

The Highland Council

Political and Parliamentary Briefing – 17 June, 2011

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1 **Scottish Government**

1.1 **News**

Government and Finance

[Scotland Bill](#) Response by the Finance Secretary

[Scotland's RAF bases](#) Scottish Government submission to the UK Government Basing Review.

[Summer Cabinet venues announced](#) Public service improvement and Active Scotland themes up for discussion.

[Broadcasting debate](#) Culture Secretary outlines proposals to take forward Scottish Digital Network.

Infrastructure & Economy

[Scottish economy](#) Finance Secretary comments on the Bank of Scotland economy survey

[Fall in unemployment](#) Unemployment in Scotland down by 10,000.

Environment and Rural Affairs

[Bluetongue restrictions lifted](#) Great Britain regains bluetongue free status

[Action to eradicate cattle disease](#) Mandatory annual screening for Bovine Viral Diarrhoea starts in December.

[Green heating scheme](#) Scheme set to begin in autumn to boost renewable heating.

[Mapping Scotland's flood risk](#) New guidance published to help Scotland cope better with floods.

Education and Young People

[Further education reform](#) Colleges can work together to deliver for learners.

Health and Social Services

[New blood donor vehicles](#) 4x4 vehicles will help to winter-proof NHS

Justice and Emergency Services

[Improving outcomes for female offenders](#) Commission established to find more effective way of dealing with female offender.

[Sectarian and offensive behaviour](#) New laws mean bigots will face five year jail terms.

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1.2 New Scottish Government Consultations

No new consultations this week

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2 Scottish Parliament 2.1 Announcements and Publications

[SB 11-43 Adult Community Care - Key Issues](#) This briefing provides some contextual background to the issue of community care. The briefing considers the legislation governing the area, the organisation of services and available funding data. It then considers some of the topics that may be key issues facing community care over session four of the Scottish Parliament.

[SB 11-42 Unemployment - May 2011](#) This briefing provides the latest unemployment data for Scottish Parliament constituency areas.

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2.2 Chamber – Business

Wednesday 22 June 2011

Scottish Government Business: Taking Scotland Forward – Rural Affairs and the Environment

Thursday 23 June 2011

General Question Time

First Minister's Question Time

Themed Question Time - Justice and the Law Officers; Rural Affairs and the Environment

Scottish Government Debate: Proposed Offensive Behaviour in Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill

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2.3 Committee – Business

Health and Sport Committee - 21 June 2011

Subordinate legislation: The Committee will consider the following a number of negative instruments

Scottish Government Priorities: The Committee will take evidence the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy

Appointment of European Union Reporter: The Committee will appoint a member to serve as its European Union Reporter.

Justice Committee - 21 June 2011

Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill: The Committee will consider the Bill.

Scotland Bill Committee - 21 June 2011

Choice of Convener: The Committee will choose a Convener.

Choice of Deputy Convener: The Committee will choose a Deputy Convener.

Work programme: The Committee will consider its approach to developing its work programme.

Subordinate Legislation Committee - 21 June 2011

Instruments subject to annulment: The Committee will consider the [Knife Dealer's Licence \(Historical Re-enactment Events\) \(Scotland\) Order 2011](#) and the [Local Governance \(Scotland\) Act 2004 \(Remuneration\) Amendment Regulations 2011](#).
Instruments not laid before the Parliament: The Committee will consider the [Act of Adjournal \(Criminal Procedure Rules Amendment No. 4\) \(Disclosure\) 2011](#).

Processes and working practices: The Committee will consider its approach to the scrutiny of Scottish statutory instruments.

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2.4 Calls for Evidence

None

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2.5 Scottish Government Bills

Scottish Government Bill	Description	Introduced to Parliament	Parliamentary progress	Committee
Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill	The Bill criminalises offensive or threatening behaviour likely to incite public disorder at certain football matches and provides for a criminal offence concerning the sending of communications which contain threats of serious violence or which contain threats intended to incite religious hatred	16/06/11		

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2.6 Private and Members Bills

None

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2.7 Oral Questions Selected for Answer

General

Gavin Brown: To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has for the Council of Economic Advisers

Adam Ingram: To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to enhance the role of local people in agreeing sites for wind turbines when these are to be located close to their communities.

Gordon MacDonald: To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on the principle that any local community should be closely involved in planning issues within that community.

Justice and the Law Officers

Graeme Dey: To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is regarding the demand on police resources of tackling under-age drinking and whether these resources could be better directed.

Richard Simpson: To ask the Scottish Executive when it will publish its proposals for the future of prison visiting committees

Bob Doris: To ask the Scottish Executive what support is available for the victims of a miscarriage of justice.

Sandra White: To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made in tackling human trafficking in Scotland

Derek Mackay: To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with the UK Government on possible changes to the Security Industry Authority and the potential impact that these may have on the regulation of the private security industry in Scotland.

Michael McMahon: To ask the Scottish Executive whether it plans to review its position on sentencing for knife crime.

Rural Affairs and the Environment

Stuart McMillan: To ask the Scottish Executive what measures the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment will introduce to help the Scottish Government achieve its 100% renewable electricity target by 2020.

John Pentland: To ask the Scottish Executive whether additional funding will be made available to enable local authorities to meet collection of food waste and other Zero Waste Plan targets.

Neil Bibby: To ask the Scottish Executive what action it has taken to prevent the abandonment of animals in Scotland.

Maureen Watt: To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on the time taken by the UK Government in appointing a supermarkets ombudsman

Richard Baker: To ask the Scottish Executive how it will work with the fishing industry and the Scottish Funding Council to promote skills development.

Helen Eadie: To ask the Scottish Executive what guidance it gives to local authorities to ensure that recycling achieves a minimum carbon footprint.

John Park: To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with stakeholders regarding reform of the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board.

Joan McAlpine: To ask the Scottish Executive what support it is providing to the South of Scotland Alliance bid for a share of the Broadband Delivery UK Fund.

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Written Answers

Efficiency Savings

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it can guarantee that it can achieve three per cent efficiency savings in the public sector without the need for compulsory redundancies. **John Swinney:** In 2011-12, individual public sector organisations are expected to report publicly on how they achieve their efficiencies and we believe they can do so without the need to resort to compulsory redundancies. The Scottish public sector has consistently exceeded its efficiency targets without having to rely on compulsory redundancy programmes. The Scottish Government is committed to providing economic security for the public service workforce in these challenging times. In March 2011 it announced the continuation of the existing no compulsory redundancies policy for a further year to 31 March 2012 and is committed to extending coverage to other parts of the public sector. **Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will rule out compulsory redundancies in the public sector for the remainder of the current parliamentary session. **John Swinney:** The Scottish Government is committed to providing economic security for the public service workforce in these challenging times. In March 2011 it announced the continuation of the existing no compulsory redundancies agreement for a further year, to 31 March 2012 and is committed to extending coverage to other parts of the public sector.

Equality Act 2010

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to ensure that local authorities comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the disability equality duty when reducing services for disabled people. **Nicola Sturgeon:** Local authorities are subject to the Equality Act 2010 and the new public sector equality duty which it contains. This new duty came into force on 5 April 2011 and covers all of the relevant protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010.

The duty requires public authorities to pay “due regard” to the need to eliminate discrimination, victimisation and harassment which are unlawful under the Act, to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations. It is for local authorities themselves to determine how they respond to the duty.

Tenancy Rules

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with local authorities since May 2007 regarding the enforcement of tenancy rules for tenants who commit antisocial behaviour.

Keith Brown: The Scottish Government regularly engages with local authorities through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). While no discussions with individual local authorities have taken place, COSLA is a key partner in developing policy and practice in a range of housing and antisocial behaviour matters. This includes our approach to tackling antisocial behaviour set out in *Promoting Positive Outcomes* which was published jointly by the Scottish Government and COSLA in March 2009.

New Farmers

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Executive how it encourages new entrants into the tenanted farming sector. **Richard Lochhead:** During the last parliamentary session, the Scottish Government asked the Tenant Farming Forum to consider what measures were needed in order to reduce the barriers to new entrants wishing to gain entry in to tenant farming. The forum responded with a number of recommendations on 14 October 2009. The Scottish Government responded positively to the forum’s recommendations and has implemented six of the eight changes to agricultural tenancy legislation through the Public Service Reform (Agricultural Holdings) (Scotland) Order, which came into affect on 22 March 2011. The Scottish Government is currently consulting on a draft Bill that would implement the other two recommendations. As well as the above, the Scottish Government have introduced a range of support mechanisms for young new entrant entrants to farming, including significant grant support of up to 60% towards capital improvements and modernisation projects. The Scottish Government was also the first Scottish administration to launch a dedicated new entrants support measure, currently worth up to £27,397 in interest rate relief along with an one-off establishment grant of up to £20,548.

National Renewables Infrastructure Fund

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what awards have been made from the National Renewables Infrastructure Fund and to what organisations or businesses. **Fergus Ewing:** Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) has awarded £5 million to Scrabster Harbour Trust and both HIE and Scottish Enterprise are involved in detailed ongoing negotiations with a number of site owners. In parallel with activities associated with the National Renewables Infrastructure Fund (NRIF), SE and SDI have been actively involved in the work undertaken to secure the recent offshore wind testing related investments announced by Gamesa, SSE and Doosan. Although no funding awards have been made from the NRIF to date, announcements are anticipated in the near future.

Infrastructure Investment Plan

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will publish an updated infrastructure investment plan. **Alex Neil:** An updated Infrastructure Investment Plan will be published by the Scottish Government in autumn 2011. **Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on those projects proposed in the 2008 Infrastructure Investment Plan that are being taken forward. **Alex Neil:** An updated Infrastructure Investment Plan will be published by the Scottish Government in autumn 2011 and this will include a summary of progress on delivering the projects contained in the 2008 plan

Warm homes fund

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Executive how much new money will be allocated to the warm homes fund referred to by the First Minister on 26 May 2011 (*Official Report*, c. 70) in relation to that allocated to similar schemes in the 2011-12 budget. **Alex Neil:** £50 million will be invested in our new Warm Homes Fund. The timing of expenditure on the Warm Homes Fund within the lifetime of the Parliament is a matter for the Spending Review, which will report in autumn 2011.

Probationary Teachers

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Executive whether every trainee teacher who successfully completes their probation at the end of 2010-11 will be guaranteed a post in 2011-12. **Michael Russell:** The Scottish Government’s commitment to teacher employment has now been agreed by all three parties to the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers. The agreement will ensure that there will be a sufficient number of vacancies for all teachers seeking employment in 2011 to apply for.

Recruitment to these vacancies will be in accordance with each local authority's existing locally agreed procedures which need to comply with current equality and employment legislation. **Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Executive how many trainee teachers will be on their probationary year in 2011-12. **Michael Russell:** In May 2011 2,218 potential probationary teachers were allocated places on the Teacher Induction Scheme for 2011-12. The number that finally take up their places cannot be confirmed until the start of the new school term in August 2011. **Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Executive how many (a) trainee teachers will complete their probationary year in 2011-12 and (b) teaching posts will be available. **Michael Russell:** In May 2011, 2,218 potential probationary teachers were allocated places on the Teacher Induction Scheme for 2011-12. The number who start, and successfully complete, their probationary year cannot be confirmed until the start and end of the 2011-12 school year respectively. The number of teaching posts that will be available for the school year 2012-13 will depend on local authorities' recruitment needs at that time.

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2.9

Question Time

Fuel Poverty (Impact of Price Increases)

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what impact it considers the recently announced increases in domestic energy prices will have on its efforts to eradicate fuel poverty. **The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing):** Price increases such as those that Scottish Power announced last week could undermine the Scottish Government's commitment to eradicating fuel poverty by 2016 as far as is practicable. In Scotland, 770,000 households are in fuel poverty. Despite the successes to date in helping more than 200,000 people to improve the energy efficiency of their homes through the Scottish Government's energy assistance package and home insulation schemes, it is estimated that as many as 46,000 more households—2 per cent of households—will be pushed into fuel poverty every time energy prices rise by 5 per cent. **Bob Doris:** I am sure that the minister agrees that, without the power to regulate our energy market, what our Scottish Government can do to tackle fuel poverty is restricted. However, given the clear success—which he mentioned—of our groundbreaking energy assistance package, which focuses Scottish Government support on those who are most at risk of being in fuel poverty, what further steps will the Government take to continue to target support on those people and to mitigate where possible the worst effects of the unacceptable price hikes? **Fergus Ewing:** Bob Doris is right to make his point. Many people in Scotland are struck by the contrast between an energy-rich Scotland and the price hikes that severely affect many of the vulnerable in Scotland. The energy assistance package is aimed at a much broader range of people who are in fuel poverty than the previous central heating programme was. The EAP provides support to pensioners and families who live in the most energy-inefficient housing. Recently, eligibility has been extended to support the most vulnerable disabled people, and we will shortly extend it further to include the most vulnerable carers.

Social Housing (Rural Communities)

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it will ensure that provision is made for extra costs associated with social housing in fragile rural communities. **The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown):** We are making a decisive change in our support for new housing developments by using Government funding to lever in maximum investment from other sources and thereby maximising construction. Housing association bids to the new innovation and investment fund will be assessed against a benchmark of a £40,000 subsidy per unit, but we have also made it clear that we retain the flexibility to consider higher subsidies where, for example, projects require additional support to reflect the challenges in some remote and rural locations. **Mike MacKenzie:** The minister has partly answered my supplementary, but is he aware that the reduction in the affordable housing grant has made it very difficult for housing associations and other organisations to consider building houses in the most fragile rural areas in the Highlands and Islands region? These are often the most remote communities where, although building costs are the highest, sustainability can be assured by the construction of a very small number of houses. **Keith Brown:** I am aware that the reduced subsidy for affordable housing will increase the challenges of building in our more remote rural communities. To assist such development, we have made it clear that, in assessing submissions to the innovation and investment fund for projects in more remote and rural communities, we will retain flexibility in considering the levels of subsidy. I should tell the member that the assessment process has only started and that announcements on the bids will be made in the autumn but, nevertheless, I am happy to discuss the matter further with him if he so wishes. **Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP):** Does the minister recognise that in certain urban communities the concept of the balanced community is also very fragile? In East Kilbride, for example, that manifests itself in a critical lack of social rented housing. Will the minister commit to meeting me and appropriate representatives from East Kilbride soon to discuss this increasingly concerning situation with a view to considering the kind of viable solutions that he has just outlined in some measure in his response to Mr MacKenzie? **Keith Brown:** Of course, I am unable to wish away these particular budget pressures. However, I am aware of the challenges facing different communities and am more than happy to meet the member to discuss the matter.

Asylum Seekers (Education)

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what statutory duties local authorities have for the provision of education for those seeking refugee status. **The Minister for Children and Young People (Angela Constance):** Under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, local authorities have a duty to provide adequate and efficient provision of school education for all children residing in their local area. That duty does not distinguish between children and young people on the basis of their asylum or refugee status. **John Wilson:** Can I ask that next time the minister—or the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning—sends round a circular to the heads of education in local authorities, they remind heads of education of their duty to provide education for all children throughout Scotland, particularly those seeking refugee status, and that vulnerable minority groups are treated with dignity and respect in relation to placing requests? **Angela Constance:** If Mr Wilson thinks that that would be helpful, I am sure that the cabinet secretary and I would be happy to oblige.

Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Budget and Staffing)

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive for what reason the budget and staffing for Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland have been reduced. **The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon):** Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland is a new organisation with a new budget. In creating the new organisation from the previous bodies—primarily the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care and the Social Work Inspection Agency—efficiencies have been made in administrative and management costs and in rationalising certain aspects of inspection activities. The reduction from the combined budgets of SCSWIS's predecessor bodies in 2010-11 to the SCSWIS budget for 2011-12 is from £35.894 million to £35.444 million, a reduction of £0.45 million, or just over 1 per cent. The allocation for future years will be set in the context of the forthcoming spending review. **Jackie Baillie:** The cabinet secretary knows that the overall reduction in the budget is 25 per cent. Does she consider that a reduction of almost 20 per cent of staff in the care inspectorate, the majority of whom are front-line inspection staff, is in keeping with securing the highest possible standards of care? **Nicola Sturgeon:** As we discussed in a debate last week, Jackie Baillie will know that, although she is insinuating that there has been a 25 per cent reduction in the budget this year—if that indeed is what she is doing—that is absolutely not the case. I am under no illusions—I am sure that no member is under any illusions—about the fundamental, critical importance of a robust inspection agency. This Government will always take all steps necessary to ensure that we have that system in place to protect the interests of the most vulnerable in our society.

Living Wage (Public Sector Staff)

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made in extending the living wage across the public sector. **The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** Addressing low pay is a key objective of the Scottish Government, and our current public sector pay policy requires employers to introduce a Scottish living wage at the level recommended by the Scottish living wage campaign. That is currently set at £7.15 an hour. I can confirm that public bodies that are covered by the 2011-12 public sector pay policy are in the process of meeting that requirement in respect of 2011-12 pay settlements. I can also confirm that, from 1 April 2011, all national health service staff in Scotland earn above our Scottish living wage threshold of £7.15. Local authorities are self-governing bodies that set the terms and conditions under which staff are employed. However, I welcome the fact that a number of them have already introduced a living wage. The Government will continue to press all public sector employers to introduce such a Scottish living wage. **David Stewart:** Will the cabinet secretary consider the situation of agency staff, such as security personnel at Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd, who have recently been offered an increase only up to £6.85 per hour, so that they can be on the same terms and conditions as directly employed mainstream Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd employees? **John Swinney:** If I am correct, the pay offer to which Mr Stewart refers relates to 2010-11, not 2011-12, which is the point at which the Scottish living wage commitment enters the Government's pay policy. Dialogue on the issue is continuing between the management of Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd and the relevant trade unions. As I said, all public bodies that are covered by the pay policy have been reminded of the importance of meeting the Government's commitment. I am sure that Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd will follow the guidance that the Government has given.

Arm's-length Organisations (Paid Directorships)

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how much council tax payers in Glasgow will save through the ending of paid director positions on arm's-length external organisations. **The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** According to the Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee 2010 review report, 40 Glasgow City Council councillors were in receipt of payments totalling approximately £260,000 for serving on arm's-length external organisations. Amendment regulations that were laid in Parliament on 2 June will—subject of course to parliamentary approval—stop councils allowing bodies that are within their control, such as arm's-length external organisations, to pay councillors for serving on their boards. The reallocation of the funding is a matter for those organisations, but the money that is saved could provide additional funds for front-line services.

James Dornan: Given yesterday's announcement that some of the council's ALEOs are being closed down, amalgamated with other ALEOs or possibly brought back into council control, does the cabinet secretary agree that it is clear that the primary purpose for the creation and continuation of those bodies was to reward and control Labour councillors and not to benefit the council tax payers of Glasgow? Does he share my view that the money, possibly running to millions of pounds, would have been much better used to protect Glasgow's charities and carers, and that a full independent investigation should be carried out into Glasgow's misuse of public funds to ensure that the people of Glasgow are never ripped off in such a fashion again? **John Swinney:** We must separate the issue of arm's-length external organisations from the question of remuneration of directors of arm's-length external organisations. There is a case for such organisations to function. There are good examples throughout the country in which the approach has protected the delivery of elements of public services. However, to get to the nub of Mr Dornan's question, there must be a proven need and requirement for those arm's-length external organisations. If Glasgow City Council can operate without that range of organisations, that certainly raises questions about why they were there in the first place. On remuneration of directors of arm's-length external organisations, the Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee was crystal clear with me that remuneration for directors of such organisations that was additional to the councillors remuneration framework served to undermine the strength of the local authority remuneration framework. For that reason, I have taken action to close the arrangement and to ensure that there is no additional remuneration beyond the remuneration framework that Parliament put in place and which is clearly appropriate for local authority service.

Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth Directorates (Accountability and Transparency)

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it takes to ensure the highest level of accountability and transparency in its finance, employment and sustainable growth directorates. **The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** Accountability and transparency are essential features of the duty of best value that is placed on accountable officers and applied throughout the Scottish Government directorates and designated by the permanent secretary, in his statutory role as principal accountable officer for the Scottish Government. The implementation of the duty of best value is subject to scrutiny by the Auditor General. **Margaret Mitchell:** How does that objective equate with the Scottish Government spending an estimated £53,000 to £103,000 of taxpayers' money to suppress a freedom of information request relating to the costs that were associated with the Government's policy to introduce a local income tax? In the interests of openness, transparency and accountability, will the cabinet secretary confirm the actual cost to date of suppressing that information, and tell us whether he considers that to be value for money and a good use of taxpayers' money? **John Swinney:** I will deal with the first misnomer in Margaret Mitchell's question, which is the notion of "suppressing" a freedom of information request. A freedom of information request was made to the Government, which took the view that the release of the requested information would breach the legislation that this Parliament put in place. The fact that the Scottish Information Commissioner may take a different view is a matter for debate, but the Government is perfectly entitled to exercise its judgment when it receives freedom of information requests if any of the exemption tests are met. It is the Government's firm view that the exemptions enabled us not to release that information, because it constituted advice to ministers that they are perfectly entitled to receive. The second misnomer is that somehow all information must be released. I venture to suggest to Margaret Mitchell that if we do not have exemptions—which Parliament put in place—ministers may not be on the receiving end of the most comprehensive, open and transparent advice from civil servants that we could get on particular issues. The issue is vested in those two clear points. Ministers considered whether it was appropriate to release information, and we will of course keep Parliament updated on any issues that arise in that regard. I say to Margaret Mitchell that I am absolutely certain that the Government was entitled to spend the public money that it spent in defending the law that this Parliament has passed. **Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Will the cabinet secretary ensure that his directorates enable greater scrutiny of Government spending by Parliament by publishing figures at level 4 detail in his draft budget this September? **John Swinney:** We make available level 4 information in many areas of policy, as requested by parliamentary committees. I certainly recollect that the Justice Committee has asked us for level 4 information, as I am pretty sure the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee has done, and the Government has provided it. We have been reluctant to provide level 4 detail in the published budget document because it might turn out to be something of a heavier tome for Mr Baker to wander up to the railway station clutching in his briefcase. I am always concerned for the welfare of Mr Baker and the heavy briefcase that he has to carry. I will consider the issue that he has raised, because ensuring that a sufficient level of financial information is available to members of Parliament for the scrutiny of the budget process and for on-going priorities is an important consideration for me.

Living Wage (Local Authority Staff)

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities regarding the implementation of a living wage for staff across local authorities. **The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** Local authorities are self-governing bodies and set the terms and conditions under which staff are employed. I have had a number of discussions with COSLA on pay issues and I welcome the fact that a number of local authorities have already introduced a living wage. The Government will continue to press all public sector employers to introduce the Scottish living wage. **John Mason:** Does the cabinet secretary agree that if the minimum wage is kept as low as it currently is there will continue to be a longer-term problem, because local government is paying a higher wage rate than the private companies that are competing with it?

Will he join me in expressing disappointment with both the Labour and the Conservative Governments at Westminster, which have refused to raise the minimum wage? **John Swinney**: There is always a challenge with regard to the level at which the minimum wage is set. That must take into account a range of factors, not least of which is the economic circumstances and conditions within which we currently operate. The Scottish Government is trying to ensure that, across the public sector, we respond to the importance of tackling the problem of low pay in our society and give individuals appropriate remuneration for the important tasks that they carry out in our public services. The Scottish Government will take that approach consistently across the pay remits for which we have responsibility and will continue to argue for the living wage to be applied across all public bodies in Scotland.

Local Government Finance Formula

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it will bring forward details of changes to the local government finance formula. **The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney)**: Details of any agreed changes to the distribution formula will be brought forward in time to inform the statutory consultation on the 2012-13 local government finance settlement, which will be announced later this year. **Marco Biagi**: Does the cabinet secretary agree that, with financial and management decisions being at the forefront of local authorities' minds right now—because of my constituency interest, I am concerned principally with the City of Edinburgh Council—it would be helpful to have indications of the direction of any change as soon as possible? Does he accept that this is a matter of some urgency? **John Swinney**: The Government tried at all stages during its previous term of office to ensure that local authorities were advised of the details of the funding settlement and distribution arrangements as early as possible. The Government has made a number of commitments in relation to local government finance, not least of which is the provision of a floor for the financing of individual local authorities. We will bring forward our proposals in that respect as part of the preparations for the local government finance settlement. I expect the details of the shape of local authority finance to be set out in the budget statement that will come to Parliament in September and the specific allocations to individual local authorities to come later in the year, probably in early December. **Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)**: Marco Biagi makes a valid point about the need of all councils, including Orkney Islands Council, for certainty so that they can plan ahead. The cabinet secretary will be aware that, over a lengthy period, there have been concerns in Orkney about the discrepancy between the settlement per head of population for Orkney and the settlements for Shetland and the Western Isles. As part of the development of his thinking, will he commit to meeting representatives of Orkney Islands Council to discuss ways in which the issue can be addressed, either through the formula or by some other means? **John Swinney**: I acknowledge Mr McArthur's point. Over many years, Orkney Islands Council has made a number of representations about the difference in per capita allocation between the Orkney Islands, Shetland and the Western Isles. As Mr McArthur knows, the formula specifically takes into account island status, and the per capita funding settlements for the three exclusively island authorities are the highest in Scotland. It is perfectly proper that that issue should be taken into account. However, within that judgment is an assessment of relative need. The formula takes into account the different circumstances on the different islands. I would be happy to discuss the issue with Orkney Islands Council. As I said in my answer to Mr Biagi, we will bring forward our proposals in good time, to enable local authorities to do the appropriate financial planning. **Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)**: Will the cabinet secretary go further and use the handsome mandate that the Scottish people granted to the Government to move away from relying on the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to set the proportion of support for local authorities, to ensure that in future Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council are not exposed to the vested interests of their peers? **John Swinney**: We have had a fascinating question time session this afternoon, with glamour for Mr Ewing and handsome mandates for me. That has certainly put a bit of extra colour into the afternoon. I hear Mr Johnstone's point. To some extent, I draw on the answer that I gave to Mr McArthur: these issues are essentially driven by an assessment of need, which underpins the distribution formula. We said in our election manifesto that we would ensure that no local authority's per capita allocation fell below 85 per cent of the Scottish average. We will take that commitment forward in the 2012-13 settlement. It is important to continue to have dialogue with COSLA and local authorities to come to agreed positions, working collectively and collaboratively.

School Building Programme (Costs)

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what estimate it has made of additional costs to local authorities in moving from capital grant to revenue funding for the school building programme. **The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Aileen Campbell)**: The Scottish Government has indicated to local authorities that, under revenue-funded projects, their total funding contribution towards the design and construction of schools will be no more than it would have been under capital-funded projects. Therefore, there will be no additional costs for authorities in moving from capital grant to revenue funding for the school building programme. **Ken Macintosh**: That was an interesting response, given that ministers and Scottish National Party back benchers have repeatedly made claims about the cost of public-private partnership programmes compared with traditional procurement. North Lanarkshire Council, whose area is one of those affected, suggests: "The most significant change resulting from the change to revenue funding support is that Hard FM and Lifecycle must be included in the project but these costs will not be funded by the Scottish Government." Is that the case? Will the Scottish Government not make up any shortfall? Does it expect councils to do so, or does it expect schools to reduce the facilities that are planned? **Aileen Campbell**: Local authorities have been provided with the outline detail of the funding model by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Futures Trust.

Local authorities will be in a no better, no worse situation compared with the position of schools that were funded by capital grants. Regardless of how a building is funded, maintenance still needs to be covered. That is good practice for ensuring that substantial investment is not wasted. As for a comparison with the private finance initiative, I remind Ken Macintosh that, under the present model, authorities will not pay the sort of credit card repayment rates that applied to local authorities under PFI.

Council Tax Freeze (Charges for Council Services)

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the average change in charges for council services has been for households since the introduction of the council tax freeze. **The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** The setting of charges for council services is a matter for individual local authorities, but as the council tax freeze has been fully funded by the Scottish Government it should have had no direct impact on charges for council services. **John Pentland:** Does the minister recognise that the underfunded council tax freeze provides little or no benefit to those who rely most on council services, because cuts in services and increases in charges for services such as home care can easily outweigh any benefit? What is the Scottish Government doing to address the regressive nature of the tax freeze? **John Swinney:** I will make three points to Mr Pentland. The first, which concerns regression, is that analysis shows that the council tax freeze represents a more significant proportion of the income of those on lower incomes than those on higher incomes. The second point is about whether the council tax freeze is fully funded. I put in place the resources to fully fund the council tax freeze over the past four years, and I intend to do so in the years to come. The third point is that I am bewildered that the Labour Party is again raising with me the council tax freeze when, just a few weeks ago, it was committed to the maintenance of the council tax freeze for a two-year period. Before the election, I was a bit sceptical about the suggestion that there had been a wholesale and universal conversion to the council tax freeze by the Labour Party, and I am now beginning to feel that my suspicions were securely founded, and that the move was just an electoral gimmick that unfortunately—or should I say fortunately—did not work.

Microgeneration (Support)

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is taking to support microgeneration. **The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing):** Our ambition is for more householders, public sector organisations and businesses to generate their own energy from microrenewables, and we will publish a microgeneration strategy by the end of the year. It will set out our plans to build on the range of support that is already available, such as the energy saving Scotland home renewables advice service, action on skills and accreditation, and maximising investment in Scotland from the feed-in tariff and the renewable heat incentive. **David Torrance:** Does the minister agree that a more streamlined and quicker planning process for small microgeneration providers would be desirable? **Fergus Ewing:** There is already much progress in that regard. Permitted development rights apply to domestic microgeneration equipment, and were introduced in 2009 and 2010. Permitted development rights for non-domestic microgeneration equipment were introduced in March this year. Permitted development rights remove the requirement for planning permission for specified equipment that falls within set thresholds, which speeds up matters considerably. However, we are also considering what more might be done to support the renewable energy industry and planners to facilitate technology that requires planning permission through the planning application process. **Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con):** How much electricity is generated annually by microgeneration on Scottish Government buildings? **Fergus Ewing:** We retain a lot of statistics in our brains, but that is not one of the statistics that I have in my frontal lobes. I can share with Mr Brown the very good news that 1,300 microgeneration installations in Scotland benefited in the first year of the feed-in tariff, delivering 7.5MW of capacity. In 2011-12, we expect 2,600 householders to take up energy saving Scotland's free service. A great deal of progress is therefore being made. If the requested information is held centrally, I will endeavour to get it to Mr Brown.

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2.10

First Minister's Question Time

Judiciary

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. **The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** Immediately after First Minister's questions I, in conjunction with the Opposition party leaders, will be meeting some of Scotland's unpaid carers, who are in the Parliament to mark carers week. I am sure that the whole chamber will join me in expressing our thanks to Scotland's unpaid carers. Today, the carers are visitors to the Parliament, but I hope that they will soon be here on a more formal basis, as we take forward our proposal for a carers parliament to ensure that the views and needs of Scotland's carers properly inform the work that we undertake in government and in the chamber. **Iain Gray:** Yesterday, we saw another attack by the First Minister on one of Scotland's most senior judges. The political editor of The Times commented on Twitter: "Going by Salmond attack on Lord Hope, the First Minister has finally lost the plot." Well, has he? **The First Minister:** No. **Iain Gray:** That of course was one of the milder comments that followed on from the First Minister's comments in his Holyrood magazine interview.

At the very least, the First Minister is in danger, if not of losing the plot, then of losing any argument that he might have by prosecuting it in that way. This morning, Jim Sillars, the former deputy leader of the Scottish National Party, called the First Minister's remarks "undignified", "foolish" and "juvenile". In the remarks that the First Minister aimed at Lord Hope, he said: "At least I went to the bother of getting elected." That is true, but those crass personal attacks demean the office to which he was elected. Will he retract them? **The First Minister:** I conducted the interview with Holyrood magazine two weeks ago, when we were engaged in a vigorous debate on these matters. Since then, I have appointed a panel of people of eminence and expertise under Lord McCluskey to advise the Parliament. Their views will then be debated in the Parliament so that we can address the underlying issue. That is how we should proceed, and I look forward to the McCluskey report. When Iain Gray asked that earlier question, it struck me that there was something about this losing the plot business. Just by happenchance—I had no prior knowledge of Iain Gray's question—I came across a quote in *The Guardian* of 15 May 2003 from David Blunkett, the Labour Home Secretary at the time. The report said: "David Blunkett's spat with the judges over their sentencing powers plumbed new depths yesterday when he accused a ... high court judge of not living in the real world and the leader of Britain's barristers of 'losing the plot'." We all have the right of fair comment. I am interested that Iain Gray's memory of his colleagues in London and the various political ramifications of judicial decisions is not so perfect, if he repeats their language but does not remember the case. **Iain Gray:** My view that the remarks were inappropriate is not one that I alone hold. We have seen comments that the First Minister's statements were crude, ignorant and embarrassing. That is not my judgment; it is the judgment of commentators and the legal establishment. It is no answer for the First Minister of Scotland to say, "This is something I said two weeks ago when I was in a bad mood." The truth is that the issue has spiralled out of control. It started with the usual constitutional grandstanding and led to gratuitous attacks on judges, courts, lawyers and even newspapers that dared to question the First Minister. That has brought us to an extraordinary joint statement from the Faculty of Advocates and the Law Society of Scotland, which described the situation as "a challenge not only to the courts but to the rule of law." The First Minister is now taking the advice of the editor of *The Scotsman* to "Calm down, Alex, dear", but he must also grow up, own up and apologise so that the debate can move on and be conducted in the way that it should have been from the word go. Will he apologise? **The First Minister:** No, I will go forward—as I think the Parliament should go forward—on the basis of looking at the expert views of Lord McCluskey and his panel. There has been a general welcome for that approach. Let the Parliament debate those views and get to the underlying issue. Iain Gray cites in his favour a range of figures, so I will cite figures who have spoken out and said that there is an issue of concern that must be addressed. They include Paul McBride QC, an adviser, at one stage at least, to the Conservative Party; Ian Smart, former president of the Law Society of Scotland and a founder of Scottish Labour Action; and Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, who said that Alex Salmond is "spot-on." There is also Elish Angiolini, the former Lord Advocate, and the Scottish judiciary in their submission to the Advocate General for Scotland's review of devolution issues. There is an issue that requires to be addressed. The interaction of the judiciary and parliamentary comment is of course age old. The independence of the judiciary is guaranteed in the legislation that we passed in the Parliament in 2008. However, it is not just about a right of free speech, which everyone in this debate should have—including Lord Hope, who exercised his. I have made no complaint about that, just as I make no complaint about the right of anyone to exercise their right of free speech. However, when you are First Minister of Scotland, or for that matter an Opposition leader, you have to address matters of key public concern. The integrity of the criminal law of Scotland is a matter of public concern. It was never meant to be second-guessed in the way that is happening at present. It is an issue of public concern that compensation payments are paid to criminals in Scotland under a liability that does not exist in any other jurisdiction. Those are points of public concern. As well as a right of free speech, we have a duty as parliamentarians to articulate the public concerns and try to bring proper remedy. **Iain Gray:** The First Minister cites some important principles that underpin our democracy. The problem is that his public statements to the press and otherwise undercut those principles, and that is what his critics are saying to him. Let us examine some of those fundamental principles. The First Minister attacked a lawyer for representing people because they are vile. His justice secretary threatened to cut off funding from a court because he did not like its judgments. I do not like some of its judgments either, but vile people having rights is the price that we pay for us all to have those rights. Vile people being properly defended in court is the price that we pay for our right to be defended too. Yes, we make the laws, but the independence of the judiciary is the price that we pay for the freedom to do that. Does the First Minister agree? Will he retract his statements, which undermine those principles of the Parliament? **The First Minister:** It was this Administration that underpinned our commitment to the independence of the judiciary in statute, through the Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Act 2008. I am afraid that Iain Gray misrepresents the issue in the Somerville case. The issue was not one of human rights in respect of what the Scottish courts laid down when they said that people had a human right to proper sanitation in the Scottish prison estate. It was that the Somerville judgment extended the liability for that not by one year, which would have been the same as in every jurisdiction in Europe, but back to 1999. We could take the view that the people responsible for that potential liability were the people who were in office in 2001-02: Lord Wallace, who was the justice secretary in this Parliament, and Iain Gray, who was the deputy justice secretary. We might say that they should have had the foresight to ensure that sanitation was proper. Alternatively, we might say that the issue was not the fact that the Scottish courts directed the correction in that situation, which was done, but whether our liability as citizens should extend back to 1999, which offered a potential legal bill of £50 million or, according to one estimate, £100 million. That is an issue of huge public concern. It is not, as Iain Gray represents it, about whether everybody should have human rights. It is about whether this Parliament, this jurisdiction and this legal system stand in equality with every other jurisdiction in western Europe. If Iain Gray is going to stand on the argument that, regardless of the bill of liability to honest, decent, law-abiding people, we should respect it back to 1999 and make compensation payments to the vilest members of society on that basis, I think that he will stand in a very lonely position indeed.

Judiciary

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): The First Minister's interview with Holyrood magazine amounted to an extraordinary rant that was characterised by bile, intemperance, provocative personal insults and a sneering disregard for the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law. No one denies that there is a serious issue with how the Supreme Court engages with Scots law in determining human rights issues. It is right that the mechanisms be looked at. However, the First Minister's blustering, bellicose outburst has totally obscured the real issue, made a laughing stock of Alex Salmond and, most serious of all, diminished the office of First Minister. Will he now apologise for bringing the office of First Minister into disrepute? **The First Minister:** No. **Annabel Goldie:** Just over a month ago, the First Minister said that he does not have a monopoly on wisdom—that is self-evident. Unfortunately, as characterised by his answer to my first question, he seems to have a monopoly on bombast, arrogance and conceit. Just to bring him back down to earth and to remind him, once again, that the judiciary is independent of Government, I point out that there is still a good old Scottish criminal offence called murmuring a judge. Rather than run the risk of the Lord Advocate having to prosecute the First Minister, would it not be easier for the First Minister to eat humble pie, admit that he botched this whole issue and apologise to all concerned? **The First Minister:** For many years, Annabel Goldie has been saying that I did not give direct answers to direct questions. She asked me a direct question and I gave her a direct answer, but it is now suggested to me that I should speak at greater length. If I can speak at greater length on this second question, then let me say this: I am delighted that, after several weeks of being in denial, Annabel Goldie now recognises that we are dealing with a serious underlying issue. I see that Conservative members are suggesting that that is not true. Can I read what Paul McBride, the legal adviser to the Conservative Party said about this issue? I apologise if any of this language is intemperate. He described Annabel Goldie's position as "beyond ludicrous" and warned that Tory hostility to the Scottish National Party was getting in the way of sensible policy making and that "The Scottish Conservatives need to explain what their policy is". What is their position on the Supreme Court being able to take cases without leave to appeal being granted by the Scottish courts and on Scottish judges being outnumbered by English judges? If that is what is said by the legal adviser to the Conservative Party in Scotland, then why on earth does the leader of the Conservative Party in Scotland not suggest that there is a real underlying issue? If that is the language that the legal adviser uses about the Conservative Party's policy, then perhaps Annabel Goldie would be better to address that policy issue, rather than just asking the First Minister for direct answers to questions. **Annabel Goldie:** Mr McBride is not an adviser to the Conservative Party. He is just one of the litany of names quoted by the First Minister. What the First Minister does not get is this: judges apply the law and lawyers advise on the law. If politicians such as Mr Salmond do not like that, they should not batter judges round the head—they should change the law. **The First Minister:** I would be delighted. It is only a few short months ago that Paul McBride was cited by Annabel Goldie in question after question as having great wisdom. I agree. He is a Scottish lawyer of great distinction, in my opinion. However, to answer Annabel Goldie's second point, yes, indeed, I would love this Parliament to be in a position to change the law, so that it is as it was always meant to be and our criminal cases are decided in Scotland. That is how it was always meant to be, and I want to change the law in that direction. I would love to change the law to make absolutely sure that we in this jurisdiction are in an equal position with any other jurisdiction in Europe and that we do not get into the ludicrous position of having to pass emergency legislation to avoid multimillion-pound payouts to some of the vilest prisoners in our society.

Fort George

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): There are concerns in the north that the strategic defence and security review could result in the Ministry of Defence closing Fort George barracks, home to the Black Watch, and breaking the link between the Army and the Highlands that goes back to the 1700s. Will the First Minister agree to make urgent representations to Liam Fox to keep the base open, and to meet the chief executive of Historic Scotland to ensure that a survival plan is prepared to save Fort George as a premier league tourist destination? **The First Minister:** I have done so and done so again. I signed off our final submission to the defence review this morning. As I mentioned to another constituency member last week, that did two things. First, it argued why it would be unreasonable for two air bases—66 per cent of our air base capacity—to close in Scotland. Secondly, it concentrated on the maximum redeployment of the Army from Germany back to Scotland. The Army is currently working on the principle of its coming home—of home basing. On that principle, not just Fort George but some of the other key Army bases in Scotland should be entitled to receive substantially more home-based soldiers, as the Scottish army is brought home.

Oil and Gas Industries

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to support the oil and gas industries. **The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** North Sea oil and gas make a huge contribution to both the Scottish and United Kingdom economies, providing jobs, investment and the majority of our fuel needs. It supports about 200,000 jobs in Scotland. This year, the Treasury expects to secure tax revenue of £13.4 billion, which is a record high in nominal terms. The Scottish Government wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on Tuesday this week, with the support of the Labour Party in Scotland, on the decision to increase the supplementary tax on North Sea oil and gas producers, with a paper analysing and highlighting the risks that are posed and suggesting solutions to safeguard the viability and continued development of the most technically challenging and mature fields in the North Sea.

Maureen Watt: I thank the First Minister for his answer. “The Chancellor’s short term focus on squeezing the maximum amount of revenue from oil and gas is putting at risk the investment we need in order to get the most out of the North Sea ... He’s more interested in cash today than investment tomorrow.” Those are not my words but the words of the chancellor George Osborne himself, when he was in opposition. Although many of my constituents who work in the oil and gas industry warmly welcome the sensible suggestions that have been put forward, does the First Minister not agree that the incident highlights why it would be far better for the taxation of the oil industry to be in the hands of an experienced former oil economist, rather than in those of a distant Government whose sole interest is to slash the budget deficit? **The First Minister:** Yes, I will rise to that challenge. If called, I will serve. Maureen Watt is quite right to quote George Osborne. I remember it—it was in 2007, shortly before the election of that year, if I remember correctly. George Osborne was arguing for stability in the oil tax regime in a way that reflected the challenges of marginal fields, heavy oilfields and gas fields. We reminded George Osborne of that at the meeting that was held with him about two weeks ago. I have some anxiety about the issue, which affects about 15,000 people in Scotland. It is estimated that there will be 15,000 fewer jobs in Scotland in 10 years’ time than there would be if these changes had not been proposed in the manner that they were. I have gratefully accepted the support of the Labour Party in Scotland on the issue, as has been said to the chancellor in our submission. Above all, three detailed points have been advanced for improving jobs prospects in Scotland. I hope that the whole Parliament recognises the importance of the industry in our economy, and the crucial importance of 15,000 jobs. Whatever difficulties there are with the Liberal-Tory coalition, I hope that the Scottish Parliament can put the interests of Scottish workers at a paramount level and support those three initiatives to bring stability and to ensure that investment in the North Sea is not interrupted. **Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Does the First Minister recognise the further concern in the oil and gas industry regarding the chancellor’s proposals to tax helicopter journeys to and from work in the North Sea on the same basis as journeys by luxury business jets? Does he support the representations that were made this week on the matter by business and local government in the north-east? If he agrees with those representations, what action will he take to support them? **The First Minister:** Yes, I agree with them. I understand that that proposal is in the process of being reinterpreted, which I hope represents progress. However, is this not another argument for air passenger duty being devolved to this Parliament? Here, we would recognise the importance of helicopter flights to and from North Sea installations, would we not?

Fuel Poverty Budget

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will review its changes to the fuel poverty budget in light of the announcement of price increases by Scottish Power. **The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** The issue of price increases is very serious. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth met the chief executive officer of Scottish Power energy wholesale and retail on Tuesday and reiterated the Scottish Government’s concern about the proposed price rises. Scottish Government programmes to improve energy efficiency and address fuel poverty for Scotland’s households through advice and new installations and heating systems will be supported by a budget of £48 million this year. The equivalent spend in 2006-07 on installation of central heating was £45.8 million. **Richard Baker:** Does the First Minister agree that the most substantial contribution that energy companies can make to tackling fuel poverty is through exercising restraint on prices, particularly given that the increases hit poorest households the hardest? Given the reduction in fuel poverty spending in the Scottish Government’s most recent budget, does he agree that the next budget should include appropriate investment in tackling fuel poverty and making more homes energy efficient? **The First Minister:** I will say two things. I just mentioned the figures, which indicate that, even in these incredibly pressing times, the budget is higher than the one that we inherited in 2006-07. Also, the member should know that, in his talks with Scottish Power, the finance secretary identified £10 million of unspent expenditure through the Scottish Power scheme, which we can now discuss with our local authority partners, to see how it can be deployed to help people further with energy efficiency. I know that Richard Baker would be the first to acknowledge that Brenda Boardman, a fellow of the University of Oxford, who established the definition of fuel poverty, said of the Scottish energy assistance package: “This is the best UK exemplar in terms of providing both a comprehensive approach ... and to linking ... assistance to the energy inefficiency of the home.” **Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP):** I am concerned that the price rise will add to the 50 per cent of senior citizens in Inverclyde who already live in fuel poverty. Does the First Minister agree that the estimated extra £20 million in VAT receipts would be far better spent on tackling fuel poverty in Inverclyde and throughout Scotland, as opposed to propping up the Treasury’s coffers? **The First Minister:** Yes, I do. John Swinney identified £10 million of expenditure. He has also referred the matter to the Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets, the energy regulator. It is true that, even at 5 per cent, the additional revenue from the energy price increases, if they were repeated across the sector, which unfortunately seems likely to be a trend, would bring in another £20 million to the Exchequer. At the very least, the additional VAT as a result of the price rises that energy companies are proposing should be devoted to further bolstering the energy efficiency and fuel poverty programmes in Scotland and throughout these islands.

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government’s position is on the findings of the global entrepreneurship monitor’s report for Scotland 2010. **The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** The GEM report is a useful contribution to our understanding of individuals’ entrepreneurship ambitions and perceptions about starting a business in Scotland, but it is, of course, a survey of aspirations.

On the statistics, I know that Gavin Brown will recognise that, pre-recession, there was a higher increase in new business registrations in Scotland and that, although there has been a decline since the recession, the decline in registrations in Scotland has been less than the decline across the United Kingdom as a whole. **Gavin Brown:** Some Governments like to gloss over bad news more than others do—and then there is the Scottish Government. The GEM report showed that we have a low rate of entrepreneurial activity. Our rate is significantly lower than the rate in England, lower than the rate in Wales and lower even than the rate in the arc of prosperity. At the weekend, five enterprise groups called for a national entrepreneurial action plan. Will the First Minister pledge to deliver that plan and will he pledge that it should be directed by a respected business leader? **The First Minister:** There were some good ideas in the suggestions that were made by the business organisations, and we will certainly be giving them the closest examination. I have to say that for a supporter of the Conservative-Liberal coalition in Westminster to talk about glossing over bad news is quite remarkable. I accept that one swallow does not make a summer and one set of statistics does not make a recovery; we need a run of statistics, such as the six-month fall in unemployment in Scotland, which will be welcomed across the chamber. Further, Gavin Brown might have noted in the statistics that were published yesterday that self-employment in Scotland stood at 388,000, which is a 6 per cent rise on this time last year. Those figures are for only one quarter but, nevertheless, they are a firm indication of a significant and positive trend with regard to self-employment in Scotland.

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3 UK Government **3.1 Press Releases**

[UK Ministers lobby Europe against 'socially regressive' maternity proposals](#) Employment Minister; will visit Brussels to continue the UK Government's lobbying on the Pregnant Workers Directive.

[Government publishes financial regulation White Paper and draft Bill](#) The Government has published its financial regulation White Paper and draft Bill. These provide further detail on the Government's proposed reforms to the financial regulatory regime within the UK.

[CC states case on competition reform](#) The Competition Commission has published its formal response to the Government's consultation on reforms to the UK competition regime.

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4 UK Parliament **4.1 Chamber Business**

House of Commons

Monday 20 June 2011

Oral Questions - Communities and local Government, including Topical Questions

Legislation - Pensions Bill - Second reading

Tuesday 21 June 2011

Oral Questions - HM Treasury, including Topical Questions

Legislation - Scotland Bill - Report stage & Third reading

Wednesday 22 June 2011

Oral Questions - Scotland, including Topical Questions

Prime Minister's Question Time

Thursday 23 June 2011

Oral Questions - Transport, including Topical Questions, Women and Equalities

House of Lords

Monday 20 June 2011

Legislation - Localism Bill - Committee of the whole House

Tuesday 21 June 2011

Debate - Reform of the House of Lords

Wednesday 22 June 2011

Debate - Reform of the House of Lords

Thursday 23 June 2011

Legislation - Estates of Deceased Persons (Forfeiture Rule and Law of Succession) Bill - Third reading

Legislation - European Union Bill - Third reading

Legislation - Localism Bill - Committee of the whole House

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Tuesday 21 June 2011

Science and Technology: Nuclear Research and Development Capabilities

Wednesday 22 June 2011

Constitution: discuss recent referendums on the electoral system and other topical issues.

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UK Government Bill	Description	Parliamentary progress
Fixed-term Parliaments Bill	The Bill fixes the date of the next General Election at 7 May 2015, and provides for five-year fixed terms.	HofC Stages Complete Ping Pong
Postal Services Bill	Make provision for the restructuring of the Royal Mail group and about the Royal Mail Pension Plan; to make new provision about the regulation of postal services.	Passed – 09/06/11
Public Bodies etc Bill	To make provision for conferring powers on Ministers of the Crown in relation to certain public bodies and offices, to confer powers on Welsh Ministers in relation to environmental public bodies, to make provision in relation to forestry, to make provision about amendment of Schedule 1 to the Superannuation Act 1972.	HofL Stages Complete 2nd Reading – TBC
Energy Bill	A Bill to make provision for the arrangement and financing of energy efficiency improvements to be made to properties by owners and occupiers	HofL Stages Complete Committee Stage – 21/06/11
Scotland Bill	A Bill to amend the Scotland Act 1998 and make provision about the functions of the Scottish Ministers; and for connected purposes	Report Stage – 21/06/11
Pensions Bill	A Bill to make provision relating to pensions; and for connected purposes.	HofL Stages Complete 2 ND Reading – 20/06/11
Welfare Reform Bill	A Bill to make provision for universal credit and personal independence payment; to make other provision about social security and tax credits; to make provision about the functions of the registration service, child support maintenance and the use of jobcentres	HofC Stages Complete Second Reading – TBC

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[The EU budget review: Towards a strong and more efficient use of tax-payers money](#)

[Transport: New rules to establish a more competitive rail market](#)

[Data Protection: Europeans share data online, but privacy concerns remain – new survey](#)

[Environment: Bathing water quality remains high around the EU](#)

[Maritime Safety: Commission requests nine States to comply with EU vessel traffic monitoring and information system regime](#)

[Commission proposes to revamp rules to protect EU workers from harmful electromagnetic fields](#)

[Commission launches search for European Green Capital 2014](#)

Council Meetings

Environment Council - the Council will discuss progress regarding the proposed review of the directive on control of major-accident hazards involving dangerous substances. Ministers will note a progress report on proposals to allow member states to restrict or ban the cultivation of genetically modified organisms in their territory. The authorisation of GMO food, feed and seeds for sale within the EU would not be affected and remains a decision taken at EU level. The Council is also expected to adopt conclusions on the protection of water resources and integrated sustainable water management, the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, and a Roadmap for moving to a competitive low-carbon economy in 2050.

European Council -Heads of state or government will discuss economic issues. They will conclude the first phase of the "European semester"- the new cycle of economic policy coordination under the Europe 2020 strategy -, by assessing the commitments made by member states in their national reform programmes and stability and convergence programmes. On this basis, the European Council will endorse country-specific opinions and recommendations.

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