mr Salmond believes, Scotland will be one of those small independent European states.

That might be Mr Salmond's dream and the dream of others in the SNP, but it is not shared by more than 70 per cent of the electorate who are represented in the Parliament. Their preferred choice is devolution and a devolved Parliament that uses the levers of power that it currently enjoys to improve the lives of the people of Scotland.

Today, Mr Swinney had his chance to set out his first budget. To be fair, he got his excuses in early—that London did not give us enough money following the comprehensive spending review and that it was the worst settlement since devolution. Yet, as Mr Brownlee pointed out, Mr Swinney has almost twice as much to spend as the first Scottish Executive had in 1999. He has access to £30 billion, but he is still not satisfied. Indeed, Alex Neil, adopting another new role as the Oliver of the Scottish Parliament, now says, “Please, sir, I want more.”

To be fair to Mr Swinney, he has been dropped in it by his boss. During the election campaign, the First Minister told a conference that the SNP would provide an additional 1,000 police officers. His mistake was to say that to the Scottish Police Federation conference, which was taking notes. We now know that there are to be only 500 additional police officers, that there are to be only 150 of them this year, and that the Scottish Police College at Tulliallan has its lowest intake for seven years. That is another broken promise from Alex Salmond and the SNP. Let us hear no rubbish from the SNP about inheriting plans. It has had plenty of time to begin implementing its own plans.



Next, the First Minister declared that the manifesto pledge to cut class sizes to 18 in primary 1 to primary 3 would be met by the end of the current session of Parliament. That surprised even his own Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, who told him that it could not be done. So did Scotland's local authorities, some of which are even controlled by the SNP. That is yet another broken promise by Alex Salmond and the SNP.

For Labour, the policy to improve the skills of the Scottish workforce is a crucial test of the SNP Administration. We want more youngsters to follow the successful modern apprenticeship programme. There were 34,000 youngsters on the scheme by the end of the previous session of Parliament. However, when the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning appeared before the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee last week, she said that she has not set a target to increase the number. Today, when the SNP was asked specifically about money to support the creation of more modern apprenticeships to persuade more of our youngsters to take degree courses in the sciences such as chemistry, physics and maths, there was no answer, only silence.

As we have heard, there are also reductions in the budgets for energy, enterprise and tourism. To achieve the growth levels that Mr Swinney wants, we need a better educated and more skilful workforce, and more investment in that area. This budget does nothing to support those growth targets. While Mr Salmond daydreams about independence, Scotland's young people dream of getting a well-paid job. They want to know that the devolved Government is using its current powers to create the type of training places that will do that. They have been badly let down.

16:35

**Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP):** I must say how much I enjoyed John Swinney's statement, not just for what he said but for the sheer joy and enthusiasm with which he delivered it. It is fantastic to watch the cabinet secretary enjoying his job as much as he does.

I was particularly interested to hear the good news about the amounts of money that will go into railways and buses, and the important statements about public transport. I also welcome the serious commitment in respect of new housing supply for Scotland: we all accept that that is a serious issue in our constituencies. I put in a plug for the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee's upcoming rural housing inquiry, which may well ask how much of the money will go to rural housing.

I will concentrate on the cabinet secretary's welcome announcement on business rates, which

he says will be abolished in this session. The reduction will start in the next financial year. I cannot begin to express how important that move is for encouraging small business growth and small business start-up. It is particularly important for the high streets of Scotland's towns and villages. Every penny that is not handed over in rates is another penny available to be spent locally, where it belongs. That is important for the huge swathes of Scotland outside the main urban centres. While no one can deny that the cities are a huge economic driver, there is a desperate need to bolster small businesses outwith the cities. Rural Scotland needs jobs and businesses, and the tools to deliver them. There is no lack of ideas, but quite small amounts of money can make or break those businesses, so the importance of that policy should not be underestimated.

While I am on the issue of ideas, I was glad to see in the Government economic strategy a section on innovation. I was speaking at the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts conference in my constituency yesterday. While we are always in danger of embarking on what I call the tea towel history of Scotland, we know that we have a tremendous history of innovation. I enter the small caveat that many of the well-known names did not actually achieve their innovations in Scotland, although they were born here.

I recognise that innovation is not just about things, but about ideas and innovative delivery. The challenge is not innovation for innovation's sake. That results in a kind of permanent revolution, such as that which occurred over the past eight years—the pilots that never came in to land and the constant reinvention of ideas that never actually get rolled out. What we heard today was ambition, self-confidence and passion, which are essential to create economic growth for Scotland.

Members have received from the Policy Institute a small leaflet about the Faroe Islands. It talks about how culture, self-confidence and growth can engender economic success. That should say it all for Scotland. This Government is nothing if not ambitious. It is self-confident and it has passion. That is backed up by the two prizes for innovation and renewables that were discussed this afternoon. Innovation will make an enormous difference to the future of Scotland.

The commitment to increase the level of research and development activity, and knowledge transfer, is as important as the clear commitment that the enterprise network will focus on investment and innovation. I hope that rural Scotland will reap the benefit of what we have heard this afternoon. Underpinning all of that, however, is the recognition that some of the

biggest rewards will be achievable only when we in Scotland can make all our decisions here. Business rates are at one level of the argument. We can and we are doing something about that. The other end of the argument is corporation tax. We need to be able to change that too, and that will not come without independence.

16:39

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** Given the SNP's much-trumpeted manifesto commitment to achieve higher emissions reductions, and given the importance of tackling climate change—on which I am sure we all agree—it is disappointing that the budget contains so few measures to reduce Scotland's carbon footprint.

The cabinet secretary made some of the right noises—a greener Scotland was the first of the strategic initiatives in his statement and he said that he wants to reduce emissions over the period to 2011—but he gave us no short-term targets, after his party abandoned the year-by-year targets that were set out in its manifesto. Rather than commit himself to reductions of more than 3 per cent per annum, which all commentators and experts say are needed in the next three years to make an impact on climate change, he simply restated long-term targets.

There are new initiatives: the cabinet secretary has introduced a climate change fund—although he has abandoned the sustainable development fund and the environmental justice fund. In effect, the money is just the same. The essence of the message from the minister is that we should wait for the climate change bill. That stance is profoundly unacceptable in comparison with the cross-departmental initiative that is needed now to make a go of tackling climate change.

The tripling of funding for community microgeneration is welcome, but the impact of that and some other measures is dwarfed by the additional tonnes of carbon emissions that will follow the removal of tolls on the Forth road bridge and the abandonment of the Edinburgh airport rail link.

The information that the cabinet secretary has provided on waste and flooding gives particular cause for concern. The consequentials from the substantial increases for flooding measures south of the border were not flagged up in the statement. The amount for flood prevention and coastal protection, which was £43.6 million last year, has fallen to £1.7 million. I understand that money for flood measures will go to local authorities, but passing that burden to local authorities means that money for flood measures will be set against a range of priorities, such as home care, education

and roads, on which local government will have to decide. How will the money be distributed among authorities? Will it be done on the basis of need, or on another basis?

It is exactly the same with waste management: spending this year is £154 million if we include the strategic waste fund, whereas the amount in the cabinet secretary's budget that is set against waste initiatives is £41.1 million. If, as he suggests, local authorities are being made responsible for waste management, we must acknowledge that they are in different positions on recycling. Much of the money has been spent on a grant basis, so some authorities are much further back. If the cabinet secretary distributes the money on the basis of the grant-aided expenditure formula, some local authorities will be substantially disadvantaged in comparison with others. I do not think that the minister has thought any of that through.

For people who think that green issues and climate change are really important, the budget is long on rhetoric but low on substance. What did the Green representatives achieve in exchange for the bargain that they made with the SNP to provide the votes that made Alex Salmond First Minister? If they turn to page 89 of the budget document, they will see that spending on public transport projects is to halve. On page 90, they will see significant increases in road expenditure. Is that what they signed up for? That is what they are being delivered.

16:44

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** So, Parliament has fewer than 90 minutes to debate the budget statement and speeches are limited to just four minutes. That makes a mockery of the term "debate", as we do not have time to take interventions, which are the very stuff of the cut and thrust of good parliamentary debating.

Of course, we do not have time to debate the budget properly thanks to the Conservatives, who voted with the SNP last Thursday to deny Parliament the opportunity to have five debates on the budget from now until Christmas, in addition to limited scrutiny—[*Interruption.*] Members shout from the back because they do not like the truth—I am speaking the simple truth.

**Roseanna Cunningham:** The member is wasting time.

**Mike Rumbles:** We do not have time.

The Conservatives' position this year is very different from what Derek Brownlee said in the budget debate last year, as Tavish Scott mentioned. I remind members—it bears repeating—that Derek Brownlee said:

"Perhaps ministers ... could spend more time being scrutinised as part of the process ... extending that time would be all to the good. Perhaps the nationalists will agree with me."—[*Official Report*, 9 February 2006; c 23196.]

Of course, that was when the Conservatives were in opposition. Now, they have backroom deals with the SNP.

**Derek Brownlee** *rose*—

**Mike Rumbles:** Sit down.

For the past eight years, Annabel Goldie's Conservatives have constantly criticised coalition parties for so-called backroom deals and grubby stitch-ups. That was when the coalition had a partnership agreement, which was detailed and fully published so that everyone could see it. How strange it is that the Tories are now engaged in backroom deals and grubby stitch-ups with the SNP.

**Derek Brownlee** *rose*—

**Mike Rumbles:** Sit down.

It is strange because none of those deals and arrangements is in the public domain—

**John Swinney:** That is outrageous behaviour.

**Mike Rumbles:** I had already asked Derek Brownlee to sit down, so I asked him again.

The point is that the Tories do not publish those agreements and they do not want their supporters across the country to be aware of them.

I do not mind political parties coming together to help each other out—that is the very stuff of party politics—but we should all be aware of what is going on. We should have openness and transparency—

**Margo MacDonald:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I think that I am correct in saying that our standing orders require speeches to be relevant to the motion or issue being discussed. I suggest that taking up more than two minutes criticising the process and the conduct of other parties is not relevant.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** If Mr Rumbles had been out of order I would have ruled him so.

**Mike Rumbles:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I hope that I will be given additional time for that point of order.

We should have openness and transparency. Annabel Goldie's Conservatives have become the masters of double-dealing and backroom arrangements. Why else have they responded to the SNP's call and helped it out on 12 different occasions?

**Derek Brownlee:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Mike Rumbles:** No.

We have now reached the point at which the SNP no longer even bothers to lodge amendments to Opposition motions; SNP members just vote for the Tory amendment, as it saves them a lot of bother.

I will turn my attention to our two lonely Green MSPs at the back of the chamber. In the previous session, I lost count of how many times Liberal Democrat MSPs were attacked by the Greens despite our having the greenest credentials of any major party. It is now clear that, like the Conservatives, the two lonely Greens will vote through a budget that will deliver much more road building across Scotland, including the M74. Their position on John Swinney's statement is, basically, "For goodness' sake, we must not mention the roads."

At the weekend, Patrick Harvie was asked whether the Greens could in good conscience support a budget that fails to cut subsidies to aviation, proposes road-building schemes and fails to invest in cutting energy consumption in Scotland's homes and businesses. We can all answer that question for him. The answer is, "Yes they can," because it is obvious that Robin Harper and Patrick Harvie will vote for this non-environmentalist budget.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Rumbles, you must wind up.

**Mike Rumbles:** The Green party is obviously well past its sell-by date, and if the Greens vote for this budget voters will surely make that clear to them at the very next opportunity.

16:48

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I have been waiting for this.

After listening to Mike Rumbles and Des McNulty, members would be forgiven for thinking that the Greens had committed to supporting the budget, but we did not give that commitment during the negotiations after the election and I will certainly give no such commitment today. I point out to Mr Rumbles—I need not have listened to his speech as I have read his most recent and silliest press release about me—that if the Government was, for example, to scrap the M74 northern extension, it would be hugely welcomed. As far as I am concerned, that would make the budget a great deal greener than any budget that any Liberal Democrat ever voted for.

**Mike Rumbles:** The Greens are still going to vote for this budget.

**Patrick Harvie:** Mr Rumbles is determined to suggest that I will still vote for the budget. I am sorry to disappoint him.

In looking at the budget, I must ask myself which of the measures that it contains will take Scotland towards becoming a more sustainable society. Two of the three measures that Mr Rumbles mentioned will. The first is the cutting of the subsidy to the aviation industry. The air route development fund was always predicated on the myth that it would cut the number of direct flights in the UK. It has not, so we should scrap it and I am glad that that will happen, although it will take some time to come about.

I am also glad that there are moves to improve energy efficiency and to increase the fund for microrenewables, which so often ran dry under the previous Administration. I welcome the provision for a climate challenge fund and a few other measures, such as the commitments to making agriculture, housing and energy use lower-carbon areas of the economy.

However, all that is pretty small beer—although it is a step or two in the right direction compared with the previous lot. Spending on measures to tackle climate change still accounts for less than a third of spending on motorways. I will hear no lectures on commitments to motorway building from Des McNulty or any other member of the previous Administration. The commitment on climate change is barely more than the Government spends on administration.

I echo some of the comments that Jackie Baillie made on housing. On the surface, there will be modest increases in the housing budget over the full three years of the spending review period—most of us understand that the first year is bound to be tighter. However, it is already being made clear that in the first year there will be a 6 per cent cut in the housing budget and there is no specific commitment on social rented housing. The organisations that Jackie Baillie cited say that the budget will fail spectacularly to provide the 30,000 new rented homes by 2011 for which they have been campaigning. It is also important to reflect on the fact that increases in the housing budget in subsequent years will not be enough to keep up with land prices.

Parties will always have a go at one another in the chamber over promises that have been made and the reality of minority Government. The SNP could have introduced a budget that simply indulged its whims, within the limits of this year's settlement from the UK Government. Such a budget would have been thrown out of Parliament, but there is enough in the budget to suggest that the Government knows that it needs to convince others in order to gain their support. However, as we look at the draft budget today, the reality is that the Government will have much work to do during the budget's progress through Parliament if it wants to secure anyone's support.

16:52

**Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP):** It is with great pleasure that I welcome the new Scottish Government's first budget. The announcements that it contains will be welcomed by communities all across Scotland, but I hope that members will forgive me for concentrating on my constituency and on why the budget is particularly good for Dundee.

I want to concentrate on three key areas. First, my constituents will be delighted to hear the Government's proposals to freeze the council tax at last year's level. The agreement with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities that was signed today is historic. Since it was introduced, the council tax in Dundee has risen by an average of £50 a year and has more than doubled. That increase has not been replicated in people's incomes or in our older people's pensions. With one of the highest council tax rates in Scotland, Dundonians will be particularly supportive of John Swinney's determination that the council tax be held at last year's level until we can get rid of it altogether. That will be a real-terms reduction that will provide relief to pensioners and hard-working families in Dundee and throughout Scotland.

The second point that I would like to highlight is the cabinet secretary's continued funding for Scotland's cities, by rolling up the cities growth fund, which was due to end this year. That money will allow Dundee to finish the infrastructure for the central waterfront project that is so important to my city. I was one of the councillors who were involved in agreeing to that visionary use of the cities growth fund back in 2003, so it is particularly close to my heart. The waterfront project will deliver a higher quality of life and it will improve our city's image. It will also provide new high-quality development opportunities to support economic initiatives. The economic potential of Dundee will always be held back unless the problem of our waterfront is resolved and the opportunity that it offers is realised in a visionary manner. The central waterfront project has that vision and will result in a step change not only for Dundee but for the whole city region. As I said, the allocation of money will allow for the completion of work on infrastructure. Dundee City Council is confident that the rest of the central waterfront master plan can be self-financing as our vision is realised.

The announcement of investment will be of equal importance to Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness and Stirling, as well as to the greater city regions that they serve.

I said that I would concentrate on my constituency and on why the budget is particularly good news for Dundee. However, the inclusion of additional funding to enhance capacity in Dundee

to support the life sciences is good news not only for Dundee—it will be welcomed by the life sciences sector across Scotland. That sector consistently punches above its weight internationally.

The University of Dundee's vision for the Scottish institute for life sciences—or SCILS—is for a new centre of excellence that is equipped and managed to the highest international standards. SCILS will attract outstanding scientists to Scotland and train the most promising young researchers to conduct world-leading biomedical research, and it will translate the outputs into new medical and commercial opportunities.

I am pleased that proposals to site the Scottish institute for life sciences in Dundee have cross-party support. We should recognise the hard work of Sir Philip Cohen in pressing the case and winning the support of not only the current First Minister but the previous First Minister. I am delighted that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning have been able to include extra funding for life sciences in this first SNP budget.

I have focused on just three areas of the budget statement that are particularly good news for Dundee, but there are many more areas on which I could have focused. This budget is not just for Dundee but will be welcomed across Scotland. It is a historic statement that shows the implementation of the joined-up approach that previous Administrations merely talked about. The deal that is available to local government goes much further than the headline council tax freeze: it represents a sea change in the relationship between central and local government that will have a positive impact for years to come.

I congratulate Pat Watters and Councillor Neil Fletcher on putting the interests of local government above personal party-political interests.

16:57

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** I think it is fair to say that, for all of us, a debate on the budget can be challenging. The figures can be difficult to follow and understand. It is critical that fuller scrutiny of the budget takes place as it goes through its committee stages.

It is also difficult to find out how the budget matches what was done by the Executive in the past so that we can track what has happened to money. I would hate to suggest that that is because this Executive does not want to make such a comparison available and transparent to everybody.

The budget is challenging for those who need it the most. In the past, we have considered gender proofing it; we have also to consider other issues to do with equality, so we need transparency from the Executive. I fear, again, that the Executive will be overclaiming and underdelivering with this budget, as with so much else.

The Labour Party supports a social contract for economic growth and shared prosperity. We can dispute the capacity of the current Executive to work in partnership with the Labour Government at Westminster to sustain economic growth. There is clear confusion over how the Executive will ensure that all Scots benefit and that difficult local challenges are properly recognised.

I want to focus on housing, the regeneration of communities, and deprivation. We have already heard what housing organisations have said about the budget. As Patrick Harvie said, we will have to drill further into the claims that are being made about the housing budget. If there is a crisis, as is claimed by the SNP, does the budget match up to it?

A very simple question was asked earlier, about the £2,000 first-time buyers grant. We heard that it would be subject to consultation, but that does not answer the question whether the grant has been budgeted for. We are told that there is money to roll out free school meals, subject to the result of the pilot project. Will the £2,000 first-time buyers grant be subject to further consideration, as was suggested by the minister who is responsible for housing? We have not heard. The danger is that people will feel doubt—there seems to be evidence to back up that feeling—when the Executive says that it cannot do things because others in Parliament will not support it. The SNP should put the issues before Parliament so that we can at least investigate them; otherwise, our view will be confirmed that the £2,000 first-time buyers grant, like the claims that have been made about student debt, was a ploy to secure votes and not a pledge to deliver action.

We need to know about the balance of spending in housing—there is dispute over the headline figure—and we need to know how much will be spent on social rented housing and the number of new houses that will be built by the end of the third year of the review, because that will be critical in meeting the homelessness target. Will that target be met? We have said that local government will be responsible for dealing with homelessness, but local government was already anxious about the matter when the legislation was going through Parliament. What will the Government do if local government says that the target is simply unachievable?

I wanted to raise a number of issues, but I will end by flagging up the issue of the areas that have

not been ring fenced that have been rolled up into the settlement. It is significant, for example, that the private sector grant will remain ring fenced; perhaps that is because when it lost its ring-fenced status it virtually disappeared from local government budgets. After all, we understand the pressures that authorities are under.

We realise that the voluntary sector can tackle issues such as violence against women better than local government can because it can define and then meet needs. We seek reassurance that funding of those vulnerable groups will be protected, because they are crucial. I understand that there are pressures on local government and we would certainly find it unacceptable were authorities to be given funds that were not ring fenced, only for the blame to be left at their door when services were not delivered.

We need reassurance that local vulnerable groups and communities will not suffer from budgetary sleight of hand at Scottish Government level. I also want to know that the Government's compact with local government will be real and that if authorities say they cannot deliver something they will be given the funding to do so.

17:01

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I have no doubt that the majority of neutral observers will perceive this budget rightly not only as a personal triumph for John Swinney but as a significant milestone for the SNP Government.

Only a few short weeks ago, the Government was presented with what most members would in their heart of hearts agree was a less-than-generous settlement from the United Kingdom Treasury. Despite that, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth has delivered responsibly and effectively for Scotland.

Of course, members will be aware that this is all a far cry from the nonsense that was spouted during the election campaign, during which some people portrayed an SNP victory as being likely to cost each Scottish family £5,000 a year, not including the swingeing council tax increases that would have to be made in the short term. For example, in Glasgow, under the heading

"SNP and Liberal Democrat Council Tax Increase Shock"

Labour Party leaflets announced that

"SNP spending plans would require a 16.6% increase in Glasgow Council Tax levels"

and

"The SNP and Liberal Democrats must be the only people in Glasgow who think that local people don't pay enough tax. Their spending plans would force hard-working Glaswegians to pay hundreds of pounds more and not improve a single local service".

In reality, the cabinet secretary's work with our partners in local government has produced a settlement for our councils that will allow service improvements to be made without the huge council tax rises that we were accused of planning to impose. One hopes only that such scaremongering election rhetoric from irresponsible members of Opposition parties will be tempered in the future.

**Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** Surely the obvious point is that, if the SNP had not ditched all its promises, what the member has highlighted would have come true.

**Kenneth Gibson:** We have not ditched our promises. Clearly Andy Kerr was not listening to the cabinet secretary's statement.

There is much in the budget that will be welcomed throughout Scotland. For example, there will be an additional £37 million for ferry services, £51 million for our fire services, £97 million to phase out prescription charges, and a doubling of the international aid budget over three years. Moreover, the 20 per cent increase in capital investment in higher education will maintain and strengthen Scotland's competitive edge, which will be vital to our future economic prosperity.

Regeneration will also benefit to the tune of £435 million, which will ensure investment in some of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities.

The SNP is determined to tackle drugs misuse and to enhance rehabilitation. With £94 million to spend over three years, I have no doubt that we will make considerable headway in addressing that challenge in our communities. Alcohol misuse is also a scourge. As Brian Adam pointed out, the £85 million that is devoted to reducing the harm that is inflicted by alcohol misuse—in a health improvement package that amounts to £350 million in new money—will allow the Government to tackle a problem that is endemic in much of Scotland.

Decent housing is a fundamental right, so I am delighted that £1.47 billion will be invested in it over three years, with a 27 per cent increase from 2008-09 to 2010-11.

The third sector's crucial importance to the well-being of Scotland is recognised with a record £63 million development programme and a £30 million investment fund that will help voluntary organisations to invest in people and assets through business development to ensure sustainability.

Of course, with independence the SNP could do much more. That is why it is pleasing to see that my predecessor as MSP for Cunninghame North

now supports an independence referendum—look forward to his former colleagues doing likewise today.

Earlier this year, Malcolm Webb, who is chief executive of the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association, pointed out that there are still 26 billion barrels of oil left in the North Sea. To put it simply, that is 5,000 barrels for every man, woman and child in Scotland. With prices likely to remain near \$100 a barrel, the mind boggles at what Scotland could do with that kind of financial muscle.

It is an excellent budget. What else could we expect from a party that puts Scotland first, last and always and which has so much faith in the Scottish people?

17:06

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Students have certainly come last with the budget, and Kenny Gibson was clearly not listening when we heard the cabinet secretary admit that he was ditching the student debt pledge. The story of today's budget is one of students betrayed and universities badly let down. Perhaps we were expecting the betrayal of students, but the settlement that universities received today will have come as a disappointing shock to them.

The SNP has dumped its policy on graduate debt, and universities, which asked for £168 million extra, are getting only £30 million. As Universities Scotland says, that is inconsistent with the Government's stated aspirations for growing a knowledge economy. Students were told that the SNP would "dump the debt monster". That was the campaign slogan, and I even have a picture of Nicola Sturgeon at a freshers fair with the debt monster—a guy in a gorilla suit—looking for student votes. Now, however, we know that the SNP is not dumping the debt monster; it is dumping its promise.

What started off with Alex Salmond pledging to meet the student loan repayments of Scotland-based students, and with the SNP responding to questions on the policy by telling us again and again on television and in newspapers that it was affordable, then moved on to a pledge, in "Reporting on 100 Days: Moving Scotland forward", to draft legislation to abolish the debt.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** Will Richard Baker give way?

**Richard Baker:** No.

However, that legislation never appeared, and now we know why—because the SNP has unceremoniously and cynically ditched the policy. It is shameful for SNP members to have insisted until they were blue in the face that they would pay

off those loans and then—despite the fact that some students will have voted for them on that basis—to abandon the pledge when in government. That is no way to treat students—or anyone. It would be tempting to use unparliamentary language, Presiding Officer, but it is clear that students will feel betrayed because that promise has been broken.

All that we hear is the excuse that this is a tight settlement. However, it is a tight settlement that the Government knew was coming—it was predicted before the election—and which the independent centre for public policy research says is fair. The SNP says that it would not get legislation through, but the policy does not require legislation beyond the budget bill, and the Government is to introduce a bill on an independence referendum in the face of opposition.

**Bob Doris:** Will Richard Baker give way?

**Richard Baker:** No.

The SNP's sums do not add up. If it was not going to cost £2 billion to scrap loans, why has the Government not introduced a proposal for the Parliament to debate, or did the SNP never really have any intention of implementing such a policy?

**Bob Doris:** Will Richard Baker give way?

**Richard Baker:** I am not going to give way. I have only four minutes, and I think that Mr Doris should sit down.

To rub salt in the wounds—

**Bob Doris:** Will Richard Baker give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order, Mr Doris. Sit down.

**Richard Baker:** To rub salt in the wounds, as Tavish Scott said, the SNP is delivering only half of what it said it would deliver in other areas of student finance. Our Executive was straight with students, in stark contrast to the current Administration, which pulled the wool over their eyes. We increased student bursaries year on year, massively beyond inflation, but there is no equivalent pledge in the SNP budget.

Earlier this week, the SNP talked of lofty aspirations for the role of universities and colleges in growing our economy, but when universities asked for £168 million extra the Government awarded them only £30 million. Sir Muir Russell, the chair of Universities Scotland, says that the settlement is a disappointing response, and he is concerned that it could weaken the competitive position of Scottish universities relative to universities in England. There was an 18 per cent increase for universities in the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition's spending review. We delivered on our pledges and put money behind

what we said we were going to do. The actions of the current Government do not match its words on university funding and graduate debt.

The cabinet secretary said that the budget heralds a new era of optimism, opportunity and delivery, but for universities it is no more than confirmation that they have been let down, and for students it is confirmation that they have been conned. The Government should be ashamed.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to the wind-up speeches. I apologise to those members whom I was not able to call.

17:09

**Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD):** As with any budget, some measures outlined by the cabinet secretary will command broad support—as evidenced by some of the comments that members have made.

However, the devil is in the detail. Although I, too, welcome the confirmation that, following representations from me and Tavish Scott, the air discount scheme will continue, it is not clear whether the Government is committed to funding the in-year allocation to Orkney Islands Council to maintain its ferry and air services and whether it is committed in the longer term to the next generation of internal transport requirements.

Most speeches have focused on the bigger picture. Mr Swinney and the SNP spin doctors have been telling everyone that the broken promises do not matter. All that matters, they say, is what happens to council tax. I am reminded of a magician's trick, when the magician waves their right hand in the air, grabs everyone's attention and gets them to focus on the wonder of what they have in their right hand. John Swinney is not worried if people look closely at his proposed council tax freeze for long enough—until next February, for example—because it, too, will disappear. Meanwhile, with his left hand, the Great Soprendo systematically discards one promise after another. However, the illusion has failed; people have already noticed the deception.

The build-up to today had undoubtedly been excellent political theatre. As Iain Gray said, each week, each debate and each question time, we were told, "Just you wait until 14 November. Wait until the budget is announced. Then you'll see." Today, we have seen that, in promising everything to everybody, the SNP never had any intention of delivering on its promises.

Today has provided a useful insight into the goings on in the Cabinet over recent weeks. There has been tension and brinkmanship, and there have been crisis talks—and not only about who would carry the First Minister's bags on the trip to Sri Lanka.

I can imagine the budget discussions—it would be like one of those winner-takes-all balloon debates. John Swinney, desperate to get his council tax freeze to fly, has been steadily emptying his colleagues over the side of the basket to lighten the financial load.

Fiona Hyslop was first over the side. Ms Hyslop, desperately clinging to her class-size commitment and nursery teacher promise, has been forced overboard, and her "ditch the student debt" placards followed her over the side.

Kenny MacAskill was next for the long walk off a short plank. In a futile bid to remain in the basket, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice took to the airwaves earlier in the week. In the space of 12 hours, he had reduced the commitment to extra police officers from 1,000 to 500, and then to no guarantee of any extra police officers at all. Mr Swinney was obviously not impressed, and over Kenny MacAskill went as part of the pre-budget clearing of the decks.

I see that Mr Mather has escaped the drop. Cuts in business rates and additional investment in renewables have been spared—as has Mr Mather. Investment in innovation is welcome. I am happy to acknowledge that that is good news, and to pay tribute to Mr Mather's obvious powers of self-preservation. That said, perhaps the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth felt that Mr Mather, having handed up the centralisation of the enterprise networks and VisitScotland, had already done enough.

There have been many historical references, to Gladstone, to Chamberlain and to Aneurin Bevan. Brian Adam said that this is an historic day. He is right. It will come to be seen as the day on which the SNP's bluster and spin started to unravel.

17:13

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** To avoid confusion, I make it clear that neither I nor my Conservative colleagues will vote for the budget proposals that have been set out today. I make that clear so that members all understand both how important the budget process is and that we should get into it as early as possible. It is, therefore, ironic that so many of my Labour Party and Liberal Democrat colleagues in the Parliament have taken the opportunity to complain yet again—some taking up all the time available to them—that they have not been given enough time to debate the budget proposals. Let us debate the budget proposals and stop complaining about a lack of opportunity so to do.

I want to talk about the issues that have been raised today and about what can be achieved. The proposals on microrenewables and home energy efficiency are interesting, but I want to know much



more. The proposals for reductions in the business rate for small businesses are extremely important, but I want to know how much more quickly those reductions can be achieved. The proposals on affordable housing are well and good and a great deal of money has been allocated, but I want to know how more private money can be levered in as a result of public expenditure.

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** Will the member give way?

**Alex Johnstone:** I suggest that the member press his request-to-speak button. Perhaps he can have his own speech.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No, he cannot, Mr Johnstone.

**Alex Johnstone:** I want to know—sooner rather than later—how many new police officers there will be. I want to know how robust the proposals for council funding are and whether the cabinet secretary will consider the independent assessment that the Conservatives proposed today. I welcome the money that has been allocated to drug misuse and rehabilitation, but I want to know how it will be delivered and what effect it is expected to have.

I am disappointed by some members' approach to the budget process, which is all about grandstanding and not about how we deliver a budget. The Conservatives have a deal that they need to stick to: it is a deal with the taxpayers of Scotland. It is our duty to ensure that the budget that the Parliament approves is the property of the Parliament and delivers for the Scottish people. Therefore, the Conservatives will not stand up in the Parliament time and time again to complain about the process and throw all the toys out of the pram. We want to debate the issues in the Parliament and in parliamentary committees. We want to put together a budget that will deliver for Scotland.

Members on the Government's front bench have not brought forward proposals that will find support in the Parliament, but they have time to do so. We need to see the details and we need to know when and how measures will be delivered. We need to know how the Government will deliver a budget for the whole of Scotland.

17:17

**Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** There is a cruel deception at the heart of the Government and its budget. In the lead-up to the elections in May, Scottish National Party members knowingly made promises that they knew fine well they could not keep. Today, as many members said, some of those chickens have come home to roost.

"Knowingly" is a good word, which I think that members used when talking about Mr Swinney's

discussions with COSLA. Not only did the SNP knowingly propose policies in its manifesto that it could not keep, but—we fast forward to weeks later—Mr Swinney had discussions with COSLA about a council tax freeze in the full knowledge that his manifesto commitments would be ditched in favour of a commitment to a freeze. Everything else would go to save one pledge. Of course, the pledge has not been saved. I suspect that as local authorities examine the detail of the offer they might come to a different view.

Liam McArthur used a good analogy when he talked about a balloon—a hot-air balloon, of course. During the election campaign the balloon flew across Scotland, filled with hot air from the people who are now on the Government front benches. Of course, the basket below was so heavily weighed down with manifesto pledges on class sizes, police officers, nursery places and student debt that it barely got off the ground. However, as we know, the balloon got off the ground and soared above Scotland for a short time, but it has begun to deflate and lose height.

As the balloon flies over our primary schools, out goes the pledge on class sizes—dumped on the parents and pupils of Scotland. The pledge that the First Minister said would be delivered by 2011 has become a contortion of words in the COSLA agreement. As the balloon flies over our universities, the SNP dumps on the students of Scotland who voted for the SNP in numbers on the basis of a pledge that the party knew it could not deliver.

What happens when the balloon flies over Peebles? That is where, in the run-up to the election campaign, the First Minister made his pledge on police numbers in front of police officers who, I have to say, are good at taking notes. That pledge is also dumped—on Scottish communities that expected better of the SNP. The balloon may still be floating, but the hot air is escaping fast.

Let us look at the SNP's wording on schools. We go from the pledge on class sizes to the situation in 2011 being one of "changing demographic trends", "accommodation pressures", implementation varying across local authorities "depending on local circumstances", and local government being

"expected to show year on year progress".

When he sums up the debate, I ask Mr Swinney whether he agrees that, in his book, progress is one local authority with one class where the class size is below 18. I know about the discussions that he has been having with COSLA—he knows about them, too. How will the Government measure progress?

If the problem is to be solved by demographic trends and fewer children, what about the pupils of

Edinburgh or West Lothian, where the demographic trends show an increase in the number of young people?

**Kenneth Gibson:** Does Mr Kerr accept that there is anything positive about the budget, such as the doubling of the international development budget or the 50 per cent increase in the equality budget?

**Andy Kerr:** Of course I accept that the budget has good aspects, but I return to the fundamental point, which is that Mr Gibson's party told the electorate of Scotland what it would deliver and made promises that it knew it could not deliver. That is what I charge the SNP Government with. That cruel deception is at the heart of the Government, and, as other members have said, it is our job and responsibility as the Opposition to describe that deception to the Scottish people. That is what we will do.

I will talk a wee bit about the offer to local government. Yesterday, it was described as the "best outcome" for local government. Obviously, councils will say that if they are offered £10.7 billion and then get £11.1 billion. However, the offer is not a good one. It barely covers the current cost of services, never mind the cost of the council tax freeze and inflation. We will see whether it turns out to be a good deal.

When we say that the SNP could have done better, Labour Party members join a long list: Universities Scotland, Shelter Scotland, the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland, Scottish Churches Housing Action, the Scottish Council for Single Homeless, local authority chief housing officers and the churches.

At the heart of Government, we have an actuary, a lawyer and an economist. We might expect their combined skills to deliver accuracy, but we have no precision. The budget would not hold up under scrutiny in any court in the land.

17:22

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** Last week, Bruce Crawford may have made the first mistake of the parliamentary session. He should have got us to vote for the Labour motion to have more debates in the Parliament. We have won the debate today, hands down. [*Interruption.*]

**Andy Kerr:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Johann Lamont** *rose*—

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)** *rose*—

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Ferguson):** Order.

**Margo MacDonald:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

**John Swinney:** I say to my dear friend the member for Perth—

**The Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, Mr Swinney, but we have a point of order.

**Margo MacDonald:** Will you take a motion without notice, Presiding Officer?

**The Presiding Officer:** No. The Parliamentary Bureau has already considered the matter. A parliamentary resolution has been made.

**John Swinney:** Thank goodness for that, Presiding Officer.

I say to my dear friend Roseanna Cunningham that I am glad that I have been able to display "joy and enthusiasm" today. It has not always been so over the past few weeks while I have been getting the budget together. I am glad to be in the chamber today and that we can now promote the budget to Parliament.

I turn to Iain Gray's point about our removal of a real-terms spending table. He will find it on page 148 of the document, in the usual way. He should not be surprised by that. I know that members have a lot of detail to come to terms with.

Tavish Scott spoke about changes to the transport budgets. He obviously has a lot of knowledge of transport issues, having been the Minister for Transport, but I gently point out to him that over the next three years, the Government will spend more than £2 billion on transport, which is four times what was spent by the Government of which he was a member between 2003 and 2006. If that is not progress, I do not know what is.

Pauline McNeill asked me about funding for community safety. My answer is similar to one that I gave other members: a great number of individual budget lines have been transferred into the local authority budget to ensure that local service delivery can be joined up by people who are responsible for and aware of local circumstances. That work will be monitored and managed by an outcome agreement with local authorities, which is a step forward for the way in which we undertake governance in Scotland.

**Jeremy Purvis:** Will John Swinney authorise Audit Scotland to carry on auditing under the previous practice that allowed us, through grant-aided expenditure, to identify the assumptions that the Government makes about the processing of budget lines, such as those for schools and road building? Will Audit Scotland be able to carry out proper, clear and transparent auditing under the new agreements?

**John Swinney:** I have already made available to Audit Scotland the whole performance management framework for the new arrangements. I understand that Audit Scotland

will be supportive and is interested in being involved in that management area. I am happy about that, as it is a good step forward. I point out to Jeremy Purvis that, as everybody knows, GAE is not a particularly scientific measure of all the issues to do with the distribution of funding and resources to local authorities, but I am happy about that level of scrutiny by Audit Scotland.

Des McNulty made a number of points about the carbon footprint of our proposals. He mentioned the cancellation of the Edinburgh airport rail link project, but the redesigned project is a much more efficient and effective use of resources, and will have a much greater impact on carbon emissions, than the expensive and grandiose Edinburgh airport rail link that he supported. We will use our resources much more effectively in that respect.

Mike Rumbles made a number of points about there not being enough time to scrutinise the budget. However, I look at my diary for the next few weeks and I see that I will be in front of a number of parliamentary committees to discuss it. That is the right and proper level of parliamentary scrutiny.

**Mike Rumbles:** What about in the chamber?

**John Swinney:** Mr Rumbles will have to watch himself: he is getting far too excited. The committees are the proper place for that scrutiny to take place and, as I confirmed to the convener of the Health and Sport Committee, ministers are more than happy to be involved in committees' scrutiny of the budget.

I will address the points that Richard Baker made on the universities settlement. In a tight spending review settlement, we are delivering a capital allocation to universities and further education colleges beyond what was asked for. We are doing that because we recognise the importance of investing in facilities to ensure that we keep up to date with developments in the sector.

**Richard Baker** *rose—*

**Margo MacDonald** *rose—*

**The Presiding Officer:** The minister is just going into his last minute.

**John Swinney:** There is enormous pressure on resource budgets, and we have taken a step to guarantee that universities are provided with the appropriate level of funding. It is rich for Richard Baker to express concerns about funding for students when he was prepared to introduce back-end tuition fees for the students of Scotland. I will take no lessons from him on that point.

This budget gives the people of Scotland the opportunity to see in action a Government that is prepared to be ambitious for our country and to

deliver on the aspirations, hopes and aims of the people of Scotland. I am confident that the budget will command their attention, support and endorsement. Others will have to come to terms with that success in the weeks to come.

## Business Motion

17:29

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-837, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 21 November 2007

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Government's Economic Strategy

*followed by* Business Motion

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 22 November 2007

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Annual Sea Fisheries Negotiations

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time  
Finance and Sustainable Growth;  
Justice and Law Officers

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: A Better Future for Scotland's Children: Ending Violence Against Women

*followed by* Appointment of the Chair of the Scottish Commission for Human Rights

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 28 November 2007

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motion

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 29 November 2007

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time  
Education and Lifelong Learning;  
Europe, External Affairs and Culture

2.55 pm Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

(b) that the period for members to submit their names for selection for Question Times on 10 January 2008 ends at 12.00 noon on Wednesday 19 December 2007;

(c) that the deadline for lodging questions for Question Times on 10 January 2008 shall be 12.00 noon on Thursday 3 January 2008; and

(d) that the period for members to submit their names for selection for Question Times on 17 January 2008 ends at 12.00 noon on Thursday 3 January 2008.—[Bruce Crawford.]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:29

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** The next item of business is consideration of five Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motion S3M-842, on the designation of a lead committee; motions S3M-840 and S3M-841, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments; motion S3M-839, on rule 2.3.1; and motion S3M-843 on the office of the clerk.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government and Communities Committee be appointed as the lead committee in consideration of the Glasgow Commonwealth Games Bill at Stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Fundable Bodies (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 2007 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Protection of Charities Assets (Exemption) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2007 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees the following parliamentary recess dates under Rule 2.3.1: 11 – 26 October 2008 (inclusive).

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk will be closed on 27, 28 and 31 December 2007.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

## Decision Time

17:30

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S3M-842, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government and Communities Committee be appointed as the lead committee in consideration of the Glasgow Commonwealth Games Bill at Stage 1.

**The Presiding Officer:** I propose to ask a single question on motions S3M-840 and S3M-841, both on approval of Scottish statutory instruments. As no member objects to a single question being put, the next question is, that motions S3M-840 and S3M-841, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of SSIs, be agreed to.

*Motions agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Fundable Bodies (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 2007 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Protection of Charities Assets (Exemption) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2007 be approved.

**The Presiding Officer:** I propose to ask a single question on motions S3M-839, on rule 2.3.1, and motion S3M-843, on the office of the clerk. As no member objects to a single question being put, the next question is, that motions S3M-839, on rule 2.3.1, and S3M-843, on the office of the clerk, both in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

*Motions agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees the following parliamentary recess dates under Rule 2.3.1: 11 – 26 October 2008 (inclusive).

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk will be closed on 27, 28 and 31 December 2007.

## Stobhill Hospital (Parking Charges)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-612, in the name of Paul Martin, on car parking charges at Stobhill hospital. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes with concern the proposal by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to introduce car parking charges at Stobhill Hospital later this year; recognises the impact that this proposal will have on the local community through inconsiderate parking by car commuters in residential areas surrounding the hospital; is concerned that current provision of public transport to and from Stobhill Hospital is insufficient, and considers that a new car parking policy that would remove car parking charges at Stobhill Hospital should be developed.

17:32

**Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):** I thank all the members who supported the motion and the thousands of people from my constituency and other constituencies who signed a petition in opposition to the proposed parking charges at Stobhill hospital and who are no doubt represented in the public gallery. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask members to check that their mobile phones are switched off.

**Paul Martin:** I hear an allegation from Cathie Craigie that it might be my mobile phone that was interfering with the sound system, but it was definitely not mine.

As we enter the festive period, some of us—rather unwillingly, I must say—find ourselves in some of the shopping malls that exist throughout Scotland. I was recently struck by the quality of the car parking facilities in many shopping centres and by the fact that those facilities are provided free. That led me to compare the free car parking spaces in those facilities with the fact that our hospitals charge for car parking. It reflects poorly on society that people who visit relatives and staff who care for patients who are at a vulnerable period in their lives are charged to do so.

I will deal with several of the arguments that Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board has presented in respect of the implementation of car parking charges at Stobhill. I was born in Stobhill hospital and have lived in the area my entire life, but I have never known a problem with car parking at the hospital. The capacity has always been sufficient and no issues have arisen with commuters abusing the car park to use it as a park-and-ride facility to travel to Glasgow city centre.

One reason that the health board has given to justify the proposals is that they would fit with the board's green transport policy. If the board cared so much about its green transport policy, why has it not put in place what is required to deliver it? Not one additional bus service will be delivered by 25 November, not one cycle shed will be in place—which is a Glasgow City Council requirement—and there will be no showering facilities for those who wish to cycle to work. The health board has implemented no element of the green transport policy.

That is another example of how Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board puts its policies first and worries later about the policies that will have to follow. It is unacceptable. I call on the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing to say in her summing up that she will ensure that the health board puts in place its green transport policy before it implements the car parking charges at Stobhill hospital.

For many years, Stobhill hospital has enjoyed the support of the community and has had an effective and constructive relationship with it. However, there is already evidence that that relationship will be put at risk if the car parking charges are implemented. There is evidence that building contractors who are involved in the ambulatory care and diagnostic unit project are parking in the surrounding area and that those who wish to evade paying the charges will do likewise. Despite the fact that I, and other elected members, have made representations to senior health board staff on that issue, they have not been able to deal with it.

We are aware of the tensions that car parking can cause, particularly when people park outside their own residential area. That will be a consequence of the implementation of car parking charges at Stobhill. I call on the cabinet secretary to meet me and the local residents who will be affected, so that she can hear about the problem at first hand. I note that she visited the hospital to launch the new ACAD unit, which I welcome. However, she also has to meet the people who are concerned about this issue. I hope that she will make a commitment today to do so.

The health board has confirmed that it will make proposals for a private company to enforce the car parking policy. When the parish council built Stobhill hospital in 1899 to ensure that poor people could access health facilities, I am sure that it did not expect that 100 years later we would not only impose car parking charges on those who are already financially disadvantaged but use private companies to enforce those charges. I ask the cabinet secretary to join me in condemning such use of private contractors and to ensure that

those who are already financially disadvantaged are assisted.

Far too often in members' business debates there is no clarity in the minister's response. I call on the cabinet secretary to suspend the introduction of charges at Stobhill hospital until the board's green transport plan is put in place. That point has already been made by the hospital's medical staff association. Will she review the very principle of implementing charges at Stobhill hospital? I accept that charges might have to be implemented at some sites but not at others. Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board has made it clear that it will take a blanket approach to implementing charges, which is unacceptable.

Will the cabinet secretary carry out a review of the impact that charges will have on the surrounding community? The current review of hospital car parking charges is wide ranging, but it does not cover specifically the challenges that Stobhill hospital will face.

The strength of opposition to the charges is something that I have not seen since the save Stobhill campaign. A number of representations from unions, communities and elected representatives have been made. I ask the cabinet secretary to ensure that their views are considered seriously.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I call other members to speak, I remind them that the debate is about parking at Stobhill hospital—the motion is quite specific.

17:39

**Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I congratulate Paul Martin on securing this debate on an important matter. I apologise to him and to members that I will have to leave when I finish speaking, as I must attend the inaugural meeting of a cross-party group. I would have liked to stay for the whole debate.

Like Paul Martin, I was born in north Springburn. When I was nine, I moved to the Milton scheme; I lived there until I was 21, when I moved to Bishopbriggs. I have only recently moved from that area, so I am very familiar with Stobhill hospital. To this day, my doctor's surgery is in the Milton scheme. That is where my heart is. I might live somewhere else, but I come from Springburn. I know exactly the feeling that comes from Paul Martin's heart.

I heard what the Presiding Officer said before I rose to speak, but this goes for all hospitals: they are not happy places, in general. My experience of Stobhill hospital has not been happy. The things that happen to families that cause them to go to hospitals are usually traumatic, whether they

involve injury, severe illness or death. However, we all have some affection for hospitals.

The last thing that I would have been thinking about when I was at the hospital, on any of my visits there, would have been parking charges. Further, the last thing that health boards should be thinking about is revenue from parking.

I must add a health warning. In my business, I see what can happen to cars that are parked in streets and uncontrolled areas. Unfortunately, in the age that we live in, hospital car parks are beginning to be such uncontrolled areas. The amount of vandalism and theft that takes place in those circumstances is enormous, and there is a price to pay for that. When a car is damaged, there is a penalty because the owner has to pay for it to be fixed. When I go to a football match and a wee boy comes up to me and says, "Mister, can I watch your car?", I pay him to do so. Actually, I usually pay half up front and half when I come back, because, sometimes, I can get a 50 per cent discount that way. That is why I do not grudge paying a small charge in a hospital car park, if there is someone on the ground who is looking after the cars.

My main message, however, is this: health boards should not seek to secure revenue from parking charges. All of us would like our cars to be protected, which is why I say that a small payment is acceptable. Revenue raising from parking charges, however, is not.

17:43

**Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab):** I congratulate Paul Martin on securing the debate. Stobhill serves his constituency, but the wider area that it serves stretches into my constituency, too. I suspect that Paul Martin and Gil Paterson will not be alone in claiming some affinity with the hospital—most of us who intend to speak in the debate probably have that kind of affinity. For the record, then, I was not born in the hospital, but I have been a patient there and I also worked in it for a brief period earlier in my working life.

One of the reasons that have been given for the imposition of car parking charges, by Tom Divers—a former colleague of mine who is now chief executive of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde—is that some of the health board's sites are log-jammed by commuters taking advantage of free parking at the hospital, which results in patients and visitors, especially the disabled, struggling to find spaces. On other sites, there is so much congestion and lack of managed parking regimes that the car parks do not serve the needs of the patients, visitors and staff. That is a rational and understandable explanation of the reasons why there are car parking charges in hospitals.

However, Stobhill is probably unique in Glasgow, as it is one of the few remaining hospitals that was built either with a fever rationale behind it or for isolation purposes—it occupies what was, at the time of its construction, a rural location and it is laid out on a grid system across a substantial acreage of ground. That layout, which persists to the present day, makes a mockery of the imposition of car parking charges on the site. It is a hospital with a generous layout and space for parking, and it does not have the kind of congestion that Tom Divers described. Ironically, as a result of that now semi-rural location, the hospital is also difficult for many people to reach, especially by public transport. I am concerned that some of the people who live in the areas that Gil Paterson mentioned—Milton, among others—have difficulty in accessing their local hospital.

What will the scheme achieve for Stobhill? It could restrict the number of visitors who are able to visit their relatives and friends while they are in-patients, and it will make the visit more difficult for those who attend as out-patients. It will discourage those members of staff who need to travel between hospitals from taking up posts, and it will—as Paul Martin rightly identified—affect the neighbouring communities, which will bear the brunt of the displaced parking from the hospital. It will also require staff who use public transport or who park their cars outwith the hospital to walk down a relatively long and ill-lit path that borders on to Springburn Park; that is not an attractive proposition, especially for those who work irregular hours. What will be achieved as a result of those plans?

I had a look at what the parking scheme says and what it will mean for individuals, and I have never seen a more complicated scheme. A number of people are exempt, including people who require longer-term treatment, people who need to visit frequently, people who are disabled and have a blue badge, people who are in receipt of benefits and credits, motorcyclists and cyclists, delivery vehicles, couriers and taxis. That is not to mention the staff categories that are also exempt. In return, we will have a complicated bureaucracy to manage the scheme; that work has already been given out to another company. For Stobhill, that is a pointless exercise. I hope that the idea of charges, particularly with regard to Stobhill, can be re-examined and reviewed once more, taking into account the specific circumstances that apply at that hospital.

17:48

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP):** As we are all aware, Stobhill is only one of the hospitals where such car parking charges are being imposed. The charges are spread across Glasgow and the

Borders area, and are causing fear and misery for staff and visitors alike. As the largest trade union representing staff at Stobhill, Unison has reported that many of its members are worried about suffering financial hardship as a result of this poll tax on the earnings of hospital workers. Relatives and friends of long-stay patients, as well as those who are visiting from out of town—as mentioned earlier—will face mounting bills as they perform necessary and psychologically beneficial visits to their loved ones.

The arguments of the health board are spurious and disingenuous. It is farcical to claim that because some people are abusing Stobhill and other hospital car parks, the board needs to dissuade them from that behaviour by imposing swingeing parking charges on legitimate staff and visitors. Why should honesty be punished, and why does the board refuse to reveal the fee that it is paying to the private company that operates the scheme? Many staff travel miles to their work at Stobhill—they work shifts, often over the parking company's fixed time limits. Women have to travel in the dark, as Patricia Ferguson mentioned. Public transport is often limited, or does not operate at the times required, as Paul Martin mentioned. Those workers save lives, and they will have to pay for the privilege of doing so.

Why were no scientific or academic studies undertaken by the health board on those vital issues? It is not the health board's duty to cut the amount of traffic on the road, nor is it the board's duty to make a cash cow out of its workforce and those who perform the necessary duty of visiting the sick in hospital. Permit schemes could easily be introduced for staff and those who visit long-term patients, and fines could easily be implemented to stop selfish people misusing the car parks at Stobhill and other hospitals.

Once again, Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board is acting in the high-handed manner for which it is known without considering the impact of its actions on staff and patients. It needs to be held to account. Although democratically elected board members will make a change in the long term, people at Stobhill are suffering financially now and they would appreciate the Parliament's addressing the problem. Neither Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board nor any other health board should be allowed carte blanche to destroy the core NHS principle of free health care at the point of need.

17:51

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab):** Like other members, I congratulate Paul Martin on bringing his motion to the Parliament for debate. I acknowledge the work that he has done over the years to support the staff and users of



Stobhill hospital. One of my colleagues says that we should put up a plaque stating that Paul Martin was born at the hospital.

Presiding Officer, you pointed out that the debate is about parking at Stobhill. People might be wondering why I am speaking in the debate, but Stobhill hospital does not provide health services only to the people of Greater Glasgow and Clyde. Indeed, it is not just for the people of Springburn, as others have pointed out. The hospital draws patients and staff from all areas of central Scotland, including my constituency of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth. We in Kilsyth, in particular, regard Stobhill as our local hospital and it is the hospital of first choice for many of my constituents. The vast majority of people who live in Kilsyth use Stobhill and other services in Glasgow rather than services that are provided by Lanarkshire NHS Board, and a significant number of people in Cumbernauld are in the same position.

People in my constituency use Stobhill even though public transport links to the hospital are difficult. People who live in Kilsyth have to take at least two buses and then have a lengthy walk up the avenue. People who live in Cumbernauld have to take three buses. However, people choose to do that because of the facilities at Stobhill and the services that they can expect when they go there. People increasingly want to use the facility because of the significant investment of more than £80 million that has been ploughed into the hospital in the past few years.

Because public transport links to the hospital are difficult, people generally take their cars. If they do not have a car, a family member or friend will often drive them to the hospital, whether for an out-patient appointment or for them to be admitted as an in-patient. If charges continue to be imposed at Stobhill, my constituents will be caused great financial hardship.

A moment ago, I was working out the costs of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's scheme. It is not unusual for people to visit relatives twice a day, once in the afternoon and once in the evening. If they pay £2 a day for parking, the cost will be £14 a week. If the person is in hospital for a couple of weeks, the cost will be £28. That is a lot of money, especially coupled with the additional expense that we know people face when a family member is an in-patient. For staff, the charge is £7 a day.

The unanimous view of my constituents is that it is unbelievable that the health board has introduced parking charges for patients and staff at Stobhill. As other members have said, the area is not one where there are commuters, or people who will use the car park although they work elsewhere. There are already charges at Glasgow

royal infirmary. We hear that staff who work there are parking at Stobhill and taking advantage of the bus between hospitals. That should not happen. People need to be able to park so that they can visit their relatives or attend out-patient appointments. Despite everything that we want to do to encourage green transport policies, because of the poor transport links to Stobhill people will still want to take their cars for the sake of their security.

I call on the minister to use her powers to instruct NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to reverse its policy and ensure that the parking charges at Stobhill are not implemented. I ask her to address that in her response. She has used her powers elsewhere in the health service, and I ask her to use her powers here.

17:56

**Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con):** I, too, thank Paul Martin for giving us the opportunity to debate this issue. I appreciate that a review is under way. I have lodged motions in relation to Stobhill and other hospitals that are in a similar situation. The management of hospital car parks is undoubtedly a matter for the NHS, but it is clear that the advice given by Malcolm Chisholm during the previous session has been hijacked by some hospital boards, particularly NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, to justify the implementation of car parking charges. It is clear that the advice was never designed to justify the imposition of blanket charging across all hospitals within any health board area—which is what Greater Glasgow and Clyde is now doing.

The effect on NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde employees is that, even after the discounts that have been offered, the charge will be greater than the net salary increase that they will receive and that the health secretary was keen to promote as a single-phase payment. That is completely unfair and it means that the net earnings of health board employees throughout Scotland vary according to whether they work in an area in which the health board charges for car parking. For health workers at Stobhill, it means that their net earnings are less than those of health workers who do a similar job in an area where the health board does not charge for car parking. I do not see why nurses and health workers should be penalised for having to work unsocial hours and respond to emergencies.

It is worrying that NHS hospital consolidation in Greater Glasgow and Clyde will require people to travel even further. There is a suggestion in Glasgow that hospital car parking charges are essential because, otherwise, the traffic routes that support, for example, the Southern general, where Stobhill patients will go in future, will not be

able to cope. That undermines the presumption of the original case.

I wrote to the cabinet secretary ahead of the announcement of a review, for which I naturally take full credit—I thank her for that. In her reply, she said that the NHS has a role to play in

“reducing the impact of motor-cars on the environment”

and that the board has an obligation

“to encourage the use of public transport”.

I mulled that statement over, and asked myself why.

We all agree, as a general proposition, that congestion is something we want to discourage and that we want to reduce unnecessary use of motor cars, but if there is such a thing as unnecessary use of motor cars it begs the question what is necessary use. Hospital visits must fall into the category of justifiable and necessary use of the motor car. Even if public transport were available, we would want it to be as good as possible. Surely we want to encourage people who have a hospital appointment to get a lift with a family friend, and to encourage people to visit patients in hospital on dark evenings. The NHS should therefore have no part to play in reducing car use or making the sick feel guilty by penalising them for using their cars.

I have paid to park in a hospital car park. When I did, I had to anticipate how long I would be there, because the charge is not a flat fee. I have a vision of elderly patients scurrying around car parks in hospital gowns to feed the meter as they realise that they have been in the hospital for longer than they have paid for. The health board has not made clear what the penalties will be if people exceed their stay. The considerable threat of not anticipating correctly the length of a stay and ending up with a fine could prove to be true.

In her letter, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing said that she accepted

“that car parking charges are a legitimate response”.

That is slightly different from what she said in opposition, which was:

“We have seen the introduction of many bad changes like the sky-high parking charges in our hospitals”.

Brian Adam has referred to the ridiculous

“creeping commercialisation of the NHS”,

but I have established that private hospitals do not charge for parking. It is ironic and peculiar that if people use a private hospital they do not pay to park, but if they use an NHS hospital, they do.

The review that is under way must reach a decisive result. The situation is wholly unfair and blanket charging is inappropriate. Stobhill is a

perfect example of a hospital at which parking charges are not justified. I hope that the cabinet secretary’s review will act to phase out charges.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Given the number of members who wish to speak, I am minded to accept a motion under rule 8.14.3, that the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.

*Motion moved,*

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended until 6.31 pm.—[*Paul Martin.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

18:01

**Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP):**

This is my first speech in the Parliament that I have not written down, so it might be a wee bit more interesting than usual. However, I guarantee that my speech tomorrow morning in the debate on competition, regulation and business structures will be written down.

I congratulate Paul Martin on securing the debate. The motion gets to the point, as we can tell from the list of people who have signed it. It is capable of applying to hospitals throughout the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area. As all the members who are present know, four motions and one amendment have been lodged on car parking charges and the review. All the motions express various levels of concern and highlight the charges that will be paid.

I welcome the review of car parking charges and I hope that it will change the health board’s position. In my submission to the review, I raised various issues. Some of them have been touched on, but I will go over them. Not every hospital car park is overflowing. Anyone who has been to a hospital for treatment or for a visit at whatever time of day will have seen that.

If a hospital is close to a housing estate or housing scheme, the people who stay there may suffer if people park in the streets outside their homes.

Deprivation is another issue. Not everyone can afford to pay to use a hospital car park.

At times, public transport to hospitals is lacking. Not every hospital is beside a train station. Buses go to hospitals, but not everyone wants to take a bus.

Not every hospital is in an easily accessed location—we have only to consider the example of the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley. For someone from Inverclyde, that hospital is difficult to access.

The parking charges are not proportionate. In my submission, I considered the figures.

Somebody who earns less than £10,000 pays the same proportion of their wages as someone who earns £80,000—0.006 per cent. In the middle band of charges, someone who earns £12,000 pays 0.025 per cent of their wages, but someone who earns £29,000, which is still in the middle band, pays 0.0165 per cent of their wages. I do not agree with charging at all, but the banding structure is also wrong.

Another aspect, as Patricia Ferguson highlighted, is safety and unsocial hours. Hospital workers do not have a 9-to-5 job; they work in a 24-hour industry. We must consider the safety aspect of things.

Gil Paterson mentioned that, when he goes to the football match, a wee boy will ask, "Mister, can I watch your car?" I confess that I never thought of that when I put together my submission. That was new to me, but I would be prepared to consider it a bit more.

We must remember that the charges were agreed in March 2007. I had hoped that the health board would reconsider its policy after the May elections, but I welcome the fact that there is a review. I hope that a positive outcome will result from the review. The review must consider how the charges would affect everyone if they were to continue and were not altered in any way, shape or form.

18:06

**David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab):** I speak in support of the motion in Paul Martin's name. I have also supported the local petition that he organised. More than 300 of the signatures on the petition have come from people whom I represent—his constituency borders mine—because many of my constituents work at Stobhill or attend either as patients or visitors. It is fair to say that the introduction of car parking charges has raised a lot of concern and anger.

The issue was discussed at the most recent meeting of the north Glasgow monitoring group, of which both Mr Martin and I are members. We were told by management that the policy is to try to encourage staff, patients and visitors—staff in particular—to make more use of public transport: indeed, we were told that the board was introducing interest-free loans to allow staff to buy bikes. However, the gentleman who told us about the scheme—I will not embarrass him by naming him—did not look as if he had seen a bike saddle for many a year.

The introduction of charges is to discourage staff from using their cars to come to work in order to free up car parking spaces for people who visit the hospital for appointments. At present, such visitors can find themselves touring the hospital grounds

looking for somewhere to leave their cars. However, the main reason for the current shortage of car parking space at Stobhill is the construction of the new day hospital, which was topped out only recently by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing. As she will have seen when she visited Stobhill, a large number of vehicles are used by those who are involved in the building work and a large amount of ground is taken up by the construction site. As Patricia Ferguson said, there will be plenty of space for car parking at Stobhill once the new hospital is finished next year. However, as NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde wants car parking charges to be implemented at all its sites, those who use Stobhill will still have to pay.

Let us be blunt: the charges are a direct assault on the most disadvantaged citizens in our society. Many of those who regularly use the out-patient services at Stobhill already suffer from debilitating illnesses and the parking charges will merely exacerbate their difficulties and the distress of many sick Scots, whose ordinary lives already pose extraordinary problems. People who suffer from some of the most serious conditions who regularly use hospital services will be punished most by the charges. It seems to be an absurd decision to place further financial restrictions on the sick.

Furthermore, I agree with Bill Kidd—I never thought that I would say that in Parliament—that it is scandalous to impose such charges on hospital staff. Medical workers at all our hospitals are on the front line in combating Scotland's serious health problems. Such individuals do exceedingly important work at all times of the day and night, as Stuart McMillan said. The charges also disproportionately affect staff on lower wages. Not content with targeting the sick, the proposals go after people who are on low incomes.

In response to claims that introducing charges will simply promote greater use of public transport, I echo other members' views in pointing out that not all hospitals are served by accessible public transport. For example, one of my constituents lives in Torrance but works at Southern general hospital, where car parking charges will also apply. He told me that, to reach his work by public transport, he would need to leave the night before. It is simply ludicrous to suggest that that is a tenable option. It is even more ludicrous to ask him to get on his bike rather than use his car. Another constituent of mine has been rewarded with a £25 per month parking permit, which allows parking in the designated staff car park but does not guarantee a car parking space. If he cannot find a space, the cost of car parking outside could be as much as £35 a week.

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport has proposals to produce a green transport plan but, as Paul Martin said, it is not yet in place. When it is, it may encourage staff and visitors to use public transport, but until then people will still want to use their cars. The car parking charges are simply a crude attempt to reap financial benefits from people who visit the facilities frequently. They should be opposed until proper public transport provision is available.

18:10

**Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** I pay tribute to Paul Martin for bringing the issue to Parliament's attention. The debate so far has been useful in shining a light on many of the problems that car parking charges are causing.

I am keen to speak in today's debate and must declare an interest. My partner, Janet, is a nurse and has been affected by car parking charges at both Glasgow royal infirmary and Glasgow's Western infirmary, where she currently works. Although the motion mentions Stobhill specifically, this is a health-board-wide issue. That is why I support the independent review that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Nicola Sturgeon, has commissioned and which is due to report shortly.

I can speak with confidence and direct experience of the anger and frustrations that car parking charges are causing to staff across Glasgow, and which they will cause to staff at Stobhill. When charges were first introduced at the royal infirmary, nurses were charged £25 per month. By the time Janet applied for a permit there, the cost was £47 and the current charge is £57. That car park is owned by Impregilo Parking (Glasgow) Ltd and managed by a company called APCOA Parking (UK) Ltd, which is a private profit-making organisation. Profit is not the motive that Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board should have when it considers whether there should be car parking charges at its hospitals.

My partner currently works at the Western infirmary, where—as at Stobhill—charges are determined by Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board. If staff at those hospitals cannot qualify for a permit—which costs up to £40 per month—they must pay £7 a day. Not everyone qualifies for a permit. Staff are allocated permits on the basis of their need to access a car to do their jobs and of the frequency of journeys that they need to make. Staff who do not receive a permit cannot park in staff car parks. I have direct experience of the issue, as some of my partner's colleagues applied for permits, just as staff at Stobhill will have to do. Although a member of staff from Bearsden received a permit, members of staff from Wishaw and Linlithgow did not. There is no coherence,

organisation, structure or fairness in how charges are applied and in who gets permits.

Janet is quite fortunate, because she stays in Maryhill and can get to the Western infirmary relatively easily. However, I do not want her to walk down to it at 7 in the morning in inclement weather, and would prefer her to take her car. Doing that daily for a month would cost her £91 in car parking charges.

I am mindful of the fact that in April 2004 the previous Executive issued guidelines on car parking charges and that at the time there was no opposition in principle to such charges. However, the Executive put some criteria in place. In 2005, Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board committed itself to a strategy of car parking charges, but only to deal with specific problems. From what Paul Martin and others have said today, it is evident that many of those specific problems do not exist at Stobhill. Why is Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board applying a one-size-fits-all approach to car parking charges in the entire health board area?

It is clear that the pending review must consider not just the general principles behind car parking charges but how they affect patients, staff, carers and visitors at all hospitals. It must certainly deal with the real concerns that patients, staff, carers and visitors have at Stobhill. I commend Paul Martin for bringing the issue to our attention.

18:14

**Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** I thank Paul Martin for giving us the opportunity to have this debate this evening. I start with a confession: I was not born at Stobhill, or even in Glasgow. However, I visited Stobhill hospital on many occasions in my role as a trade union official representing people there. I was also a member of the then Health Committee when, under the convenership of Roseanna Cunningham, we examined car parking charges.

I am pleased to see the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing at a members' debate. That does not often happen and it is worth noting.

The anger that has been generated by this issue at Stobhill, at Inverclyde royal hospital and at other hospitals in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board area is as high as we have seen anywhere else. There have been protests, and petitions have attracted massive support. Unfortunately, industrial action is threatened. I have read the cabinet secretary's public statements and I am sure that she is working to prevent the situation going that far.

We have had review after review, which just will not do. We have been given guidelines, criteria

and—supposedly—the right to consultation on the impact of car parking charges. Although most people would agree that charges should not be a profit-making exercise, I concede that some hospitals have suffered from abuse of their car parks. Such abuse has to be tackled, but I do not know that charges are the right way to do so.

Safety and security issues have to be addressed when they arise. However, for Stobhill, the Inverclyde royal and other hospitals, a case-by-case, hospital-by-hospital consultation before the introduction of car parking charges is essential. Many hospitals in the west of Scotland are in different situations. This is not a dodge—people in Inverclyde are not suggesting that it is okay to introduce charges at the Glasgow royal infirmary or other Glasgow hospitals. People from my part of the world use all those hospitals, and we have the additional burden of the cost of the journey to get to them. However, there is a double whammy in that if we get a friend to take us there, we have to face car parking charges as well.

It is a scandal that car parking charges will be rolled out across the health board area—and particularly in the IRH—without consultation. No one has consulted the local community, no one has consulted the local authority, no one has consulted the local users groups and no one has consulted people in the neighbourhood. I ask the cabinet secretary to use her powers and to insist that a full and proper consultation take place, so that issues can at least be aired.

In June 2006, the Health Committee raised the issue of access—another issue that angers me. We are pushing ahead with car parking charges in and around our hospitals, but I see no such enthusiasm for dealing with the general issues of travel access to hospitals and health centres throughout the west of Scotland. There is no guidance on how health boards and various other agencies should deal with access. How soon will it be before the health board moves on to consider charging for the use of car parks at health centres as well? I hope that we can stop such a move, and I hope that the cabinet secretary recognises—I am sure she does—the seriousness of the situation. If we can, let us consider car parking charges and other such access issues as part of the broadest consideration of access. We have to think about how the most vulnerable people can access health services at their health centres and hospitals wherever they may be throughout the west of Scotland.

18:19

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I, too, congratulate Paul Martin on securing this debate. At the outset, I should make it clear that I recognise that the motion very much deals with

Stobhill hospital and that, as other members have pointed out, the same situation applies to other hospitals such as Gartnavel, the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley and, indeed, the Vale of Leven. Maybe, like Duncan McNeil, I should get it out of the way at the start that I was not born at Stobhill hospital. However, my husband Stephen was, so some might say that Stobhill has a lot to answer for.

The charge is that what is happening at Stobhill is unfair to patients, visitors and staff. Paul Martin is absolutely right to say that, according to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, the move is somehow part of a green transport strategy. It has also said that people use hospital car parks as park-and-ride facilities. Indeed, Alex McIntyre, the board's very own director of facilities, has said that car park charges are necessary to address severe congestion.

Let me consider those remarks in the context of the Vale of Leven hospital, whose situation is very similar to that of Stobhill hospital. The Vale of Leven is not near a train station or a major bus route; it sits on a hill; and the distance from the front gate to the hospital is about a quarter of a mile. On my frequent visits to the hospital, I have never found the car park congested. As a result, I find it difficult to understand how the Vale of Leven or, indeed, Stobhill could be described as a park-and-ride facility. The health board's fundamental reasons for introducing these charges are clearly not justified in these cases.

Many have described hospital car parking charges as a tax on the ill. It is hard enough for a sick person to ensure that they have the right change or for people on low incomes to worry about having to pay £7 for a full day's parking. However, what of those with long-term conditions who need to visit hospital again and again? A local person said to me:

"I'm often required to attend the hospital with an elderly relative who suffers from heart problems. I've sometimes been sitting in the medical assessment unit for up to five hours while they treat her. The last thing I want to do, when I'm with a frightened old woman, is leave her and go and feed the meter indefinitely."

Like other MSPs, I have also been approached by hospital staff who are genuinely concerned about affordability. Many are part-time, low-paid workers; indeed, a lot of them are women, who, to live their lives, need their cars to meet tight timetables and to juggle work and things like collecting their kids from school.

Like those who are served by Stobhill, many people are required to travel to other hospitals for tertiary treatment. What of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's green transport strategy when it sends people miles for treatment and charges them for the privilege? Using alternative travel

arrangements, it takes two and a half hours to get from the Vale of Leven hospital to the RAH. Clearly in such circumstances it is quicker to take the car.

I therefore very much welcome the review announced in September by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing. I am not convinced that that was down to the efforts of Jackson Carlaw, but in the spirit of generosity we should all encourage the cabinet secretary's actions. Given the scheme's evident complexity—certainly, as Patricia Ferguson made clear, in Glasgow—I wonder whether it is sensible to continue with it at all. I was particularly taken by Bill Kidd's suggestion of fining those who use hospital car parks as park-and-ride facilities.

As Bob Doris pointed out, the review reports in a mere two weeks' time, at the end of November. Because I believe in father Christmas, I invite the cabinet secretary to give the communities around Stobhill, the Vale of Leven, the RAH and other hospitals throughout the country a very early Christmas present by wiping out these charges.

18:23

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon):** I could be unseasonal and suggest to Jackie Baillie that it was open to the previous Administration to tackle this issue before last Christmas and that it declined to do so. However, as this is a consensual members' business debate, I will not go down that road.

I should also get it out of the way at the beginning that neither I nor—to the best of my knowledge—any member of my family was born at Stobhill. Nevertheless, I care very deeply about the terms of this motion. I, too, congratulate Paul Martin on securing this debate and thank everyone who has stayed behind to contribute to it.

I share many of the concerns that have been expressed and hope that my presence at such a debate—which, traditionally, would be responded to by a deputy minister—is evidence of that. Members will agree that, although these concerns centre principally on Stobhill hospital, they have much wider applicability and relevance. Some of my comments, although they apply to Stobhill, will have that wider relevance as well.

I will indicate where I disagree with some of the comments that have been made, but it is because I share many of the concerns that have been expressed that I took the decision to establish a review of the guidance that the Government inherited from the previous Administration and which governs the policy about which we have heard concerns in today's debate. I will say more about the objectives and progress of the review

later, but I will begin by putting the debate in context.

It is evident from the contributions that have been made that we all agree that good patient car parking facilities are increasingly important in a modern patient-centred NHS, particularly when one considers the demographics of our country and the fact that more and more patients accessing acute care will be elderly and infirm. It is worth stating that.

Good car parking facilities also matter to staff, particularly those on low pay, and I recognise the concerns of staff about the criteria used to award permits. However, car parking facilities, even if we have alternative, green transport modes, will continue to be important to staff who live a long distance from their place of work or who have child care or other caring responsibilities. I recognise all that.

We must also remember, on the other side of the coin, that in providing car parking a health board, whether it is NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde or any other board, accepts certain health and safety and other legal responsibilities towards the people who use those car parks. Boards have an obligation to ensure that their car parks are maintained, safe and fit for purpose, and that means that costs are incurred. I say this not as a defence of any specific car parking policy but simply as a statement of fact: we must bear in mind the fact that any element of the cost of maintaining a car park that is not met by car parking charges comes from funds that would otherwise be spent on front-line patient care. Unlike shopping centres or even private hospitals, health boards cannot dip into profits to meet those bills. I say that simply as a statement of fact, because it is important that people bear that in mind.

As Jackson Carlaw said, the fine details of parking policies are for boards to determine locally, but it is for Government to set the parameters so that boards know what is expected of them, in the interests of patients, carers, visitors and staff. In setting those parameters, it is important that we adhere to certain key principles, which apply to Stobhill and to other hospitals as well.

The first of those principles is that car parking charges should not be introduced as a means of generating income to subsidise patient care. The second is that charging excessive rates to any car park user is unjustifiable. The third is that judging what is excessive must be put in the context of local circumstances. I hear clearly the point that Paul Martin and others made about Stobhill not being congested, and the appropriateness or otherwise of blanket policies is one of the specific

issues that I have asked the review to examine. It is important to bear that in mind.

Where charges are applied, boards must be able to show that they reflect a reasonable balance between the needs of users and the costs of maintaining facilities. The final key principle that I want to mention—it reflects some of the comments that have been made—is that car parking charges should not be levied in isolation. If they are to be levied at all, they must sit within an operational travel plan that promotes and delivers sustainable travel choices.

**Paul Martin:** I welcome the cabinet secretary's commitment to carry out a review in respect of a number of issues, but will she examine the fact that the green transport policy will not be in place by 25 November, and if it is not, will she call on Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board to withdraw its plans until such time as they conform with the policy?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I will go on to talk about the review and about the timescale that I have deliberately set for it, because I understand that many car parking policies have been in place for several years now, while others, such as those in Glasgow, are in the process of being implemented. As I indicated, the previous Government issued guidance that reflected some of the principles that I have been talking about, but it is my view that that guidance did not go far enough to protect people working in or visiting hospitals. That is why I have asked for the guidance to be reviewed. The review group includes representatives of staff, unions and patients and will report to me by the end of this month. The review has been charged with looking at how the guidance, or individual local schemes, might be amended to safeguard access for patients and ensure equitable treatment for staff.

In the short space of time that I have left, I will deal with some of the issues that are particular to Stobhill. There is legitimate concern about the potential impact on local residents of parking by car commuters in the residential areas that surround the hospital. I accept that, as the capacity of the hospital car park is fixed, if we provide more spaces for patients, that may result in displacement of staff who currently park on site. Regardless of where we end up with car parking charges at Stobhill and elsewhere, it is incumbent on NHS boards to provide environmentally friendly transport alternatives that make it more possible for staff to leave their cars at home.

I say to members who have raised concerns, including Paul Martin in his intervention, that I will ensure that Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board is aware that members have expressed concern that the board is not moving fast enough to provide alternatives.

The board is already working with FirstBus on a bus route development plan. I hope that, over the course of the next year, that will lead to significant increases in the services provided to hospitals—not services exclusively to Stobhill, but including additional services that enter the Stobhill site.

I look to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to work with local authority partners and transport partners to make effective, environmentally friendly public transport a reality for patients, whatever happens with car parking charges. I also look forward to receiving the review group's report, and hope that it informs a process and leads to an outcome that ensures equity for everybody who has to use our hospital car parks.

*Meeting closed at 18:31.*





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