



■ Pete Wishart MP.

Perth bids in Commons to be UK's newest city

By Campbell Gunn

PERTH will bid to be the newest city in the UK in the House of Commons this week.

Its call for official city status will be heard in Westminster on Tuesday, after Perth and North Perthshire MP Pete Wishart secured a debate in the House of Commons.

However, Mr Wishart claimed the competition for a new city in the UK favoured large English towns.

The UK Government recently outlined plans for a city status competition to celebrate the Queen's Diamond jubilee year, 2012.

During the debate, Mr Wishart will question the UK Government's plans to award city status to only one town from across the UK, as well as pressing home the case for Perth.

Irresistible

He said that Perth had an irresistible claim to secure its place as Scotland's next official city.

"This debate is a great opportunity to make that case, and build on the work done in raising Perth's profile during its 800th anniversary.

"It's disappointing that the UK Government is only offering city status to one candidate from across all of the UK.

"It would have been far better to initiate separate competitions in each of the nations, as in the Golden Jubilee competitions, or multiple cities from across the UK as happened in the Millennium competition," he claimed.

"These plans are clearly unsatisfactory and I fear will favour large English candidate towns with more resources and easier access to the decision making centre.

"It is not too late for the UK Government to organise separate competitions for each of the nations of the UK, or make provisions for more than one city securing city status with a range of candidates from across the UK."

Scots doctor fears African child abuse hell

By Euan Duguid

A SCOTTISH doctor fears a war-torn African nation he's devoted years to helping is being targeted by western paedophiles.

The respected doctor, who has declined to be named for fear of repercussions by the predators, has deep concerns that the wider international charity effort to rebuild Liberia could now be undermined by the sinister development.

The consultant anaesthetist, who is originally from Dundee and has spent two decades working in impoverished west African nations, recently flew to the country's capital city, Monrovia, to visit various charity projects he privately supports, including a school and orphanage.

But during a meeting with friends, who live in the city, he learned of the disturbing allegations which centre around the case of an American national who is currently being held in Monrovia's jail for alleged sex offences against children.

According to local reports, the 53-year-old American citizen was arrested earlier this year and charged with rape and sexually

abusing three Liberian girls, aged 11, 13 and 19.

The alleged offences occurred between 2008 and January 2010.

Last night the doctor said, "The American who is currently being held, from the information I was told, was apparently running a guest house for people from America who were coming over to try to adopt Liberian children."

Stable home

In January last year Liberia suspended adoptions because of allegations of mismanagement and corruption in the adoption process.

The Scottish doctor added, however, that well placed sources in the country also told him the ongoing ban has been put in place to prevent an apparent wider problem of paedophiles exploiting the country's orphans.

But that has impacted on genuine foster parents, who are now unable to adopt children desperately in need of a stable home.

Our source added, "Sadly, it seems that Monrovia may have become a focus for people with paedophile tendencies because there are so many orphans — a legacy of Aids and 14 years of civil war."

He fears the goodwill and trust built over the years by western aid agencies could now be damaged.

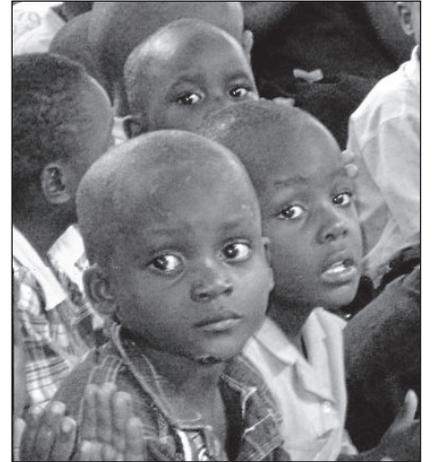
He added, "If people from the west are coming over to abuse African children, that conflicts with charities who are working on the ground trying to save them.

"You have the real risk that all Americans and Europeans are banded in the same bracket.

"I'm absolutely appalled at the idea of predatory paedophiles coming into the country and targeting vulnerable people.

"In an impoverished situation there's scope for a lot of good, but there's obviously potential for abusive people to do their worst."

■ LIBERIA'S CIVIL war (1989-2003) displaced nearly a third of the country's 3.4 million people and caused more than 250,000 deaths.



■ Orphans in Monrovia, Liberia.

As terrified families fled bush battles, children were lost.

Some joined the ranks of drugged-up child soldiers, either by choice or coercion, others were taken into orphanages.

Today, there are estimated to be over 36,000 orphans as a result of HIV/Aids alone, with thousands more orphaned by the war.

Tougher action urged over blind cord deaths

EU blasted over delays in safety crackdown

THE Scottish Government has blasted Brussels over delays in cracking down on a deadly hazard to children.

Community Safety Minister Fergus Ewing says the European Commission must speed up moves to counter the threat of looped cords on blinds.

He was backed last night by the parents of a Scots girl who died after being strangled by a blind-cord.

Mr Ewing said, "Sadly, there have already been five blind-cord related deaths in the UK this year — tragic accidents involving young children despite attempts by their parents to make their household a place of safety.

"In every case, a parent or guardian's back was turned for just a few seconds.

"Yet that was all the time it took for tragedy to strike.

"Tougher action needs to be taken at a legislative level.

"I'm writing to the European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, John Dalli, tomorrow, demanding the EC's work to improve the relevant European standard on blinds is speeded up and completed as soon as possible.

"Having a robust and effective legislative framework in place is essential in preventing more deaths, so work to improve the standard must be completed as a matter of priority.

EXCLUSIVE

By Bob Smyth

"Let nobody doubt the Scottish Government's view — the framework regarding safety of blind-cords is not strong enough and that needs to be addressed now."

Two-year-old Muireann McLaughlin died in 2008 when she slipped while waving from a window.

She knocked herself unconscious and fell into the looped cord of a blind.

Her parents, Angus and Kate, from Menstrie, support Mr Ewing's comments.

Angus said, "We're very pleased the importance of the message is finally getting through to those who can make decisions and put their weight behind legislative changes and make a difference.

Committed

"Kate and I are only interested in preventing this from happening to another family. Anything we can do, we will."

The couple's MP, Gordon Banks, has been calling for Westminster to enforce tighter regulation of the UK blind industry and the redesign of corded blinds.

He agrees that action at European level has to move faster.



■ Kate and Angus McLaughlin with daughter Aine.

He said, "It's six months since the US Consumer Product Safety Commission, Health Canada and the European Directorate General for Consumers wrote a joint letter calling for stronger safety standards to be adopted swiftly."

A European Commission spokeswoman said, "We're committed to put in place requirements that significantly enhance the safety of blinds and corded window coverings.

"The current safety standard does not cover certain models of blinds, such as Roman shades.

"It also relies on instruc-

tions, warnings and external safety devices.

"Consumers do not always pay attention to the warnings and safety devices are not always installed correctly."

The new proposals will be agreed by member states by July, then go to CEN, the European standardisation body, which will finalise the safety standard by the end of 2011.

It could then take another six months for members such as the UK to implement it.

The draft proposals suggest cords and chains shouldn't form loops or, if

they do, should have safety devices that would make loops inaccessible to children or break the loops.

■ At least two children die every year in the UK, strangled in the cords of a window covering.

Estimates show nine children in the EU between 15 and 36 months died this way in the last two years.

In the US, 119 children have died since 1999.

Experts recommend not installing cords in children's bedrooms and using cleats, cord tidies, clips, ties or a wall clamp to get rid of hanging cords.