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Thursday 19 January 2017

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Scottish Parliament

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[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

General Question Time

Green Investment Bank

1. Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding reports of potential asset stripping when the Edinburgh-based Green Investment Bank is transferred to the private sector. (S5O-00569)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): Since 2015, the Scottish Government has made repeated representations—including yesterday and today, as it happens—to the United Kingdom Government about the strategic importance of the green purpose of the bank; the significance of the retention of the Edinburgh headquarters; and, of course, the related jobs.

Ash Denham: I welcome the Scottish Government's action in relaying those concerns, which I am sure are shared by many members on all sides of the chamber.

It is disappointing that the Tory Government has not continued to help the Green Investment Bank to flourish. As an Edinburgh MSP, however, my concern is for the 55 jobs that are based in the city. Has the UK Government given any assurance that those jobs will be protected?

Keith Brown: I share Ash Denham's concerns about those jobs and the green purpose of the bank. I received a partial reassurance from the UK Government in yesterday's phone conversation to the effect that the strategic importance to Scotland of the bank itself will be fully considered as part of on-going discussions around its privatisation.

I spoke to the UK Government Minister of State for Climate Change and Industry. During that conversation, I pressed for greater transparency around the privatisation process and for confirmation that the bank will continue to be headquartered in Edinburgh, along with the 55 jobs that I mentioned.

I should say that it seems passing strange that virtually every newspaper in the country has mentioned the name of the preferred bidder for the bank, and yet the UK minister, in our conversation yesterday, would not confirm—even at this stage, when everyone else in the world seems to know—who the preferred bidder is.

I believe—as I am sure Ash Denham does—that headquartering the bank in Scotland is extremely important. There was a campaign to ensure that that happened, and it succeeded. It is important not only because we have the pool of expertise that is needed to support that function but because the bank is symbolic of Scotland's role as a leader in the green energy sector. That in turn helps to sustain and support the Scottish Government's reputation, which has been boosted not least by our winning a circular economy award, along with previous awards relating to climate change. The bank is extremely important to Scotland and we will continue to make representations.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

Ash Denham is right to highlight the potential impact on jobs, which may affect my constituents in Edinburgh Southern. What assurances have been made, and what role can the Scottish Government play in engaging with potential purchasers of the Green Investment Bank? Has the Scottish Government had any guarantees from the UK Government to that effect?

Keith Brown: As I said, the assurances have been somewhat partial. That is true for the issues around jobs, the headquarters function and the green purpose of the bank. For each of those areas, we have pressed the UK Government to make a good point about the discussions that we could have with preferred bidders.

I think that we are now at the stage of having a preferred bidder rather than a series of bidders. We will do—and are doing—what we can, but it would be much easier if the UK Government could at least confirm who the preferred bidder is. It is very difficult at present to ensure that we have those discussions, but we are not being passive on the matter. Members will be able to see more of what is happening when more becomes clear in the course of time.

I assure Daniel Johnson, who, like Ash Denham, is a member for Edinburgh with an interest in the matter, that we are pressing very hard in a number of different forums not just for the existing 55 jobs to be maintained but to ensure that the number is increased. There is a possibility that that will happen, but we want those jobs to be high-quality headquarters jobs.

In addition, we want to ensure that the green purpose of the bank is maintained. I am also pressing very hard to ensure that we are not about to see asset stripping as part of a private takeover. Those issues are being pressed, and if the member wants to discuss them further with me, I am happy to do so.

Crown Estate (Social Remit)

2. Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made in providing the Crown Estate with a social remit as part of the devolution arrangements. (S5O-00570)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Control over the management and resources of the Crown Estate in Scotland should rest with the people of Scotland. We are currently undertaking a public consultation, which was launched on 4 January, to help to shape the long-term arrangements for the management of Crown Estate assets in Scotland. The consultation contains our proposals and options on how those assets can be managed differently in future, which cover the overall aims of the estate and opportunities for further devolution.

Richard Lochhead: I am sure that the cabinet secretary will agree that the hard-won devolution that allows Parliament to provide a social and economic remit to the Crown Estate will help the likes of tenant farmers in Glenlivet and Fochabers and communities such as Tomintoul and Portgordon in my constituency, and of course communities elsewhere in Scotland, to have much more say over their own future. Will the cabinet secretary ensure that her officials keep those communities up to date through the consultation process and beyond?

The surplus that the Crown Estate usually generates would previously have gone to the United Kingdom Treasury. Are there any prospects of any surplus being retained by the Crown Estate to reinvest into those communities?

Roseanna Cunningham: My officials and I have met stakeholders, including representatives of the rural estates. We are happy to meet any community representatives who wish to speak to us about the issue. Anyone with an interest in the transfer should approach officials about arranging a meeting.

On whether the surplus can be used for investment, the Scotland Act 2016 requires the Crown Estate to be managed as an estate in land or as estates in land managed separately, which would require primary legislation. We need to maintain the Estate and there is provision for on-going investment in each financial year for that purpose.

The consultation outlines our intention to continue funding maintenance and investment costs in the longer term. That includes the management of liabilities from gross revenue or the capital budget.

We have committed to provide councils with the net revenue from marine assets out to 12 nautical miles. We are making provision for the interim body to retain a portion of revenue for investment in the Estate. In addition, the Scottish ministers have discretion to vary the proportion retained and we will keep the issue under review.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I was very interested in that answer. An interest that I have—I held it during my time on the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee in the previous parliamentary session—is the redefinition of the Crown Estate's remit on social inclusion and sustainable development and its mission statement.

Although it is reassuring that the cabinet secretary stresses that the consultation has been initiated, can she give further reassurance that it will be widely publicised, so that marine harbour groups, coastal communities and, indeed, tenant farmers, as highlighted by Richard Lochhead, will have the best opportunity to be involved in developing the policy, which will allow us to have a really inclusive Crown Estate for the future?

Roseanna Cunningham: I can reassure Claudia Beamish about that. It is important that all communities with an interest in any aspect of the Crown Estate's workings look at the consultation and consider whether they can contribute. Sometimes, the tendency is to presume that it is only local councils and/or some of the bigger estates that might have an interest, whereas relatively small bodies and organisations will be key to the work.

We want to hear the widest possible range of views, so work is on-going to ensure that we get out and about and that communities understand that they, too, can play a role. I ask members in the chamber to ensure that, where there are Crown Estate interests in their constituencies, they generate as much interest in the consultation as they possibly can.

Youth Unemployment

3. Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how it is tackling youth unemployment. (S5O-00571)

The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn): In December 2016, I published the second "Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy" annual report, which highlighted the progress that we are making towards the programme's headline target of reducing 2014 levels of youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2021.

The report highlighted developments in growing vocational provision for young people in the senior

phase, including growth in our modern apprenticeship programme, a significant expansion of foundation apprenticeships, establishing 17 of the 21 planned developing the young workforce regional groups and investing in the earlier introduction of careers advice, refocusing activity across our youth employment programmes on young people who need the most support.

Annie Wells: The Scottish Government's progress report into its national drive to tackle youth unemployment revealed that the number of jobless youngsters increased over the past year by 2.4 per cent to 42,000. Last month, the Scottish Government missed a great opportunity for young people in the job market after it failed to ring fence the £221 million in apprenticeship levy funds. How can we ensure that young people are given opportunities in skilled training and that that decision on the funds will not discourage businesses from relocating apprenticeships elsewhere?

Jamie Hepburn: Annie Wells failed to mention the fact that Scotland continues to outperform the United Kingdom on youth employment, unemployment and inactivity rates. She also failed to mention the fact that Scotland's youth unemployment is at its lowest rate since those statistics began to be gathered and, indeed, is the second-lowest youth unemployment rate in the European Union.

I am surprised to hear the Conservatives once again mention their apprenticeship levy. Let us never forget that the UK Government introduced the levy without prior notification or consultation with the Scottish Government. Of course, that £221 million is not new funding for the Scottish Government to spend. It replaces existing funding and, indeed, when we take account of the £73 million cost to the public sector, it reduces the Scottish Government's spending leeway by some £30 million.

However, through our draft budget, we are investing significant resource in supporting young people into employment. We have £81.5 million to increase modern apprenticeships; £11.5 million to expand graduate-level and foundation apprenticeships; £9.3 million to support employers to recruit young people who face barriers to employment; a new flexible workforce development fund of £10 million; £3.9 million to support individual learning accounts; an increase of £16.4 million in workforce budget to support the delivery of a devolved employability service from April 2017; and other funding to support young people into employment. That is why I am sure that, once they properly assess the budget, Annie Wells and the rest of the Conservatives will have to support its passage through the Parliament.

Joint Ministerial Working Group on Welfare (Meetings)

4. **Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when the joint ministerial working group on welfare will next meet and what will be discussed. (S5O-00572)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): The next joint ministerial working group on welfare meeting is scheduled to take place on Monday 20 February. The agenda for that meeting is still to be finalised.

Mark Griffin: The Scottish Government has announced a welcome consultation on using flexibilities in universal credit to make more frequent payments. What discussions about split payments have there been at the joint ministerial working group? Why is the Government not progressing with a consultation on that measure at the same time? It could, for example, prevent the social security system from forcing a woman who is experiencing domestic abuse to be financially dependent on her abusive partner.

Angela Constance: I assure Mark Griffin that we are looking very closely indeed at split payments. Some intensive work and discussion are going on between Scottish Government officials and Department for Work and Pensions officials.

We are also taking the time to consider all the consultation responses—there were more than 500—on the way ahead for social security. Split payments was one of the issues that people pressed home hard to the Scottish Government as part of the consultation. We are examining the issue closely. We have to find ways to enact political will—we have to find the delivery mechanisms—and will keep Parliament and the Social Security Committee fully informed as we proceed.

Residential Property (Short-term Letting)

5. **Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will take action to regulate growth in short-term letting of residential property. (S5O-00573)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): The Scottish Government has no plans to regulate the growth in short-term letting. However, we recognise that some concerns exist and we welcome the opportunity to engage further with stakeholders on the matter.

Our Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016 will come into force later this year. It will provide security, stability and predictability for tenants through measures that include a new

modern tenancy, rent increases being possible only once in every 12 months and tenants having three months' notice of changes to enable them to budget accordingly. In addition, councils will have the power to apply to ministers for a cap on rent increases in their areas for up to five years, and there will be a broadening of access to dispute resolution through the housing and property chamber of the First-tier Tribunal.

Andy Wightman: Over the past few weeks, I have been speaking to constituents who live in the old town and the Grassmarket in Edinburgh. It is clear that there is a substantial problem with unregulated growth in short-term holiday lets. A substantial part of the residential population in those areas might disappear within the next decade. Very audible sex parties have taken place in the flat above one constituent, and an elderly couple are now living out the rest of their years lonely in a tenement stair that has lost all its other permanent residents. Others with young families live in a state of stress and anxiety due to the rent-seeking behaviour of a growing number of property owners.

Does the minister agree that a tighter regulatory framework is required for use of residential property? In particular, does he agree that the planning system—specifically use-classes orders—could play a significant role in ensuring that communities and councils have the tools that they need to regulate the residential character of not only the city of Edinburgh but many villages and rural areas across Scotland?

Kevin Stewart: I sympathise with the people in the stories that Andy Wightman gave us, but the planning system cannot always readily distinguish between different types of housing tenure. Where a householder proposes to change the use of an existing residential flat, the requirement for planning permission will depend on the circumstances of each individual case, and the matter will be for the planning authority concerned, in the first instance. Mr Wightman might want to engage in the current planning consultation and urge the residents to whom he has spoken to do so, too.

Crime (Recording)

6. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it is content with the way that it records crime. (S5O-00574)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): Yes. The Scottish Government records crime using the Scottish crime and justice survey and police recorded crime statistics. Both measures tell a similar story of falling crime levels.

The production of our police recorded crime statistics is carried out by independent statisticians and is overseen by the Scottish crime recording board. That ensures that the data are transparent, trustworthy and produced in line with the “Code of Practice for Official Statistics”.

The success of that approach was confirmed just last year when the UK Statistics Authority designated our recorded crime data as national statistics and sent its congratulations to the Scottish Government on the leading approach that our statisticians are taking to improve the value of that information and users' understanding of it. That contrasts with the position in England and Wales: the UK Statistics Authority will not assess their statistics until there is an improvement in police recording practices.

Douglas Ross: The Scottish Government issues press releases with misleading figures for crimes of violence when the true figures are much higher. The cabinet secretary will know that the Office for National Statistics, in its figures for England and Wales, makes no distinction between different levels of violence. Why does he not agree with Derek Penman of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland, who said:

“It's important crime is classified correctly so data published ... provides the public with an accurate picture of violent crime.”?

Michael Matheson: Douglas Ross might not be aware of this, but the classification of recorded crime and offences in Scotland has been exactly the same since the 1920s. Therefore, the process that this Administration has used is the same as that which has been used by every Administration since the 1920s. It is clear that the member had absolutely no idea about that.

On HMICS's recommendation on looking at aspects of the statistics, the Scottish crime recording board is already taking forward that work. That work is on-going and will be considered in the coming weeks.

Despite Douglas Ross's efforts to try to undermine our statistics for Scotland, they are, because of the excellent standards that we apply, the only statistics of that nature that have national classification.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The cabinet secretary might be aware that “Wildlife Crime in Scotland—2015 Annual Report” came under scrutiny recently in the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee. It was revealed that a number of bird of prey persecution incidents from two years ago were withheld from the report despite details from other sources being in the public domain. Will the cabinet secretary undertake to investigate why that information was withheld, and will he say what

Police Scotland can do to ensure that wildlife crime reporting is transparent, accurate and has the confidence of the public?

Michael Matheson: Classification and the way issues are recorded in the statistics are developed by statisticians, and the approach must comply with the code of practice that is applied to recording of crime statistics. I have no doubt that if the Scottish crime recording board believes that there is a need for any alterations, it can consider that issue, as we move forward with any changes that could take place. However, I will ensure that Mark Ruskell receives a full and detailed response on the specific nature of wildlife crimes.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con): To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S5F-00751)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Ruth Davidson: Bev Robertson helps to run a small engineering business called Precision Oiltools in Kintore, which employs 12 people. She has just found out that her business rates will go up by 63 per cent in April. This morning, she described that as

"nothing short of daylight robbery".

Does the First Minister think that such an increase for a small local firm is acceptable?

The First Minister: Of course, 2017 is a business rates revaluation year and, in such a year, all commercial premises have their property value reassessed by the independent assessor. The Scottish Government has no locus to intervene in that process. As Ruth Davidson will be aware, assessors published draft revaluations online before the end of the year. Those will be subject to change when revaluation notices are posted out in March. Crucially, all ratepayers will have until 30 September this year to appeal their revaluation if they think that it is wrong. That is the process of revaluation that is under way.

All that said, the Government recognises the importance of having a fair and competitive business rates regime. That is why Derek Mackay announced in the budget our plans to lift 100,000 small businesses across the country out of business rates altogether. I do not know whether the business that Ruth Davidson cited will benefit from the small business bonus, but 100,000 businesses across our country will pay no rates at all, such is the importance that we attach to small businesses acting as the engine of growth in our economy.

Ruth Davidson: There was absolutely nothing in that answer for Bev Robertson's business and her 12 employees.

Bev's firm is not alone. Yesterday, we spoke to another engineering firm, Score Group, which is based in Peterhead. It is a fantastic firm that runs the largest private apprenticeship programme anywhere in the country, but it has now discovered that it will have to pay an extra £120,000 come April, and it fears that it will have to turn

apprentices away as a result. Yesterday, its managing director, Conrad Ritchie, told us:

“We have some of the highest rates here and this increase will price many businesses out of the markets they compete in locally, nationally or worldwide.”

The company’s chamber of commerce says that that will

“drive firms which have managed to stay afloat into insolvency or at best lead to further job losses.”

That is the reality. What action will the First Minister consider to help out businesses such as Score Group?

The First Minister: If Ruth Davidson had listened to my first answer, she would have heard what I had to say. I stress again, because it is important, that the businesses that Ruth Davidson cites do fantastic work in our country to help us to grow the economy. This Government is on the side of business the length and breadth of the country.

However, the process that Ruth Davidson cites is a revaluation that is being carried out by independent assessors. The kind of increases that Ruth Davidson mentioned are tied to increases in the rateable value of premises. I have already outlined the process. Draft valuations have been published and final valuations will be published later this year, but all businesses have until September to submit appeals if they think that their valuation is wrong.

Ruth Davidson asked what we are doing to support small businesses that employ people and contribute to the economic success of our country. As I said, the small business bonus, which goes way beyond anything in any other part of the United Kingdom, is lifting 100,000 small businesses out of business rates altogether. Ruth Davidson might also be interested to learn that, in 2017-18—the financial year that is about to start—more than half of all rateable properties in Scotland will pay nothing at all in rates, because of the small business bonus and the range of other business rates reliefs that are in place.

Of course I understand the concerns that will arise for businesses from revaluation. That is why I stress the independent nature of that process and the ability of businesses to appeal. However, the Government has ensured that we have a competitive small business rates regime; indeed, it is probably the most competitive small business rates regime anywhere in the UK, because that is the importance that we attach to small businesses.

Ruth Davidson: Yet, in a double whammy, both Precision Oiltools and Score Group have been hit by the doubling of the business supplement that the Scottish Government instituted overnight.

Those stories come in a week in which we learn that growth in Scotland is now a third of what it is elsewhere in the UK. Liz Cameron, from Scottish Chambers of Commerce, says:

“Scottish government actions must be aimed squarely at increasing this rate of growth and utilising the powers at its disposal to support businesses, giving them the edge over businesses in other parts of the UK and enabling them to grow.”

Does the First Minister really believe that setting higher taxes—putting higher burdens on employers, such as Score and Precision Oiltools—helps to do that?

The First Minister: I will repeat the facts again for Ruth Davidson: 100,000 small business premises across the country have been taken out of business rates altogether. The threshold for the large business supplement has increased, meaning that fewer businesses will be subject to it. As I presume Ruth Davidson is aware, a wider review of business rates that is being led by Ken Barclay is under way to ensure that we continue to have a competitive and fair business rates regime. That is the kind of action that Liz Cameron rightly calls for from the Scottish Government, ensuring that we support our businesses.

Ruth Davidson mentioned apprenticeships. Let me just remind her that it is a Conservative Government that is imposing the apprenticeship levy on businesses above a certain size the length and breadth of the country. It is not the Scottish Government—[*Interruption.*] Ruth Davidson is shouting at me from her seat about how we are spending that money. Let me remind her that it is not new money—what we get from that levy, the UK Government has taken away in other ways. All that money is being spent on supporting training, skills and apprenticeships across the country. We will continue to support our businesses.

However, the last thing that our businesses need right now, whether they are in Scotland or in other parts of the UK, is to be ripped out of the world’s biggest single market. That is the future that they face because of a Conservative Government’s obsession with immigration, rather than putting the interests of the economy first. We will continue to provide fair support through the business rates scheme to our businesses, but we will also continue to argue that our businesses should continue to be free to trade in the European single market.

Ruth Davidson: Whenever the First Minister is under pressure, she runs to Brexit, but the truth of the matter is that Precision Oiltools did not raise Brexit today but raised the increase in its rates bill that is happening right now; and Score Group did not write to me about Europe but wanted to talk about the Scottish National Party Government’s failure to support it. Scottish Chambers of

Commerce has said specifically that if we are drawn into tunnel vision on Europe, we will miss the chance to transform Scotland's attractiveness as a place to do business. That is what the First Minister should be focusing on.

The facts are these: unemployment in Scotland is up, employment is down and, while confidence for small firms in other parts of the UK is going up, here it is falling through the floor. Yet we have a finance secretary who has hidden from companies that say that rates are pushing them to the wall, and we have a Government that taxes people and firms more in Scotland than anywhere else in the UK and which, again this week, is threatening further instability with its own referendum—this time another one on independence.

The Scottish Government is about to present the most important budget since devolution, which will decide on the taxes that Scots pay. Will the First Minister stick to her current plan to make Scotland the most highly taxed part of the UK, driving out businesses and jobs or will she change course and give Bev, Score Group and thousands of people like them the backing that they need to succeed? That is the question to focus on. How is she going to act?

The First Minister: Let me point out a few facts to Ruth Davidson. First, the Lloyds Bank report "Business in Britain", which was published on 3 January, shows that business confidence is increasing markedly in Scotland, more so than in the rest of the UK. Let us look at employment in the tourism sector, which is up by 11 per cent in Scotland, compared with just 4 per cent in the rest of the UK. This morning, the Scottish Retail Consortium showed retail sales increasing. The latest Bank of Scotland purchasing managers index is signalling that Scotland's private sector output and employment returned to growth in December. Unemployment is down over the year. Gross domestic product per head is up 2.2 per cent in Scotland since before the recession; the figure in the rest of the UK is much lower than that—I think that it is 1.5 per cent there. The Government will continue to do everything that it can to support our business community.

Let me also remind Ruth Davidson of some other facts that I know are not very welcome for her. Let us look at this ridiculous claim about Scotland being the highest-taxed part of the UK. If someone is a taxpayer in Scotland, they do not pay tuition fees for their children to go to university. If their elderly parent is in care, they do not pay for personal care. They have a healthcare system that is free at the point of use. Taxpayers in Scotland get a far better deal than taxpayers in the rest of the UK.

Finally, on Brexit, I am determined to save Scotland from Brexit. It is not just the case that the

Tories are running towards Brexit. They want to drag Scotland kicking and screaming over that Brexit cliff edge, and I am determined that they are not going to get away with it.

Engagements

2. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the week. (S5F-00750)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Still engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Kezia Dugdale: Our national health service is on the verge of a "system breakdown". Those are the stark words of the chairman of the British Medical Association in Scotland. Nowhere is that more obvious than in Glasgow, where new figures show that more than one in four patients are waiting longer than four hours in accident and emergency at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital. Last week, pregnant women were turned away, and this week the *Daily Record* told the harrowing tale of Karen Meikle, who had to travel 300 miles a day to see her sick child, Alex, because there were no beds in Glasgow. Does the First Minister agree with Dr Peter Bennie that Scotland's NHS is facing a "system breakdown"?

The First Minister: As I have readily said in the past, of course our NHS is working under pressure. The pressures that come from the changing demographics and the ageing population mean that we need to do even more to support our national health service. That is why we are investing more in our NHS—over the current session of Parliament, £500 million more than the rate of inflation. I remind Kezia Dugdale, as I frequently do, that the commitment from Labour was simply to increase funding by inflation. The commitment from this Government is greater, and that is helping to support record numbers of staff.

However, as I have also said before, it is not enough just to invest more and to have more members of staff working in our health service; we also have to reform how our health service operates. That is why this Government, unlike any other Government across the United Kingdom, took action to integrate health and social care. It is why we are transferring investment from the health service into social care services. That is why we have the best performing accident and emergency departments in the UK and why we are starting to see delayed discharges going down.

There is much work to do, and of course our hard-working NHS staff work under considerable pressure, but we will continue to support them in doing the fantastic job that they do.

Kezia Dugdale: The First Minister can come to the chamber and attack Labour's health spending

plans every week, but that does not make what she says true. No wonder the BMA says that it is sick of SNP spin.

The problems in our NHS are not just confined to the central belt. Elaine Hanby from Nairn is a 48-year-old mother of two. She is the chairwoman of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Widows Association and she was diagnosed with a cataract two years ago. Her condition now impacts on her quality of life and her optician referred her to Raigmore hospital in Inverness for surgery. The Scottish Government target is that patients should wait no longer than 12 weeks for their first consultation, but Mrs Hanby was told to expect not a wait of 12 weeks but a minimum wait of 12 months. What explanation can the First Minister give Mrs Hanby and other cataract patients for the shocking waiting times in NHS Highland?

The First Minister: I am not going to comment on an individual case. As I repeatedly say, if there are individual cases that any member wants to raise with the health secretary, they should do so.

However, let me say this. This is a serious issue. Our NHS is perhaps the most serious issue that we discuss in the chamber. Of course we want waiting times to go even lower, but waiting times today, whether they are in-patient or out-patient waiting times or waiting times for accident and emergency services, are lower than they were when the Government first took office. Our responsibility is to continue to work with healthcare professionals to get those waiting times even lower than they are now.

Kezia Dugdale asks about what we are doing to bring that about. I know that it is uncomfortable for her, but what I said about her spending commitment is true. Anybody who doubts it does not have to take my word for it; they have only to read Kezia Dugdale's manifesto from the election campaign last year. Our commitment is to greater investment in the NHS than that promised by any other party in that election.

The commitment that was in our manifesto, which we are already in the process of implementing, is to expand capacity at the Golden Jubilee national hospital for operations such as cataract operations and to create more elective treatment centres around the country, so that we build capacity for those operations and, in the process, take pressure off our emergency services. That is all part of the reform that goes with our record investment in the NHS.

As I always do, I recognise each and every day the pressure that NHS staff work under, but the Government is committed to working with them to ensure that they continue to deliver excellent services all over the country.

Kezia Dugdale: There was little comfort in that for Mrs Hanby. Labour MSPs are dealing with cases just like that, from Caithness to Paisley and from Dumbarton to Aberdeen. Do we have to bring each and every individual case to Parliament for something to happen?

At the start of the First Minister's answer, she said that, if people have individual complaints, they should take them to the health secretary. That is exactly what Mrs Hanby did. She wrote to Shona Robison, and I have a copy of the response that she received last week. In it, the Government admits that a 12-month wait is "totally unacceptable", but its response was to give her a guide on how to travel to Europe for treatment. I have it here. If a 300-mile round trip can be described as "system breakdown" and a 12-month wait as "totally unacceptable", how would the First Minister describe a 3,000-mile round trip to Europe for treatment?

The First Minister: Our commitment, not just to the patient whose case Kezia Dugdale cites but to every patient across the country, is to provide the best-quality treatment as quickly as possible in every part of the country. That is what we are focused on and dedicated to delivering, in partnership with our NHS staff, each and every day.

I know that there is much work to be done. The nature of the NHS means that there will always be more work to be done, but I say again: waiting times, whether they are out-patient, in-patient or accident and emergency waiting times, are lower today than they were when the Government took office. That is because of our increased investment and the increased number of staff. We are committed to further increasing investment and also, crucially, to carrying out reforms in our NHS to ensure that it can cope with the pressures on it. That is our commitment, and we will continue to take forward that commitment, day in and day out.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are a number of constituency questions.

Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): Last week NHS Tayside took the decision temporarily to close the Mulberry unit, which is a mental health in-patient facility at Stracathro hospital, in my constituency. That decision was taken on safety grounds, because of a lack of junior psychiatric doctors to cover the three sites in Tayside. The closure will have a big impact on patients, their families and carers, and staff living in Angus. What will be done to mitigate the impact of the closure? What steps are being taken to encourage doctors into psychiatry? Will the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport meet me and service users in my constituency to discuss their serious concerns?

The First Minister: Patient safety is the absolute priority, and it is right that the board listens to the advice of its clinicians to ensure that all patients across Tayside continue to receive a safe service. The health board has assured the Scottish Government that the measure is temporary, and we will provide every support to the board and the local health and social care partnerships as they continue to work with their partners to develop a sustainable model for the longer term.

Through our national workforce plan, we are working with boards to identify further steps that can be taken to fill training posts in disciplines that have been harder to recruit to in recent years. NHS Tayside has already approved an attraction and recruitment strategy that is designed to support its workforce plan, including for psychiatry.

The health secretary will be happy to keep the member and any member who is interested in the issue fully up to date.

Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I draw the First Minister's attention to the announcement yesterday of the closure of the Airdrie Savings Bank after 182 years of trading. The closure has been forced by the level of regulation that now makes it very difficult—indeed, impossible—for a small community bank such as the Airdrie Savings Bank to survive in today's world. As a result, 70 people will lose their jobs. Can I have assurances from the First Minister that the Scottish Government and all its agencies will do everything that they can to ensure that the 70 people who face forced redundancy get the maximum help to find alternative employment, and that the Airdrie Savings Bank will be appropriately assisted by Scottish Enterprise and other agencies to ensure an orderly run-down, with productive use made of the bank's very fine premises in Airdrie and other parts of Lanarkshire?

The First Minister: Yes, I am happy to give Alex Neil those assurances. I am sure that we were all sad to hear the news from the Airdrie Savings Bank yesterday. The reality is that the bank is no longer able to compete in a very changed banking world—it is not of a scale to accommodate that change. The board has therefore made the difficult but responsible decision to wind down now in a controlled and orderly manner while customer deposits are absolutely safe and protected, and of course without the need for any public sector bailout. That reflects the bank's prudent, capable approach to banking—an approach that has served the local community well over many years and which will be so sadly missed.

I know that this will be an extremely difficult time for those affected: obviously, for the bank's customers, but perhaps more particularly for its

employees and their families. I can confirm that, through our partnership action for continuing employment initiative, we will provide skills development and employability support for any employee facing redundancy. I understand that the TSB will share local vacancies with the staff who face redundancy.

It is important to stress that public intervention, had it even been possible, would not have changed the board's decision. It is a sad decision, but I think that it is one that most people understand. Our focus now must be on supporting the communities served by the bank and those who work for it.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): As the First Minister might be aware, there are on-going discussions about the future of 30 long-term care beds in St Margaret of Scotland Hospice in Clydebank, in my constituency. Yesterday, at a special full meeting of West Dunbartonshire Council, a motion on the hospice in the name of the former provost, Denis Agnew, was passed. The hospice is concerned that proposals by the integration joint board to use beds as social care beds might raise questions about the hospice's charitable status and, more important, its ethos. I believe that an amicable solution is entirely possible. To that end, can I request a meeting with the health secretary to explore whether the Scottish Government can play a role in supporting a resolution to this very important issue between the integration joint board and the hospice?

The First Minister: First, I know how valuable and valued the services provided by St Margaret of Scotland Hospice are to those who benefit from them. When I was health secretary, I had a very close interaction with the hospice and, indeed, helped to allay some of the concerns that it had back in those times.

As I understand it, the West Dunbartonshire health and social care partnership has said that there is nothing in the proposed arrangements that would undermine the hospice's charitable status. However, it is clear from what I have already heard and from what Gil Paterson has said in the chamber that the hospice still has concerns, and it is important that we try to address those concerns. Gil Paterson has asked specifically for a meeting with the health secretary, and she will be happy to meet him to discuss how the integration joint board and the hospice can find not only an amicable solution but, most important, a solution that will allow St Margaret of Scotland Hospice to continue to provide the excellent care that it provides for people in its surrounding communities.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S5F-00758)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): On Tuesday.

Patrick Harvie: This week, we heard a statement from the Prime Minister that was confused, contradictory and dangerous. The Scottish Conservatives may now be trotting along merrily behind the Brexit cheerleaders, but it seems like only five minutes ago that they were all for protecting our place in the single market. We have heard from the Prime Minister empty words about “considering” Scotland’s position but, from everything else that she is saying, it seems that she has already ruled out doing anything about it. I want to hear reassurances from the First Minister that there will be no delay to the legislation to keep open the option for the people of Scotland to decide for themselves whether they want to stay on the Brexit bus as it heads over the cliff.

We know that there will be deeply damaging economic impacts from ripping Scotland and the United Kingdom not just out of Europe but out of the single market. I have never believed that economic growth should come at the expense of social justice or sustainability, but the UK Government now seems to want to ignore all three aspects because of its relentless hostility to immigration and immigrants. What assessment has the Scottish Government carried out not only of the direct economic impact on Scotland—on jobs, on incomes and from inflation—but, since the Scottish budget is now based partly on economic performance, of the impact on the public finances if we lose our place in the single market?

The First Minister: The Scottish Government continues to make those assessments, but we have also seen independent assessments that the impact of a hard Brexit will be a loss of 80,000 jobs and £2,000 per person in real wages. Those are real impacts for people the length and breadth of the country.

Patrick Harvie is absolutely right. The Scottish Government and the Scottish people did not choose to be in this position. Scotland did not vote for the path that the Prime Minister set out on Tuesday. Even more important, that path is against our interests as a country. It puts jobs, wages, living standards and investment on the line. It threatens to change fundamentally the kind of country that we are—and not for the better.

The Scottish Government has put forward proposals to protect Scotland’s interests. Just last night, those proposals were described by Lord John Kerr, who is a former very senior UK diplomat, as impressive, serious and substantive.

Thus far, the UK Government has not considered those proposals with the seriousness that they merit. That exposes talk of a partnership of equals in the UK as nothing more than empty rhetoric.

The joint ministerial committee, in sub-committee form, is meeting today. There will be a plenary session at the end of the month. The Scottish Government will continue to engage and to seek further compromise.

However, we should be in no doubt that time is fast running out for the UK Government to convince us that it cares one jot about Scotland’s interests. If it does not do so, Scotland will face a choice. Do we go down the damaging path set out by Theresa May—with all the impacts that we know that it will have, and in the knowledge that our voice does not matter in the UK—or do we decide to take our future into our own hands and take control of our country’s future? The difference between me—and Patrick Harvie—and others in the chamber is that I believe that that should be a decision for the Scottish people.

Patrick Harvie: The First Minister is clearly right about the profound change that is threatened, but I do not yet hear an assessment of the impact on the Scottish public finances, for which the Scottish Government is responsible. That impact will happen before Brexit; it is already happening.

Eight months ago, we all stood for election to the Parliament, each with our manifesto commitments. The Greens promised to be bold and to use the Scottish Parliament’s new powers to protect services and provide the investment that the country needs. The Scottish National Party said that it wanted to offer an alternative to Tory austerity.

It is a rare year in which circumstances change so dramatically; we have had the Brexit vote and a change of UK Government, and we now have the threat to cut us off from the single market. Given the impact of that, is it not now abundantly clear that the Scottish Government’s economic policies, which were written nearly a year ago and based largely on a status quo position on income tax, cannot be treated as though they are written in stone? Surely the case is now stronger than it has ever been for using our tax powers fairly to protect people on low and middle incomes and ensure that words such as “progressive” come to mean something and that the services that every community in the country depends on are protected.

The First Minister: We have put forward budget proposals, including tax proposals, that are fair, reasonable and progressive. We are in a budget process and, as Patrick Harvie knows, the finance secretary continues to discuss with him and with parties across the chamber the content of

those proposals. Those discussions will continue over the next few weeks.

I agree with Patrick Harvie about the impact of the decisions that are being made by the Tory Government at Westminster on our economy, on jobs and on our public finances. Of course, we need to respond, and we will continue to respond, just as we responded to welfare changes by setting up the welfare fund and mitigating the effect of the bedroom tax. We are taking action to mitigate the worst impacts of the wrong-headed decisions that are being made at Westminster, and we will continue to do that.

However, sooner or later, there comes a fundamental choice. Do we want to continue, as a Parliament and as a country, always having to mitigate the impacts of decisions that are out of our hands and made by a Tory Government at Westminster that a majority in this country do not vote for, or do we want to take into our own hands control of our country's future? That is the choice that is looming for the people of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: There are a couple of supplementary questions.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of the landmark decision this week by the Court of Session to award damages in a rape case—the first in a civil court. This week has also seen the publication of “Criminal Proceedings in Scotland 2015-16”, which confirms that only 12 per cent of police-reported rapes and attempted rapes proceed to court, where the conviction rate is very low. Rape Crisis Scotland advises that more and more rape complainants will turn to the civil justice system, but rape is a heinous crime that should always result in a criminal charge. What will be the implications for the justice system if victims feel that they can get justice for those criminal acts only through the civil courts system?

The First Minister: That absolutely should not be the message. Many of the decisions that Claire Baker talked—rightly—about are decisions for the independent prosecution service and for the courts. I know that she understands that. I do not think that anybody can be in any doubt about the Government's determination to ensure that there is a really tough approach to anybody who commits sexual crimes or domestic violence.

In the statistics that were published this week, the number of convictions for sexual crimes and domestic abuse remains high, and the number of convictions for sexual crimes is at an all-time high. Of course, we all take sexual crimes very seriously, which is why it is good to see that more people are being convicted of sexual offences and that the average length of sentences for rape and

attempted rape has increased by 8 per cent since last year.

However, we all know that much more work needs to be done. I hope that there is a lot of consensus on the issue. This is not on the specific point about rape that Claire Baker raised, but we will shortly introduce new legislation to address domestic violence. All of us have a duty to make sure that there is a system in place whereby victims feel that they can come forward and in which, when they come forward, those who are guilty are brought to account and given appropriate sentences.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Last night, Parliament voted to keep the board of Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Will the First Minister confirm to Parliament right now that that is, indeed, what will happen?

The First Minister: Of course, we will reflect carefully on the vote that the Parliament took last night, as we always do. I hope that, whatever the disagreements are about particular proposals, there will be a lot of agreement on our objectives.

We talked earlier about the economy. We recognise that all our individual economic development agencies do a fantastic job, but we want to make sure that they are greater than the sum of their parts and that we are all working towards the goal of supporting Scotland's economy. That is the genesis of the proposals in the first phase of the review that we are talking about.

Let us be clear that even the proposals as they are at this stage would see HIE retaining its chief executive, based in Inverness; retaining its headquarters, based in Inverness; retaining control of all staffing levels; and continuing to operate from its headquarters in Inverness. That is the commitment to the Highlands.

The review is now in its second phase and, as part of the on-going consideration, the debate and the vote in Parliament yesterday will of course be taken fully into account.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): This week, the widely respected economic think tank the Fraser of Allander institute confirmed that, contrary to all the Scottish National Party claims about Tory cuts and Westminster austerity, the total Scottish Government budget has gone up in real terms by 0.4 per cent since 2010-11. The institute went on to say that the way in which the Scottish Government presents its budget is flawed and that

“the selective data that the government presents often appears designed to support their arguments rather than to help inform debate.”

Will the First Minister take the opportunity to apologise on behalf of herself and her finance secretary for all the disgraceful spin that they have put on their budget figures and will she undertake to deliver a budget process that is fit for purpose?

The First Minister: I was really hoping that Murdo Fraser would get up and ask about this, because it is a spectacular own goal on his part. I will quote from the very Fraser of Allander institute blog that he cited. It says:

"In terms of *discretionary spending*, and the amount the government has to spend on day-to-day public services such as schools and"—[*Interruption.*]

The Tories do not like to hear this so I will repeat it:

"In terms of *discretionary spending*, and the amount the government has to spend on day-to-day public services such as schools and hospitals ... the budget has declined by around 5% in real terms since 2010/11."

The blog also makes it clear that if we were to include in the calculation all the things that Murdo Fraser says should be included to get to his measly 0.4 per cent, the calculation would have to include money that is

"not *real* money that can be spent on goods or services".

I know that the Tories frequently live in fantasy land, but I am not sure how they think that we can fund the health service or the education system with money that is not real and cannot be spent on goods or services. To quote the Fraser of Allander blog, the money that this Government has to spend on services across our country

"has declined by ... 5% in real terms"

as a result of decisions taken by the Conservative Government in Westminster.

Maternity Wards (Treatment and Care)

4. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what procedures are in place to ensure that the necessary treatment and care in maternity wards is provided at peak times. (S5F-00784)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The arrival of a baby for any family is not only a time of joy but is, clearly, a time of stress and worry. Our aim is that our national health service provides the services that expectant mothers need to ensure that both they and their babies get the best possible care. Indeed, that is why we will soon publish our national review of maternity and neonatal care.

However, we are very clear that on the rare occasions—they are rare—when maternity units have to divert care, boards must have in place contingencies to ensure the safety of mothers and

babies while maintaining the quality of care at all times.

Stuart McMillan: I thank the First Minister for that reply. Does she therefore agree that larger hospitals and community maternity services working together collaboratively to ensure safe services is of real benefit and is, by far, preferable to a marketised health system?

The First Minister: There is an important point to be made here. One of the benefits of having an integrated healthcare system is that hospitals—and health boards, in certain circumstances—can support each other.

The question has arisen, I am sure, because of the circumstances in Glasgow at the end of last week at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital, where admissions were diverted for a short time due to an unusual combination of a high number of admissions and a number of women developing complications. Three women were diverted to other units and another two had planned procedures deferred for a few hours. However, it is because of our integrated healthcare system that contingency plans were activated and care for the women could be provided safely at other hospitals. Such occasions are very rare, but on those rare occasions it is absolutely vital that such arrangements are in place and that they work well.

Children with Additional Support Needs (Support for Teachers)

5. Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government considers that appropriate resources are in place to support teachers of children with additional support needs. (S5F-00754)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We are very clear that all children and young people must get the support that they need to reach their full learning potential. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 places duties on education authorities to identify and provide for the additional support needs of their pupils, and although the Scottish Government has published statutory guidance to support education authorities in fulfilling those duties, it is for education authorities themselves to show that they have the appropriate resources in place to do so.

Jeremy Balfour: Additional support needs workers are essential to the Scottish Government's getting it right for every child policy, but a survey that was published this week by Unison Scotland shows that staff working in additional needs are under enormous pressure, are exhausted and feel undervalued, stressed and lacking in training and support. Does the First Minister accept that the report is, after a decade of Scottish National Party management, clear

evidence that the Government is simply failing front-line staff?

The First Minister: No—I do not think that that is a fair characterisation of the position. I acknowledge the pressure and stress that are, by definition, associated with the job of teachers who support children who have additional support needs. I know that Jeremy Balfour takes a very close interest in these matters, so he will know that since 2004 there has been a fundamental change in how children with additional support needs are catered for in the education system, with the vast majority of pupils now being in mainstream education.

The other point to stress is that although teachers specifically for pupils with additional support needs are vital in our system, it is the job of all teachers to ensure that all pupils get the care and support that they need. That is why this Government is putting such emphasis on supporting schools, with the additional resources through the attainment fund going directly to schools. We will continue to work with local authorities and teachers to ensure that support exists when and where it is needed.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Since 2010, almost 500 additional support needs teachers have been cut. As the First Minister knows, if we are really to close the attainment gap, we must support young people who have additional support needs. Will the Government use the tax powers that it now has and amend its budget proposals to prevent local authorities from being forced to make cuts, many of which will fall on education and will result in even fewer additional support needs teachers in our schools?

The First Minister: Of course, a key part of the budget is the £120 million that is going directly to schools' headteachers, so it is for them to determine how to invest that money in order to raise attainment and close the attainment gap. If headteachers want to use the money for additional support needs, that option is available to them. That is part of our determination to get resources not just into the education system generally, but direct to schools and headteachers in order to ensure that resources have the biggest impact. I hope that members across the chamber will support that.

National Health Service

6. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on the comment by the chair of BMA Scotland that the national health service is "stretched pretty much to breaking point". (S5F-00777)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Our NHS and care staff do a fantastic job in the face of increased demand, and they have my thanks for the work that they do. For our NHS to provide the services that our people need long into the future, we must deliver the twin approaches of investment and reform. As a result, our "Health and Social Care Delivery Plan" sets out a range of actions to ensure that we have sustainable services, including bringing forward a national health and social care workforce plan this spring to ensure that our NHS continues to have the right numbers and skills mix for the future. That, of course, is backed up by our commitment to increase NHS investment by £500 million more than inflation by the end of this session of Parliament.

Anas Sarwar: I want to quote the chair of BMA Scotland, Peter Bennie. He said:

"we're just fed up with a mantra that says from the Government we have more doctors than ever before.

The question is do we have enough doctors, do we have enough nurses, do we have enough staff outside the health service to provide the care that people need? And at present, we don't.

The majority of staff in the health service are working way beyond what they're actually supposed to be doing just to keep things running.

And eventually that leads to personnel breakdown and eventually it leads to system breakdown.

The impression that Government tries to give is that things are ok just now, they are not."

Who is telling the truth: Nicola Sturgeon or Dr Peter Bennie?

The First Minister: We work closely with the BMA, the Royal College of Nursing, all staff organisations and staff the length and breadth of the country. That is why we have set out a very clear direction of travel, building on the progress that has already been made in our national health service over the past 10 years. Yes—we are continuing to increase staff numbers, but we are also making sure that we have the right mix of skills.

For example, many of the concerns about the pressure on general practitioners will be addressed by building up the multidisciplinary teams in primary care. That is why the health and social care workforce plan that will be published in the spring is so important.

It is also fundamentally important that we continue to back the plans with investment. I say again—I know that Labour members do not like it—that our commitment to investment is much stronger than the commitment that they made. It is a fact that if Labour had won the election last May—unlikely though that was—the NHS today would have had less funding, and that would be

the case for the duration of this parliamentary session.

Investment, reform and working with the health service will continue to be how we take forward improvements.

Jobcentres (Glasgow)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): I ask those leaving the chamber to do so quietly.

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-02971, in the name of Bob Doris, on the closure of jobcentres in Glasgow. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with concern reports that eight jobcentres in Glasgow are facing closure, including in Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn; believes that the closure of these jobcentres would have a devastating impact on jobseekers who rely on the service, and would be incompatible with the ambition of supporting people into work, and further believes that the social security system should have dignity and respect at its heart.

12:47

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): The motion at its core has the principles of dignity and respect in relation to how we treat vulnerable groups in our communities. The plans by the Department for Work and Pensions to close half of the jobcentres in Glasgow undermine such principles and make no sense in terms of encouraging jobseekers back into employment. This afternoon, we are joined by MP colleagues who have forcefully opposed jobcentre closures across Glasgow.

I will focus today on the impact on those who use Maryhill jobcentre. Along with Patrick Grady MP, I met a group of single parents who would be seriously impacted by the closure of Maryhill jobcentre. I thank One Parent Families Scotland for arranging the meeting and for the openness, frankness and honesty of those who spoke to us. Those single parents would be required to make a trip to Springburn jobcentre instead, and the local MP, Anne McLaughlin, shares my concerns about the knock-on consequences for Springburn jobcentre.

This is what one-parent families in Maryhill had to say about travelling to Springburn:

"If your child's unwell, how do you get up there? I don't want to take them on the bus. Just now I can ask a neighbour to look after them for a short while, but not for over two hours."

Another person said:

"I suffer from chronic pain. The thought of sitting on buses for almost an hour each way scares me. It is really worrying and it's scary for lots of people."

On the expense of it all, they said:

"If you used that to get to Springburn, you'd be taking it out of your child's mouth."

"I suffer from depression and anxiety and I'll not be able to travel to Springburn. I also don't have enough money to live on. I couldn't afford the extra expense."

On appointments at Springburn, they said:

"If the appointment is at 2 pm, how would you sign on and pick up your wean? It's the same in the morning, as well—10 am means you'd not be able to drop off your kid in time."

"The jobcentre doesn't offer earlier or later. There's not usually anything else available."

Concerns over closure go far beyond the practicalities of getting to Springburn. For many, it is also about the hard-won relationship and trust that they have developed with a benefits adviser over time, which is crucial for supporting vulnerable groups back into employment. People are unlikely to retain the same work coach, so the relationship is likely to be dismantled and much of that trust will be shattered. Jobcentre staff and the Public and Commercial Services Union share those concerns.

We all know that Jobcentre Plus is a toxic brand and there is a huge controversy over the United Kingdom Government's welfare reforms and sanction regime. Despite that, many jobcentre staff know well that the key to getting a vulnerable person who faces barriers to employment ready for work is to nurture those relationships, sometimes in very difficult circumstances. A parent in a one-parent family said:

"I've got one in there and they are absolutely brilliant. She knows I've got the weans and tries to help. I've built a relationship with mine. With others the trust falls down."

Another said:

"You don't want to keep retelling your story. It's often very personal and your existing job coach knows you."

Along with MP colleagues, I met senior managers at Jobcentre Plus. When I asked how many claimants use Maryhill jobcentre, they were unable to tell us. When I asked for a map of the area that Maryhill jobcentre covers, they were unable to provide it. When we requested an equality impact assessment, to see how groups such as single parents, carers and those with disabilities might be impacted by the closure, Jobcentre Plus said that it would do one only after a decision had been taken. When we asked how Jobcentre Plus had interrogated the travel implications for service users, it appeared that Google Maps was the only travel expertise that had been applied.

If a council consulted on closing a school in such a manner, the Scottish Government would have the power to call in and block the decision—it has done so in the past. That is precisely what the UK Government must now do: intervene in a flawed process and save Maryhill jobcentre and the others that are threatened across the city.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I congratulate Bob Doris on bringing forward this important debate. Every Glasgow MSP and MP is united in their condemnation of the decision to close the jobcentres. Is it not time that the UK Government listens to the city's elected members?

Bob Doris: Absolutely. I hope that the UK Government will be listening carefully to this debate and will use it to inform a decision to halt every closure right across the city.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Bob Doris: I need to make a little progress.

The Smith commission agreement referred to jobcentres. It called for the UK and Scottish Governments to

"identify ways to further link services through methods such as co-location wherever possible and establish more formal mechanisms to govern the Jobcentre Plus network in Scotland."

Yet the DWP does not appear to have even informed the Scottish Government of the proposals in advance of announcing them. Maybe we will hear more about that from the minister.

I want to say a little bit more about the jobcentre in Maryhill. It sits directly opposite another office block that is largely unoccupied. The rent on that property would, in all likelihood, be cheap as chips. The DWP could also cast an eye around the corner, just over the canal towards Ruchill, where the former social work building at the Quadrangle sits mostly empty along with other properties at low market rent. The citizens advice bureau is based just down the road at Avenuepark Street, and Skills Development Scotland has skills shops on Byres Road and on Saracen Street in Possilpark, yet there has been no discussion with any partner on any form of partnership working or co-location.

Adam Tomkins: Will the member take an intervention?

Bob Doris: In a moment.

The DWP could recognise that the current Maryhill jobcentre location is a stone's throw away from a new £12 million health and social care centre at Gairbraid Avenue in Maryhill and is directly opposite Maryhill burgh halls. The area is a growing community hub and I urge Jobcentre Plus not to turn its back on Maryhill and on those whom I represent who have multiple barriers to employment.

If I can have some time added on, I will be happy to take an intervention from Adam Tomkins.

Adam Tomkins: I thank Bob Doris for giving way. I know that time is tight, so I appreciate it.

In November last year, the all-party House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee reported on the future of jobcentres. It said unanimously that

“The future of Jobcentre Plus ... is one of change”

and that Jobcentre Plus must be

“open to working in ways that are increasingly flexible, adaptable and experimental.”

That report was signed up to by every member of the committee, including the Scottish National Party's own Mhairi Black. What evidence supports the view that just because Glasgow has 16 jobcentres now, it must always have 16 jobcentres, even though the nature of jobcentres and the employment market is changing?

Bob Doris: I am deeply worried by that intervention from Adam Tomkins, as I thought that we had cross-party solidarity on the matter. Perhaps we need 20 jobcentres. If Mr Tomkins looks at the issue, he will see that the UK Government is talking about a 20 per cent reduction in jobcentres. Why has Glasgow been targeted for a 50 per cent cull of our jobcentres? Why, Mr Tomkins? I have no idea.

I invite the Minister for Employability and Training, Jamie Hepburn, who is in the chamber today, and Damian Hinds MP, who is minister of state at the Department for Work and Pensions, to come along to Maryhill together—that is partnership working—and meet those who will be impacted directly by the jobcentre closure, should it go ahead. Mr Hinds could see the area for himself, meet local partners and better understand the opportunities that exist locally for co-location and partnership working.

Let us improve, rather than diminish, the support that we provide to vulnerable groups. To realise that opportunity, the DWP must first ditch plans to axe Maryhill jobcentre. I hope that Mr Tomkins and his Conservative colleagues will support that call in their contributions today, not just for Maryhill jobcentre but for jobcentres across the city.

Glasgow's elected representatives across all parties can see the clear deficiencies in a rushed and threadbare consultation. Issues such as the risk of sanctions, the risk of additional expense, the impact on families and the loss of valued work coaches at a local level are all worrying my constituents. Together, with cross-party unity, we can halt the closures. I hope that we can keep that solidarity this afternoon and meet the needs of those vulnerable people whom we are all supposed to represent in the chamber.

12:56

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on an issue that has

growing media attention, and I thank Bob Doris for bringing the debate to the chamber. I will not condone the DWP proposals but neither will I condemn them.

Glasgow has some of the worst employment rates in the whole of Scotland. The claimant count in the city is 3.1 per cent, in comparison with 2.2 per cent for Scotland and 1.8 per cent in the UK. Of course it is important that we support those people into work in the best way possible, and I share the concerns of members in the chamber. I am concerned, as my colleagues are, about the communication around the proposed closures. Change, whether it is permissible or not, should not be sprung on people out of the blue.

Consultation on change should not come across as a lip-service exercise, and I was disappointed to see the length of time for which the consultation is open. As new arguments for and against come to light, people should be given the opportunity to digest the information that is available and make informed responses. With the further roll-out of universal credit in Scotland, I am concerned about the increased need to make jobcentres as accessible as they can be.

Bob Doris: Annie Wells makes the point that people must have informed opinions on the matter. However, given that neither MSPs and MPs nor anyone else knows how many people use Maryhill jobcentre or even which area it serves, is the consultation not fatally flawed? Irrespective of her views on jobcentres, does she agree that every jobcentre closure proposal in Glasgow should be scrapped right now and the DWP should start again?

Annie Wells: I agree that we need to monitor the use of jobcentres more closely, but we also know that the claimant count in Glasgow has dropped by 44 per cent since 2010, going from 24,200 to approximately 13,000.

I am concerned about the fact that the consultation is restricted to just three jobcentres: Maryhill, Bridgeton and Castlemilk. However, the situation is difficult. The 20-year lease contract is coming to an end next year, and it is only logical that we have the discussion now. We need at least to be open to the idea, and I will make a few points for members to reflect on today. Between 20 and 40 per cent of the floor space in the buildings is currently underoccupied. Is it right for the Government to sit on empty floor space and go rolling into a new contract without at least asking whether that is a good use of resource? Is it right to send the message that a 3-mile journey is plain wrong—no matter the circumstances—when many of the jobs that are advertised at the centre will require just that and more?

Of course, extra efforts should be made to ensure that service users with long-term health conditions or disabilities are not adversely affected, and I shall make that point well known when I submit my entry to the public consultation. That is what it should be about: compromise. It is not about black and white decision making but about making the most sensible decision while making the necessary provision for the most vulnerable.

None of the 260 staff who would be relocated as part of the change are expected to lose their jobs and the DWP has made no mention of cutting investment. In fact, last year, more than 122 additional work coaches were recruited to jobcentres in Scotland to ease workload and to ensure a service based on rapport.

I did not omit to sign Stewart McDonald's letter because I do not share the same concerns. I did not sign it because the finality of its tone suggests that the decision has been made. The language that is used suggests that every person visiting the jobcentres will be struck down by such a change. That is not a reasonable assertion to make, particularly if, as I have said, emphasis is placed on looking after the most vulnerable if journey times increase.

I encourage all members of the public who feel strongly on the issue to submit their opinions now to the DWP through its consultation. I have posted details of the consultation on my website.

I, as much as anyone here in the chamber today, hope that the best outcome will be reached on the issue.

13:01

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Before I begin, I apologise to Bob Doris and to you, Presiding Officer, because I will have to leave the chamber after my speech to host an event.

I will come back to Annie Wells's points, but first I welcome the MPs in the gallery. We have Chris Stevens, Margaret Ferrier, Patrick Grady, Anne McLaughlin and, of course, my MP, Stewart McDonald, who has been pushing the issue hard in my constituency. Thank you for coming.

When I was first informed that not one, but two, jobcentres would potentially be closed in my constituency, my first reaction was, obviously, concern. I represent a diverse community and many of my constituents face extreme socioeconomic hardship. Jobcentres are part of a lifeline to many of them.

The name "jobcentre" suggests that it is a place to find work, but as every member of this Parliament knows, jobcentres are so much more. Are they places to find employment? Yes—but

they are also places to discuss adult learning and skills acquisition, disability issues and, of course, benefits and social security.

Damian Green MP may think that the closures are necessary as the Westminster Government continues to harm the most vulnerable members of Scottish society with its austerity agenda, but my job is to remind the Tories both at Westminster and here of the devastating effects the closures would have on communities across Glasgow.

It has been well documented in the media that cruel benefit sanctions are hitting the desperately ill and people with disabilities especially hard. They are often unable to reach appointments due to distance and ill health. Imagine how difficult the appointments would be for vulnerable people to reach after the proposed changes.

I will highlight what one of the closures in my constituency would mean for some of the most disadvantaged local residents. Despite Annie Wells's saying that she does not want to see people "stricken down" by the changes, the distance between Castlemilk jobcentre and Newlands jobcentre, which is to remain open, takes—according to Google Maps—15 minutes by car. Many Castlemilk jobcentre users do not have a car, so let us look at the map again. A walk between the two takes 58 minutes for an able-bodied person. Imagine that you are a young mother with a couple of young kids having to make your way there for fairly regular meetings. If you do not make the meetings, the sanctions will kick in very quickly. Imagine that you have a mobility issue and have to make it to meetings, because if you do not, the sanctions will kick in very quickly. That is how thoughtless the whole consultation and "Pretend that you care" process is. It is about the Tories saying, "Glasgow? We're never going to win that place. Who cares?" This is poll tax 2. It is completely unacceptable.

Last year, I met a constituent who had to flee her home because of domestic violence. She has young children and is living on the breadline. She attends Castlemilk jobcentre. When I was talking to her, she showed me the holes in her shoes. What the Tories are asking her to do—what their Government is asking her to do—is to walk an extra 4 miles in those holey shoes to get to that jobcentre before she is sanctioned and life becomes even more difficult.

Let us not pretend that the Tories are trying to make life easier for people on the breadline or make it easier for people to get back into work, because the measure is shameless in that it has taken nothing into account except the bank balance and the bottom line. There is meant to be a consultation that takes into account people's needs, but there has been none of that. It is not a real consultation. We know fine well that, at the

end of the consultation, there will be no changes of any substance in Glasgow. We will be fighting hard for changes.

I was really disappointed—but not surprised—that Adam Tomkins and Annie Wells did not sign the letter that has been mentioned. I know that they would have been happy to sign it, but I am not surprised that their party told them not to sign it under any circumstances.

Adam Tomkins: It is absolutely not the case that my party told me to sign or not to sign that letter. I read it and considered every word of it. I wanted to be able to sign it but I advised its author that I was unable to sign it for the reasons that Annie Wells has given. I would be grateful if James Dornan would retract that baseless allegation.

James Dornan: I am more than happy to retract the allegation that I thought you wanted to keep the jobcentres open and sign the letter. I apologise. I just thought I knew you a bit better than that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must come to a close, Mr Dornan.

James Dornan: I will do, Presiding Officer. I apologise.

It is important—despite the reservations that the Tories might have, for whatever reason—that the campaign is cross-party. We have cross-party support from all parties in the chamber except the Tories. Let us ensure that, despite your concerns, we get to a position that allows you to go back to your masters so that we can all push the Westminster Government to ensure that the jobcentres stay open. If you do not, you will penalise people who are already suffering and do not deserve to be penalised any more.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that they should always speak through the chair.

13:06

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I will certainly do my best.

I congratulate Bob Doris on securing the debate and on recognising the importance of the subject matter. I cannot be the only person who, when the decision was announced—I think that it had been leaked ahead of the announcement—was shocked by the rush with little regard for the impact on communities.

The decision has resulted in significant campaigning throughout the city, although I will talk particularly about the Southside. I commend the *Evening Times* for its campaign to address the grave concerns about the implications of the

closures. We have heard from Bob Doris about the work that he and his colleagues have done. I also highlight my party's work. Local Labour councillors—Archie Graham, Malcolm Cunning and Emma Gillan—and activists including Steven Livingston have, with others, recognised the importance of the issue and been out highlighting their concerns and their desire to ensure that the closures are stopped. They have also been talking to the public about the importance of building public support for encouraging the Government to think again and for taking on the DWP on the matter.

I am particularly concerned about what is happening in Castlemilk and Langside, but I also recognise that there are implications throughout the city. In fact, this morning my Labour colleagues were out campaigning on the issue, and I was struck by the response that they received across the communities. However, it would not be right simply to say what our individual parties have done or just to recognise the important point that people beyond parties have strong views on the matter—as campaign groups have highlighted—because the campaign has been marked by an important effort to build local cross-party consensus.

I commend people who have done that—local MPs or Frank McAveety, the leader of Glasgow City Council. We have all acknowledged the importance of drawing together on the question. I commend that type of working—not only in respect of the jobcentre closures, and regardless of who is making the decision. Whether a decision is made by the UK Government, the Scottish Government or local government, politicians need to have the freedom and confidence to come together on matters that are of great significance in their communities.

We should urge David Mundell to listen to the concerns. Adam Tomkins talked about the importance of evidence. The fact is that the decision is not evidence based, as James Dornan highlighted. I am also concerned that the decision has been made without an equality impact assessment having been done. If there had been, cuts would not be being disproportionately targeted on a city that relies on the services.

There is no understanding of the transport challenges. It is all right to look at Google Maps, but people should try in the real world to travel on the bus or use the walking routes for accessing the services. This morning, the Public Petitions Committee looked at the failures of the bus system. The idea that a person would rely on a bus to travel even further to access support without anybody having done the basic working out of where transport links are is a nonsense.

The reality is that it has been a paper exercise. It has not looked at whether there would be a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups, women, lone parents or disabled people who want to access services. It has not been driven by a rational assessment of need and purpose; rather, it started at the end of the process and worked back. Surely the rational minds among Conservative members must agree that that is not acceptable.

I recognise that the issue becomes even more challenging because of the highly contentious debate on the key elements of the welfare system and the Tory Government's approach, which—in George Osborne's unforgivable terms—sought to divide the “workers” and the “shirkers”. If the argument is that we need to support people into work in the current welfare system, why make it so difficult to access that support? If that is its purpose and its job, why make it more difficult for people who need the support to get it in Glasgow—a city that has disproportionate need for it? Even if people believe in conditionality and the benefits of a sanctions system—I do not—why make increasing the level of sanctions more likely? Why make it more difficult for people to comply? Why make a decision that is not connected to the experience of ordinary people?

Adam Tomkins: Will Johann Lamont take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member has no time, Mr Tomkins.

Johann Lamont: The reality is that, rather than looking at needs, the decision was made on paper in order to meet a budget requirement.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must come to a close, Ms Lamont.

Johann Lamont: We need to start with people in our communities and then make decisions that follow from that. I urge all members to make their voices heard, because the implications for families in my city are immensely serious.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Due to the number of members who wish to speak and the overrunning of every speech so far, I am minded to accept a motion, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Bob Doris*]

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That does not mean that members should fill all of that time.

13:12

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I was going to ask whether that gives me more time, but I will stick to the time limit, as the Presiding Officer said that I should.

I commend Bob Doris for securing the debate and thank the many MPs who raised at Westminster the issue that we are discussing. I think that two debates were held there and some of those MPs are in the gallery. I also thank the *Glasgow Evening Times* for running an excellent campaign against the jobcentre closures.

I am convener of the Social Security Committee. On 15 December, we held a session in which we took evidence from Neil Couling and Denise Horsfall. During that session, the jobcentre closures, which had just been announced, came up. I will read some extracts from the *Official Report* of that meeting, which will give a flavour of what was said. As Johann Lamont said, the exercise is absolutely nothing to do with people; it is a budgetary exercise to save money.

Prior to that committee meeting, we visited the jobcentre in Musselburgh. As the convener of the committee, I raised that in my first questions. I said:

“Even though we visited only two weeks ago, we were not aware of the jobcentre closures. That cannot just have been decided two weeks ago or last week; it has to have been on the agenda for a number of months ... We were given no indication of the closures while we were visiting the jobcentres.”

I asked about Glasgow specifically, and I pointed out that

“an awful lot of work”

must have

“gone on in the background”

previously to come to that decision. I asked why we were not made aware of that as a committee that was looking at social services and the new bill that was coming forward. Denise Horsfall said:

“I will happily come in about Glasgow specifically. In answer to the convener, I will say yes, we did not talk about the closures. When we met I referred to the fact that we were looking at the estate, but I certainly was not specific. It was not in my gift to be specific at that stage; I had no authority to talk to you about it. My authority came on the day of release.”

She went on to say that systems such as Google Maps and Traveline had been used but admitted that

“that is not the same as getting on and off a bus.”

When I asked about the timescales and why we had not been told when the closures would happen, Ms Horsfall said:

“without a doubt, you are absolutely right, convener—they did not just drop out of fresh air. There was a discussion about what seemed to be acceptable and available for the city of Glasgow—what the best use of the estate was and how we were going to deliver the services. Those proposals then went to a consultation period with landlords.”—[*Official Report, Social Security Committee*, 15 December 2016; c 4, 9, 5, 9, 10.]

The proposals did not go out to consultation with the public, the Parliament or elected members. Most important of all, they did not go out to consultation with the people who use the services; they went out to consultation with the landlords. That makes it clear that the decision had nothing at all to do with getting people into work and helping people. How could the DWP think that people who are disabled and folk who are on the breadline might be able to take two or three buses or walk to get to a jobcentre? The DWP did not bother about them. All it cared about was the cost for the estate.

Adam Tomkins—I do not know whether he intends to elaborate on this—asked in committee why a deal could not be done, given that, for example, the landlord of Castlemilk jobcentre said that he would drop his rates, but the DWP did not bother to say anything about that. From the evidence that we were given, it is possible to come to only one conclusion—that people were not considered at all because it was felt that they did not matter. The feeling was that vulnerable people, disabled people, single families and young kids did not matter; all that mattered was money. Therefore, we must ensure that the jobcentres in question are saved.

13:17

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I sincerely thank Bob Doris for bringing this important debate to the chamber and pay tribute to the broad support that exists for this concern. It is refreshing—and significant—that the issue is one that brings together the Scottish Government’s supporters and its critics. It is not one on which members divide along constitutional lines—it has united political activists from a number of parties, politicians at local, national and UK levels and a wide range of organisations and other services that work in people’s communities.

People are responding with astonishment and anger to the proposal, and I am very pleased that, as Sandra White said, the *Evening Times* has been drawing public attention to the issue through its work.

For me, the starting point on such an issue is a desire for a fundamentally different kind of welfare system—a different kind of social security system. Not just in recent years through the work of the Tory Government but for decades the social security system has been changing from a system

that is supposed to be about providing security for people into one that is designed to bully people into low-paid work. The kind of social security system that I would want to see would make some services available online or over the phone—that obviously has benefits—but the most important thing that it must do is have people working with people to support them to overcome the very serious barriers that they face to re-entering work, to finding appropriate work or to making work work for them and their life circumstances, and that means having services in local communities. We need to have in those services people who know about the local community, its transport links, the kind of work that is available and the kind of issues that members of that community face.

It is absolutely vital to have those local services protected. Even if the level of demand reduces—and we should want it to reduce—the local nature of such services is critical to ensuring that the service is effective. The letter from Damian Hinds that we have all seen, which sets out the proposed closures, ends with the phrase:

“Three of the proposed site closures ... may lead to longer journey times for some claimants”.

It is absolutely inevitable that they will lead to unacceptable journey times and costs. Even for those people who qualify for a jobcentre travel discount card and manage to get access to that, the reduced rate of a single trip across city zones—many of the people impacted by the cuts will be crossing the First Bus zones in Glasgow—is £2, so a great many of those people will still find themselves having to buy an all-day ticket, which is £4.50.

It is not good enough to say, as Annie Wells did, that if someone gets a job it might involve just as much travel, so people should be willing to travel to work and to a jobcentre. A job pays a wage, but going to the jobcentre does not. It is outrageous to imagine that people can bear those costs.

As members know, like others, I want to encourage people to walk and cycle around our city, but even I would think twice before tackling the hill up to Castlemilk on my bike. James Dornan mentioned walking as an option. Some of my Green Party colleagues, activists and candidates and I organised a walk from the Bridgeton jobcentre to Shettleston—that walk took nearly an hour. That does not take into account the barriers faced by people with reduced mobility, disability or other commitments, such as family care.

There are two inevitable consequences of the changes. First, more people will miss appointments, get sanctioned as a result, and so not get the support and services that they need. Secondly, more people will be forced deeper into

poverty by having to bear the additional travel cost burden.

The Scottish Conservatives are due some credit for turning up today and I pay tribute to them for that. However, they should come here with an opinion. They have an absolutely privileged position in the debate because if they add their support to the cross-party support for concern on the issue, we have the ability to tell the UK Government to change its position. To have complete cross-party consensus on the issue, the Scottish Conservatives need to add their support and I urge them to do so as soon as possible.

13:22

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, congratulate Mr Doris on securing this important debate. The proposed closure of jobcentres in Glasgow, whilst in itself a reserved matter, is an issue that the Scottish Parliament should be debating and I am glad that we have the opportunity to debate this important issue for Mr Doris's constituents today.

My position mirrors that of my colleague Annie Wells: given the nuances, I will not condemn the proposals, but nor will I condone them or the process that is currently being followed. Across the United Kingdom, the Department for Work and Pensions has committed to reducing the size of its estate by 20 per cent—a decision that was taken due to changing circumstances and the facts as they are on the ground today. That comes near the end of a costly 20-year private finance initiative contract, signed by the Labour Government, for the upkeep of many DWP offices. Recent figures show that, across the UK, the reduction in numbers of claimants and the system changes have resulted in the DWP using only 25 per cent of the space that it pays for under the PFI contract.

We must note that the claimant count across the UK has dropped from 1.5 million in 2010 to around 800,000 today. In Glasgow, in that same time frame, the claimant count has almost halved. In Glasgow East, it has dropped by 47 per cent in less than seven years. However, that means that over 13,000 people still need the vital services that jobcentres provide. The concern that has been demonstrated across the chamber about what the proposed closures could mean for those people and about the whole process must be recognised by the DWP as it continues its consultation.

A review is being undertaken. The proposals seek to bring together smaller, less busy jobcentres into larger existing sites, thereby reducing the DWP's rents and freeing up services with a view to delivering a higher quality of service for benefit claimants.

The UK Government has made a pledge—it is one that I whole-heartedly endorse—that no DWP staff will be made redundant because of the changes. If anything, the DWP workforce looks set to grow in Scotland. Indeed, 122 new work coaches were recruited just last year.

However, as Annie Wells has said and will make clear in her submission to the DWP consultation, for those with long-term health conditions or disabilities, much more effort is needed to ensure that service users are not adversely affected by any of the proposed changes.

We must not lose sight of the uncertainty and trauma that are caused by being made unemployed. I do not doubt the worry for people when they read that their local jobcentre is to be closed. It is down to us—their elected representatives—to assure them that they are not being abandoned and to ensure that the changes, if they happen, are acceptable and result in better delivery of services for those who need them.

I urge all who are here today or watching at home who have concerns about the proposals to submit them to the consultation. It is only by working together, across parties, in the interests of constituents, that we will find a solution that works for everyone and that we can truly create a jobcentre service that is fit for the 21st century—one that will deliver real results for the people of Scotland.

13:26

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Bob Doris for bringing this important debate to the chamber and Stewart McDonald for co-ordinating the letter, which has support from all the parties except the Tory Party. I would be interested to hear from the Tories who represent Glasgow on what terms they would have signed a letter of solidarity with the rest of the MSPs who represent the city. I am also pleased that the *Evening Times* is backing the campaign.

From what I have read so far, there has been a complete lack of analysis of Glasgow's requirements. To me, that is an attack on the city of Glasgow, and as far as I am concerned, such an attack should lead to all of Glasgow's representatives fighting its corner.

One in 10 adults in Glasgow has never had a job. In Parkhead and Dalmarnock, six out of 10 families are lone-parent families. Glasgow is home to some of the most deprived communities, yet we face seven closures, which represents 50 per cent of Glasgow's jobcentres. It appears that Glasgow has been singled out for unfair treatment. One in four people still has no access to the internet.

Are the proposals part of a wider plan? As we know, the DWP is already moving to universal credit, which is a system that is quickly becoming discredited, from what I heard this morning. The city is certainly not ready to make that transition. Unemployment is still at 7.7 per cent. Jobcentres are a lifeline for people in cities such as Glasgow who are seeking work.

Like others, I would have some respect for the consultation—I suppose—if there was some analysis, but there are complete contradictions in what we have heard. I will come on to the ministerial letter, but there has been no real analysis of how people will get to the new arrangements. The DWP does not even know the numbers of people who are using the jobcentres. I do not know how the consultation was even allowed out of the door.

Adam Tomkins: What we know, as the member will surely accept, is that the claimant count in Glasgow has fallen by 44 per cent in the past seven years. It is down to 13,500. That is still too high, but it is a significant reduction. Is it not rational, given a 44 per cent decline in the claimant count, to think about the number of jobcentres that a city such as Glasgow continues to need?

Pauline McNeill: If that is the Tories' position and argument in this debate, they do not understand the city of Glasgow. The member is not taking into account any of the characteristics of the city that I am describing. The city is not ready. In previous debates I have heard the Tory position about getting people back to work. Jobcentres are a lifeline for people. The strategy is a very poor one if that is what it is based on.

We are not even clear why the closures are happening. Are they part of a bigger plan? As Adam Tomkins knows, the Social Security Committee learned that they seem to be part of a wider review of the estate. I want to get to the letter from the Minister for Employment, which is worth reading out, but I was about to make the point that at least there is one area of solidarity, in that the committee members worked together to call on the DWP to extend the consultation to 31 January, whereas it would previously have closed in the week after Christmas, so we have some time.

I encourage people to respond to the consultation by writing to Etta Wright at the Laurieston jobcentre in Glasgow. It is really important to do that, and I believe that it will be possible to save some of the jobcentres. That is why I look to members on the Tory benches: if they really want to save some of the jobcentres from closure, they need to work more closely with the other parties. The justification that we have

been given by the Minister for Employment is that the proposal

“will provide an estate that's right for the city”.

There is nothing about it that is “right for the city”. The letter says:

“I would like to reassure you that the reduction in sites in Glasgow is in line with our overall plan to reduce the total amount of space we occupy ... The number of Jobcentres proposed for closure reflects the preponderance of smaller jobcentres in Glasgow.”

I am sorry, but it is not an issue of floor space; it is about the needs and requirements of unemployed people.

Many of us have talked about the practicalities. We have heard many times the spurious reasons for which sanctions are applied, one of which is that individual claimants can be sanctioned if they are late for an appointment. There is much more likelihood of people being late for their appointment under the proposals. When the DWP considered distances between jobcentres, it found that the estimated walking times are 30 minutes between Bridgeton and Shettleston and 45 minutes between Castlemilk and Newlands. By the DWP's own admission, those walking times exceed the agreement that it had in 2011 that the time would be a maximum of 20 minutes. I ask those in other parties to join us: let us fight together and at least save some of the city of Glasgow's jobcentres.

13:32

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I, too, thank Bob Doris for securing the debate, and I thank him and the members who signed the motion for affording us the opportunity to debate the issue.

Jobcentres play an important role in supporting people who are seeking work. They are also an important point of contact for local businesses that are looking to recruit and for local and national initiatives that seek to support people into work, as well as encouraging growth and opportunity for all. It is widely accepted that having meaningful employment in a fair work environment that pays a living wage has a positive impact on health and wellbeing.

Yesterday in the chamber, we debated a Conservative motion on health inequalities. Nothing demonstrates the glaring divergence from the Tories' sham concern about health inequality more than the UK Government's actions on welfare and benefits. The outrageous decision to close half the jobcentres in the Glasgow region, including the Cambuslang jobcentre in my constituency, is just another example of the disregard that the Tories show to the vulnerable in our society.

As we have heard, the announcement was made without prior consultation. There was no consultation with elected members, local communities, service users or DWP unions or employees. Following answers in the House of Commons to questions from Margaret Ferrier MP and Angus Robertson MP, it became clear that the Tory Secretary of State for Scotland was also kept in the dark on what the DWP was up to.

I grew up in Rutherglen, in my constituency, and I have been fortunate enough to work in my constituency. I have seen Rutherglen and Glasgow suffer from heavy levels of joblessness as traditional industry collapsed in Scotland in the 1980s. The transition from the industrial past has been tough on constituencies such as mine. Manufacturing jobs, which numbered in the thousands only a few decades ago and guaranteed jobs for people in Rutherglen, Cambuslang and Blantyre, now number in the hundreds. That story is familiar to many communities across Scotland, but it is especially relevant in Glasgow, where joblessness, lower incomes and historical underinvestment in public services have come together to contribute to high unemployment levels and high underemployment levels.

To cut 20 per cent of jobcentres in Scotland in the current climate—with the plummeting pound, uncertainty on access to markets and potential tariffs on Scotland-made goods—would be bad enough, but to close half the jobcentres in the Glasgow region smacks of an overreach that is reminiscent of Margaret Thatcher's poll tax, which has already been referred to. It is just another example of the Westminster Tories' disregard for Scotland and especially for the unemployed and underemployed in our communities.

If Glasgow's jobless can be hammered with no resistance, with nearly 70,000 people affected, the Conservative Government will be emboldened to roll out further cuts to essential services. That is at the heart of the matter; it is not just about jobcentre closures but about a sustained campaign of defunding all public services and transferring provision, when it is profitable, to the private sector. This is happening while Glasgow has a 7.7 per cent unemployment rate, which is 2.3 per cent higher than the UK average.

The jobcentres are not round the corner from each other; they are services that are located in distinct local communities that have specific catchment areas. For example, in the area of Halfway in Cambuslang, the walk to the nearest jobcentre will increase from 30 minutes to more than an hour. That is what the jobcentre closures completely disregard—the local impact on communities and the people who are caught up in the situation.

DWP staff are being advised not to process appeals, and sanctions are a real and present threat to ordinary people. The hour-long walk from Halfway suddenly seems more stressful when being five minutes late could have a devastating impact on the benefits that are received. At best, decreasing access will result in more stress for people who are in a vulnerable position, but at worst, it will result in hunger and homelessness. In fact, given the planned closures, the DWP should be loosening the sanctions regime to ensure that people who are moving to a different jobcentre are not punished for having difficulty in getting to their appointments on time.

We should be maintaining the services that we already have. In areas of greater need, we should be looking at how to develop services, not cutting them. As my colleague Bob Doris highlighted in his motion, we need a social security system with "dignity and respect at its heart",

not one that imposes such closures on the most vulnerable in our society.

13:37

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): I warmly and genuinely thank Bob Doris for bringing this important debate to the chamber. It is appropriate that we will have spent a full hour discussing the matter. I also thank the minister, Jamie Hepburn, for the commendably open and transparent way in which he has kept Glasgow representatives from across the political spectrum informed of his communications with the DWP. I am afraid to say that the contrast between the openness of the Scottish Government and the lack of transparency on the part of the DWP is quite marked in this instance.

On the day that Annie Wells and I discovered that the proposals were on the table, we wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, and we received a response on the following day—8 December. That correspondence is in the public domain because it has been released under freedom of information rules. We expressed a number of concerns about the process and substance of the consultation, some of which I still have and some of which have been resolved.

It is important to understand the context in which this is happening. There are two elements to it. The first is that there is an all-party agreement at Westminster, which includes the SNP, that the future of Jobcentre Plus needs to be different from its past. The nature of the employment market and of the work that jobcentres undertake is changing.

For example, it is increasingly important to the work of jobcentres for them to have the facility and space to act as hubs for local employers, so that

employers can seek to hire employees at those jobcentres. That is easier to do with a smaller number of larger jobcentres than it is with a larger number of smaller jobcentres. It is worth recalling that in November, the all-party House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee said:

“The future of Jobcentre Plus (JCP) is one of change. ... To make a success of its new, expanded role, JCP will have to ensure that it is open to working in ways that are increasingly flexible, adaptable and experimental.”

All of that said, although I do not always agree with Patrick Harvie, I was taken with the way in which he expressed the important point that, even if the nature of the demand is changing, it remains important that the demand is met locally. I am taken with that point and I will relay it to the secretary of state.

Bob Doris: Mr Tomkins referred to the idea of the provision for those seeking employment changing and to the need for reform. The Smith commission suggested the idea of jobcentres co-locating with Skills Development Scotland, skills shops and citizens advice bureaux to provide a tailored service. Maryhill would be a prime location for such a co-located service. Does the member agree that Jobcentre Plus and the DWP should halt the closure of the Maryhill centre and explore that proposal dynamically with all partners?

Adam Tomkins: I am all in favour of exploring options for co-location, and that is one of the issues that the minister has written to the secretary of state about. That is incredibly important. I want there to be more joined-up working between the UK Government and the Scottish Government on the delivery of employability services and our social security system. That is one of the directions in which the Smith commission moved, and I was pleased to see that.

It is important to understand what is not happening—specifically, that includes a number of the things that Clare Haughey wrongly said were happening. This is about enhancing services, not cutting them. It is about improving claimant access to more employers. The proposals are for a reduction in floor space only—I say that not to diminish their importance but to help people to understand exactly what is happening. All staff and services will be relocated and no job losses are planned. As Liam Kerr said, the number of work coaches in Scotland is going up—122 work coaches were hired by the DWP in Scotland between April and September last year, notwithstanding the fact that there are fewer claimants than there have been since the 1970s.

I have some on-going concerns. I am concerned that the consultation that we have for the Bridgeton, Castlemilk and Maryhill jobcentres is not being extended to the other five jobcentres. I

have raised that concern with the secretary of state, and I will happily—well, not exactly happily—do so again. Like my fellow members of the Social Security Committee Pauline McNeill and Sandra White—who is the convener of that committee—I was concerned about the truncated timescale for the consultation on Bridgeton, Castlemilk and Maryhill, and I was pleased that the committee was able to bring to bear cross-party pressure on officials to have the consultation period extended.

On Monday, I visited Partick jobcentre, which is in Sandra White’s constituency and is one of the largest jobcentres in Glasgow. I asked staff and managers there about the DWP’s plans. One of the things that are happening in that part of Glasgow is that Anniesland jobcentre is to be closed, with its work being rolled into that of Partick jobcentre.

The staff and managers at Partick assured me that their jobcentre has ample capacity to absorb the additional work from Anniesland. They also told me that Anniesland was working at only one third of capacity. I asked how they knew that, because I knew that how we measure jobcentre capacity has been challenged in the House of Commons, and they said, “Well, it’s a three-storey building, and two storeys of it are closed.” Only one third of the building that the taxpayer is renting is being used by the jobcentre—the other two thirds are being leased out to other Government departments. That illustrates the magnitude of what we are talking about.

We are talking about redesigning jobcentres to be more effective for a city such as Glasgow rather than cutting services. If we held that in our minds, perhaps we would understand the proposals a bit more clearly.

13:43

The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn): I join others in thanking Bob Doris for bringing this debate to the chamber. I also thank the members who have contributed to the debate and those who have stayed behind to watch it.

In particular, I thank Conservative members who have stayed behind. I could not help but notice that they were out in force today—I counted more than 20 Conservative representatives at the start of the debate, although there are rather fewer than that now, as some have sloped off. That is quite unusual for a members’ business debate and I cannot think why they stayed in such numbers. I agree with Patrick Harvie that it would have been good to have heard rather more opinion coming from their benches—to be fair, I acknowledge that we heard a bit more from Adam Tomkins. I

However, in the absence of such, it is incumbent on the massed ranks of Conservatives who stayed here today to have at least brought their ears with them so that, having listened to what was said, they can take back a clear message to their party representatives in government at Westminster and can express the opinions that they have heard in the Scottish Parliament.

I welcome, too, the Glasgow MPs in the public gallery, who have been undertaking a range of activity in Westminster to bring the issue to the fore, as have most of the elected representatives of the city of Glasgow in the Scottish Parliament.

Concern has been expressed in the debate about the impact on communities and individuals. In parliamentary discourse, we often use the term “individual” when we actually mean a person—we are talking about people; we are talking about our neighbours, friends and family and those who live and work around us. Any one of us might need support from the social security system from time to time. I share the concern that the closures will make accessing support much harder in the city of Glasgow, a city that I am proud to have been born and raised in.

Pauline McNeill: Given the point that Mr Tomkins made about the estate, if that is an issue—he gave the example of the Anniesland jobcentre, which is occupying only one storey—is the Scottish Government in a position to talk to the DWP about other buildings that could be used?

Jamie Hepburn: I was planning to come to that issue a little later, but I will come to it now. The decision to close particular jobcentres in Glasgow seems to be driven by the fact that lease arrangements for particular buildings are coming to an end. First, that is a peculiar way in which to determine where a jobcentre is to be located. It would be rather better to see what the community needs. Secondly, Pauline McNeill correctly makes the point that underoccupancy of a building is a secondary consideration in deciding to close a particular jobcentre. The point that we are making, which again I hope is heard clearly, is not about the particular buildings that jobcentres are in; it is about the communities that they are located in. A number of members have made the sensible and apposite point that there are great benefits in seeking co-location of services. We have a range of offices through Skills Development Scotland, and Glasgow City Council has a range of offices for its social work department, for example, where there could be co-location.

To summarise my response to Pauline McNeill's point, the Government will always be pleased—that might not be the right word in this instance, given the subject matter, but we will be willing—to engage in dialogue with the UK Government and the DWP about such matters. Indeed, earlier

today, I had a meeting with Damian Hinds, the Minister of State for Employment. I should say that it was fairly constructive—although, of course, words are always easy. I am clear that we need to continue dialogue in that regard.

I am also clear that we need to continue dialogue on the clear commitment that was made in the Smith commission process about a greater role for the Scottish Government in the management of Jobcentre Plus. As Mr Tomkins will know because he was on the Smith commission, paragraph 58 of the commission's report sets that out and talks about a greater emphasis on the Scottish Government having greater responsibility, jointly with the UK Government, in relation to Jobcentre Plus.

I make that point not just to make a constitutional flag in the sand-type argument; I make it for the practical reason that if we had had such a process in place, the Scottish Government and everyone else would not, I presume, have found out about the closures through the pages of the *Daily Record*. We might have had some prior warning, which would have allowed us to raise our concerns, make the offer to co-locate and perhaps influence a change in mindset. We could also have raised the real concerns that I have about the potential negative impact on the coming devolution of the employment programme. We will rely heavily on Jobcentre Plus as a conduit for referrals to the programme, so we could see another negative impact in that regard.

Today, however, we debate the significant negative impact on people on the ground. We have heard clearly that those individuals—or people, I should say, to go back to the more correct terminology that I used earlier—will be faced with increased travel costs and travel time to engage with their newly designated jobcentre. As Mr Doris knows, Maryhill is an area of Glasgow that I know well, and the jobcentre will be almost 4 miles away in Springburn. Mr Doris is right to raise concerns about the increased pressure on Springburn jobcentre, as we already know that Springburn has the highest volume in the city of customers claiming jobseekers allowance and universal credit. There will be a clear negative impact.

The Government has expressed over a long period our concern about the UK Government's particular form of conditionality and its sanctions regime. I am concerned that the changes will lead to an increased number of sanctions in the city of Glasgow. I wrote to Damian Green, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, on that matter and he wrote back to me saying that there will be no change in policy for the individuals affected. However, that fundamentally misses the point. The issue is not the change in policy for those

individuals; it is about the change in circumstances. By the very nature of the changes, people will have to travel much further to access services, so of course people will arrive late for and miss appointments and we know that, in many cases, that can lead to their being sanctioned.

I could say much more about the issue, but let me be very clear—if it is not clear already—that the Scottish Government's preference would have been for us to have been rather better engaged in the process so that we could have raised our concerns. We are concerned that the closures are only the first raft of such closures for Scotland, although we are not clear where others might be and when they might be announced. It is likely, therefore, that we will come back to debate the same subject matter again.

I ask Conservative members to take the message back to the UK Government and I assure members that when the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, the Minister for Social Security and I meet Damian Green at next month's meeting of the joint ministerial working group on welfare, we will discuss the matter.

13:52

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Draft Climate Change Plan

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Good afternoon. The next item of business is a statement by Roseanna Cunningham, on the draft climate change plan. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): In 2009, the Scottish Parliament unanimously passed the most ambitious climate change legislation anywhere in the world. Seven years on, I lay before the Parliament the Scottish Government's draft third report on proposals and policies for meeting the statutory emissions reductions targets from 2017 to 2032. The draft climate change plan has been prepared in accordance with sections 35 and 36 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

In the past seven years, much has changed—not least the climate. The latest analysis by the European Commission's Copernicus earth observation system confirms that 2016 was the warmest year on record. Global temperatures reached a peak in February 2016 at around 1.5°C higher than at the start of the industrial revolution.

Those temperature increases and their impacts vary enormously around the globe. Many of the people who have done the least to contribute to the problem have limited capacity to adapt. Our work through the climate justice fund, which supports some of Africa's poorest climate-vulnerable communities, has emphasised the urgent practical need for global solutions.

We saw a major step in the right direction in Paris in December 2015. The United Nations Paris agreement, which was the first global, legally binding agreement to limit greenhouse gas emissions, came into force on 4 November 2016, significantly earlier than anticipated by the international community. We now see extraordinary momentum towards a low-carbon future—a future that is being shaped right here in Scotland.

Scotland has long-standing links to the climate change agenda. It was Professor Joseph Black at the University of Edinburgh in the 1700s who discovered carbon dioxide; he called it "fixed air". On the other hand, James Watt's work on the steam engine in the late 1700s was instrumental in initiating the industrial revolution. That revolution brought radical changes to our economy and society, and triggered the mass burning of fossil

fuels—cue the beginning of anthropogenic climate change. It is fitting that Scotland, having contributed to the problem in the first place, now leads on many of the solutions.

I had the privilege of attending the 22nd conference of the parties—COP22—in Marrakech last year, where Patricia Espinosa, the executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, referred to the “great achievement” of Scotland exceeding its 2020 emissions reduction target six years early. By delivering a massive 45.8 per cent cut in emissions since 1990, Scotland has demonstrated to the world that deep cuts are possible.

We should all be proud of that achievement. Without unanimous parliamentary agreement on the need for urgent action back in 2009, we could never have come so far so quickly. I advise members that Patricia Espinosa was surprised and incredibly impressed by the fact that that political buy-in was across the entire political spectrum. It is unusual in this world to have such unanimity.

Our achievements are a direct result of our ambition, our determination, our hard work and our willingness to collaborate. Progress has been achieved not by the Scottish Government alone, but by businesses, investors, communities and households, non-governmental organisations and the wider public sector all working to deliver a common goal for the common good.

Decarbonising electricity is critical in tackling emissions, and we are well on our way. In 2015, renewable electricity accounted for an incredible 59.4 per cent of Scotland’s gross electricity consumption. Scotland-based companies are selling their renewables expertise abroad in more than 40 countries.

We have exceeded our 2020 target of achieving 500MW in community and local ownership, and in line with our 2016 election manifesto commitment we now pledge to double that to 1GW in the same timeframe—the equivalent of powering half a million homes. We must not forget that many community and locally owned renewables projects generate funds that can be spent at local people’s discretion.

On energy efficiency, we have exceeded yet another target, achieving a 15.2 per cent cut in total energy consumption six years earlier than planned. That is not just an impressive statistic; our investment is making a real difference to vulnerable households in Scotland, particularly in addressing fuel poverty.

In my portfolio, we have seen a 77 per cent emissions reduction in the waste sector between 1990 and 2014. Almost two million households in Scotland now have access to a food waste

collection service, which is up from 300,000 in 2010.

Those are just some examples of our progress. We have done well, but together we must do more.

Today’s draft plan sets out how we intend to reduce emissions by 66 per cent by 2032, against the 1990 baseline. The reduction takes us into truly transformational territory. For the first time, we have made use of an international standard for modelling emissions reductions and energy issues. Members may have attended a session in the Parliament that my senior officials provided last year, which I hope they found helpful. The model has helped us decide how to reduce emissions across the economy using a pathway that is broken down into carbon envelopes, or budgets, for each major sector.

By 2030, Scotland’s electricity system will be wholly decarbonised, and it will supply a growing share of Scotland’s total energy needs. System security will be ensured through diverse generation technologies, increased storage, smart grid technologies and improved interconnection. By 2030, the combination of carbon capture and storage and the production of gas from plant material and biomass waste will have the potential to remove CO₂ from the atmosphere.

By 2032 we will have transformed, through the landmark Scotland’s energy efficiency programme, the energy efficiency and heating of our homes and non-domestic buildings, which are what is meant by the term “services” in the draft plan. Wherever technically feasible and practical, non-domestic buildings will be near zero carbon and the majority of homes will be connected to low-carbon heating systems. Scottish households should save hundreds of millions of pounds on their fuel bills over the lifetime of the plan, and thousands of jobs will be supported through the development of energy efficiency measures as well as renewable heat services and technologies. Our shops, offices, schools and hospitals will be warmer and easier to heat. By reducing energy demand we can help businesses improve their energy productivity and competitiveness and release savings in the public sector for front-line services.

The transport sector will be significantly decarbonised by 2032, with emissions dropping by a third compared to 2014. Low-emission cars and vans will be widespread, and low-emission heavy good vehicles will be more common. We are committed to freeing Scotland’s communities from harmful vehicle emissions. We will continue to invest in public transport and active travel and in low-carbon technologies such as electric cars and vans, hybrid ferries and green buses—and in the infrastructure that they require. In the chargeplace

Scotland network, we already have one of the most comprehensive electric charging networks in Europe. Electric vehicle sales are climbing.

We have also committed to the introduction of our first low-emission zone in 2018. We will evaluate and pilot the more extensive use of low-emission zones and associated changes to freight logistics and public transport, all of which will contribute significantly to improved air quality. Public health will benefit. Scientists tell us that the more they learn about the impact of air pollution on our health, the more concerned they become. It is also a question of social justice: in Scotland's towns and cities, communities with the lowest rates of car ownership are often those that are most likely to be affected by pollution.

In agriculture, our ambition is for Scotland to be among the lowest-carbon and most efficient food producers in the world. By 2030, we will expect farmers on improved land to know the nutrient value of their soils and to be implementing good practice in nutrient management and application. My message to Scotland's farmers is clear: what is good for the planet is good for farmers' pockets, and we will support them to ensure that they can cut their emissions and costs.

Enhancing our natural carbon sinks is critical. By 2030 we will have restored 250,000 hectares of degraded peatlands against 1990 levels—an improvement of valuable soils that represent around 20 per cent of Scotland's land mass. That is a step change in our ambition, and it is fundamental for biodiversity, water quality and our enjoyment of Scotland's spectacular natural environment. Over time, we will increase our tree-planting rate to 15,000 hectares by 2024-25, with a view to having 21 per cent of the Scottish land area in wood cover—an increase of around 3 per cent.

The draft climate change plan and the forthcoming draft energy strategy set out challenging but achievable goals that will boost Scotland's productivity and foster a vibrant climate for innovation, investment and high-value jobs. We are committed to working even more closely with business to finalise and implement those plans and to secure sustainable economic growth that is driven by innovation, exports and inclusion.

Our long-standing commitment to a low-carbon future has provided certainty to investors, businesses and communities; it has given us credibility and respect on the world stage; and it is a practical demonstration of our role as global citizens. Parliament now has the opportunity to help us to refine and improve our approach, and I commend the draft plan to members.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues

that she raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions. A lot of members wish to take part—if we have short questions, everyone will get in.

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of her statement.

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our age. I welcome the global commitment that was agreed in Paris, which recognises the importance of averting, minimising, and addressing the loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change. In Scotland, the 2020 interim target to reduce emissions by 42 per cent has been exceeded, which I welcome. Moreover, the announcement today of the intention to reduce emissions by 66 per cent by 2032 against the 1990 baseline is a truly transformational step forward.

The Scottish Conservatives are committed to sustainable transport; to ensuring that every home in Scotland has an energy performance certificate band C rating by 2030; and to the decarbonisation of our energy sector. The Scottish National Party Government has been very good at setting targets, but it has not always been good at meeting them in areas such as peatland restoration, tree planting and recycling rates.

In the short time that I have had to review the draft plan, I have noted that a number of policies are not linked to budget lines. Given the ambitious target that has been set today, what is the expected overall cost to the Scottish Government of delivering the climate change plan?

Roseanna Cunningham: I welcome the Conservatives' commitment to the overall strategy that the Scottish Government is pursuing. I would expect that whoever was standing here in government would want to continue with the commitment.

I hear what Maurice Golden says about some of our individual ambitions, and he is correct. On peat and forestry, progress against report on proposals and policies 2 was not as great as we might have wished, but we believe that we can make a step change in that area. The uptake of woodland grants has started to increase, and the amount of money that we are putting into peatland restoration will provide the necessary increased uptake. It is our intention to drive that forward to ensure that we are able to deliver on the much greater ambition that Maurice Golden seeks. I thank him for his commitment to getting on board with that ambition.

We have looked at the overall cost relative to gross domestic product for the whole of Scotland, and it comes in at about 2 per cent of GDP. It is not just about the costs that are borne by

Government but about how we look at the impact across the whole economy. However, that 2 per cent figure does not take into account the enormous benefits that are involved. It is not a net 2 per cent; there is payback from the huge benefits that will accrue.

I tend not to talk simply about the costs. If we talk only about costs, we miss out on talking about the benefits. There are enormous potential benefits, including in areas such as the economy and innovation, on which I know Maurice Golden is very keen.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of the statement. I welcome today's draft climate change plan. The document will be used by us all to guide us to a more sustainable future.

Global temperatures have risen to 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels, alarmingly close to the 1.5°C limit that the world has committed to strive to keep to. Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is essential that there be robust funding for research and development and innovation across sectors, so that the necessary technology—it has not even been invented—can be effective?

The statement is light on detail. It remains to be assessed whether the plan will provide enough guidance and finance to tackle the most heavily emitting sectors. As transport emissions have reduced by less than 3 per cent from the 1990 baseline, there will have to be a massive step change there. Indeed, meeting the plan target will be a big challenge for everybody in Scotland, yet a lot of the actions will fall to local authorities at a time of cuts.

The SNP's failure to ban fracking—or even to mention fracking—in the plan is a major let-down. If the Government is serious about tackling climate change, it will back my bill to ban fracking.

Roseanna Cunningham: I thank Claudia Beamish for her overall support. I am struggling slightly to isolate a question from her comments, so I will start with the fracking issue.

Fracking is not mentioned in the draft plan because we are not doing it. Factoring in something that we are not doing is not something that we considered being of much use. We are taking a cautious and evidence-led approach. I am conscious that the Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy is sitting next to me, and I know that he is about to launch a full public consultation on the issue. In fact, in our pre-statement chitchat, he asked me about issues in respect of that consultation. Once responses have been independently analysed, the full range of evidence will be considered and recommendations will be made.

In the timescales that the draft plan covers, we will not be doing fracking; it is not going to be factored in in the immediate future. If anything were to change, we would have to look again at the plan but, at the moment, there is no need to do that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to questions from back benchers. I would like to get in all 11 members, so I would ask that they all—and not just Mr Dey, who I know will do so—ask short questions and that the cabinet secretary provides short answers. I know that that is difficult for everybody.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): The ambitious target that has been set for peatland restoration following the budget commitment for 2017-18 is extremely welcome. Will the restoration grants that are referenced in the draft plan be open to all land managers? Larger-scale projects might—at least in the early years—be favoured in order to achieve economies of scale and to establish the momentum that we will require. Does the Scottish Government recognise that we will need an accompanying increase in capacity and skills to deliver on the target?

Roseanna Cunningham: Applications will be invited from land managers across the board who are interested in delivering restoration projects. That will build on the excellent relationship that the peatland action initiative has established with the sector.

Obviously, we will want to support the best projects and those that deliver the most—and that is what we will be looking for. We agree that we need to develop capacity further to support the delivery of peatland restoration, so we will be working to build on the successful work that has been done to date. As I said, that will involve training and development and the dissemination of restoration tools and techniques. It will also mean jobs, which is an important consideration that needs to be reaffirmed.

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): The cabinet secretary will know that her budget for improving energy efficiency in housing is still £1 million behind where we were two years ago. When organisations such as WWF Scotland say that an average of £400 million a year is required, how will the budget figure of £140 million achieve that? Will the cabinet secretary be relying on the United Kingdom Government's energy company obligation fund of £640 million, of which Scotland receives 11.5 per cent—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not a short question. That will do, thank you.

Roseanna Cunningham: I advise the member that energy efficiency measures are not coming out of my budget but coming out of a colleague's

budget. This Government's proposals leave trailing what is happening south of the border. As I understand it, no public money is going into energy efficiency south of the border so, to be frank, I find it extraordinary for the Conservatives to ask a question about that. What we are doing will be extremely important. It is a key part of what will be delivered under the climate change plan, but it is also key to delivering on fuel poverty targets.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Given the ambition of the climate change plan, does the cabinet secretary envisage opportunities for Scottish businesses to innovate as the Glenug Inn in my constituency has done? It has been using 100 per cent renewable energy, reuses heat and food waste and keeps 85 per cent of waste out of landfill.

Roseanna Cunningham: Indeed. I have already talked about the jobs that might emanate from the amount of work that is being done on peatland restoration. We are already seeing the benefits of innovation. Around 43,500 people are directly or indirectly employed in the whole low-carbon and renewable energy sector in Scotland and Scotland-based companies are competing globally, as I indicated in my statement.

There are many examples of innovation. In addition to the one that Kate Forbes mentioned, there are, for example, the surf 'n' turf project in Orkney, which will produce hydrogen from onshore wind and marine energy, and the Glasgow Housing Association project in partnership with the private sector that will implement a new district heating scheme in south Glasgow, which will include the UK's largest air-source heat pump.

There is already innovation in and around this area. It is an aspect that we must not forget. It is not only about cost but about benefit, and the benefits go beyond those to climate change and the environment alone.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary said that we are into truly transformational territory. What steps is she taking to ensure that no one is left behind and that we have a just transition for workers in industries that are detrimentally affected by the plan? What about all the pensioners who are living in fuel poverty this winter—what assurances can she give them that they will not continue to be left behind?

Roseanna Cunningham: I have already indicated in the statement and some of my answers that that is a key part of the plan. I appreciate that members have not had the time to read the plan in detail, but we talk about benefits beyond simply climate change mitigation. Those will be benefits for everybody. I rather suspect that

the people who are currently in fuel poverty are, for example, also the most likely to be impacted adversely by poor air quality. I hope that Richard Leonard understands the health implications of that for people in their working environment and those who suffer from fuel poverty.

At the end of the day, if we do not fix the problem of climate change, there will be a negative impact on huge numbers of people. We need to get it sorted out and I hope that what I have heard from Richard Leonard does not suggest that Labour is moving away from a commitment to the overall policy.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Many of the 21 recommendations made by the Government's adviser, the UK Committee on Climate Change, have been rejected or only partially addressed in the plan. One of that committee's essential concerns was that agricultural emissions were set to overtake those from energy, so will the Scottish Government commit to compulsory soil testing? It is clear that the voluntary approach, which resulted in only nine farmers getting involved in the Government's climate farming programme, is failing.

Roseanna Cunningham: We have already committed to compulsory soil testing. I am on record as having done so, as is at least one of my predecessors. That is our intention.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of her statement, welcome the aspirations in the plan and commit myself to helping with the scrutiny of it over the next three months. Will the cabinet secretary advise me when Parliament can expect a detailed strategy on how we up our game on district heating? I make a plea that energy efficiency programmes that are implemented have a degree of flexibility to allow local circumstances to be taken on board. In relation to transport—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, that is fine, Mr McArthur. I have other people on my list and that is two good questions.

Roseanna Cunningham: Those are two good questions that are not entirely within my portfolio. I am conscious that the energy strategy is being published next week and I rather suspect that those questions might be more properly directed towards my colleague the Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I ask the cabinet secretary to expand on what the agricultural sector in Scotland can do to help us meet our climate change targets.

Roseanna Cunningham: The approach to reducing emissions in agriculture is through maximising farming efficiencies, focusing on

protecting and enhancing soils, tackling livestock diseases, utilising the best technologies, and turning waste into a resource. Low-carbon farming is not only good for the planet; it is good for food producers' pockets.

I refer to my response to Mark Ruskell's question. Yesterday morning, I was on a farm near Alloa and I spoke to Ross Logan, who is a young and innovative farmer who has done soil testing on his farm. As a consequence, he saved over £3,500 on fertiliser in the first year.

People can be kind to the planet when they farm and save a lot of money too. I have never yet met a farmer who does not want to save money.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is Mr Scott's cue.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare an interest as a farmer.

Since 1990, emissions from the transport sector have decreased by only 1 per cent. In light of the cuts to mitigation measures that are proposed in the current budget, how will a 33 per cent reduction be achievable by 2032? The cabinet secretary referred to that in her statement.

Roseanna Cunningham: I very much hope that John Scott conducts soil testing on his farm to make all the savings that are possible for it.

John Scott *rose*—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, Mr Scott.

Roseanna Cunningham: I will move on to transport.

Over the period since 1990, there has, of course, been a huge increase in demand for transport. We show our age when we think back to 1990, but most households then would have had only one car. Now, it is not uncommon for households to have two or three cars. That has an enormous impact, and that has been one of the problems in effecting change.

In my statement, I talked about technologies that are beginning to come on board that will be able to help us to get to the challenging targets that we want to reach. I remind members that there is potential for innovation that we do not yet understand or know about. Obviously, we have not factored that into the plan, but the world is changing very quickly and, frankly, I even hope that the target will be bettered.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): The cabinet secretary might be aware that there are exciting proposals for district heating in Grangemouth and the east side of Falkirk. Those proposals include a number of domestic and non-domestic buildings, such as the new Forth Valley College campus, which is due for completion in

2019. Will the Scottish Government continue to impress on Scotland's local authorities and other public bodies the benefits of district heating for climate change and the economic, health and social benefits that district heating can bring to local communities?

Roseanna Cunningham: Appropriately situated district heating is an efficient method of delivering affordable, low-carbon heat to consumers. It can help to reduce fuel poverty—that goes back to the question that Richard Leonard asked—and tackle the associated health problems that fuel poverty can lead to. District heating plays an important role in the transition to an affordable, low-carbon heat system for Scotland.

The project that Angus MacDonald mentioned is laudable. There are other projects, of course, and the Government supports the approach. The low-carbon infrastructure transition programme is supported by the European regional development fund with a budget of £76 million. It focuses on accelerating the development of low-carbon infrastructure projects, including district heating. One wonders about the question that now hangs in the air around that.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): It is fair to say that progress on energy efficiency for domestic heating has been disappointing. To follow on that theme, what specific financial measures and measures through the planning system are in the draft climate change plan to promote district heating and combined heat and power units?

Roseanna Cunningham: As Daniel Johnson knows, I am not responsible for the planning system. A huge planning review has just been launched, and I hope that, if he has particular concerns about how the planning system works, he will make a submission to that review. We are trying to drive forward on as many fronts as possible. That is one of them, and I think that we will be successful.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that climate change policies have the potential not only to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build a low-carbon economy, but to deliver in other vital areas such as health and social justice, and to encourage behaviour shift in the next generation through education? That is a matter that is close to my heart.

Roseanna Cunningham: Yes, I absolutely agree with that. We have chosen the pathway that we have to ensure that we meet our climate change targets while maximising economic growth and optimising wider benefits. We have used the model that I talked about in my statement.

The plan highlights a number of key non-carbon benefits. The combined value of air quality improvements as a result of reduced emissions might be in excess of £500 million a year.

The increased number of journeys that are made by active travel will reduce congestion and pollution, as well as providing the associated benefits of being active. I can tell the member that this morning I had a lovely visit to Currie high school, where the whole school is showing a commendable commitment to sustainability that covers everything from what food is produced in the canteen to what the young people are learning in the classroom. That just goes to show that work in this area can impact on virtually every area of life.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank all members, because everybody got their question in. That shows what we can do when we all put our minds to it.

Rural Development (Funding)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-03463, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the future of funding for rural development.

15:01

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing): The devolution of most rural powers in 1999, together with access to billions of pounds of funding through European Union membership, gave Scotland's Parliament and Government key tools with which to support our rural and coastal communities. The now clear intention of the United Kingdom Government to take Scotland and all of the UK out of the EU and out of the single market means that rural Scotland faces a very uncertain future, so I want to set out what Scotland should rightly expect from the UK Government, and to seek cross-party support and agreement from Parliament on how best to protect Scotland's rural interests.

I and my advisers have had fruitful discussions with other parties, and I am pleased to say that those fruitful discussions have enabled us to be in a position to support the Labour and Liberal Democrat amendments. Let me say at the opening of this first rural debate of the new year that I shall seek to work with members in other parties on the key matters that we face. That is my new year's resolution.

Members: Hear, hear.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We all heard it and we will hold you to it.

Fergus Ewing: I am sure that you will, Presiding Officer, and rightly so. We will see how it goes.

I hope, too, that we can agree on the fundamental point that devolution has been good for rural Scotland. It has enabled the Parliament and successive devolved Administrations to focus their time and energy on key rural issues. All those issues have benefited from our having control over policy and legislation, which has been underpinned by public funding within the context of a wider EU framework.

Indeed, much of the development that has been undertaken in rural Scotland in the past 18 years has been possible only through EU funding support, with around €4.6 billion being provided through the common agricultural policy between 2014 and 2020 alone. At the same time, EU membership has enabled us to protect our

precious natural environment and to contribute to our climate change ambitions.

Now we are losing that, and there is to be nothing in its place. We have no guarantee of funding beyond Brexit; we simply have a promise of policy to come and a plea for trust to deliver a better, brighter deal for rural Scotland. The fact that there is no plan for Brexit is no excuse for there being no plan on what will be done to replace EU CAP funding, including the funding that is provided through the Scottish rural development programme and the European maritime and fisheries fund.

Today, Michael Russell is representing the Scottish Government at the joint ministerial committee on UK negotiations, and next week Roseanna Cunningham and I will meet counterparts from all the UK Administrations to discuss rural and environmental matters. Such discussions will be essential as we negotiate the difficult months and years ahead. We have been promised treatment as equal partners: we will hold the UK Government to that promise and will enter all discussions about the future of rural Scotland in good faith. However, if we consider the actions of the UK Government—or, rather, its inaction on commitments that it made on rural funding, and on the CAP funding review in particular—we can be forgiven for also retaining a degree of scepticism.

So far, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has failed to carry out a full review of the UK allocation of agriculture funding. George Eustice, with whom I have a workmanlike relationship, promised that the review would be concluded by the end of last year. It has not even begun—far less, been concluded.

If the CAP is to end, why is a review needed? One very good reason is that it will highlight the stark difference between payment rates per hectare for Scottish farmers and for farmers in the rest of the UK. For example, English moorland farmers receive about €65 per hectare, whereas Scotland's poorer settlement means that our region 3 moorland farmers only get about €10 per hectare. Even on better-quality land, English farmers receive almost €30 per hectare more than Scottish farmers.

At present, there is no level playing field north and south of the border. I hope that we all agree that livestock and arable farmers doing the same job in different parts of the UK should receive comparable levels of payment within devolved systems. However, English, Welsh and Northern Irish farmers receive payments of which Scottish farmers can only dream.

That is not the only example of the UK Government treating Scotland unfairly. I remain deeply dissatisfied with the current constitutional

arrangements pertaining to Seafish, following the UK Government's refusal to include the power to raise a Scottish seafood levy in the Scotland Act 2016. To me, repatriation of the near £2 million Seafish levy that is raised here in Scotland makes perfect sense. The UK Government's inflexibility on the matter is all the more surprising when one considers that fisheries policy is devolved.

The parallels between the Seafish levy and the red meat levy are striking. Scotland's legitimate request for greater influence on how money that is paid by Scottish farmers is utilised to promote their interests has, until recently, been rebutted by the UK Government. Although some progress has been made on those levies in the short term—and I have sought to encourage good relations with my UK counterparts—none of those examples augurs well for our future relationship on funding, should the UK Government seek to take over from the EU after Brexit.

Aside from the unanswered question whether the UK will match EU funding post-Brexit, there are, where Scotland's rural fishing and farming communities are not getting a fair deal, key unresolved issues between the Scottish and UK Governments.

At a farming conference in the new year, Andrea Leadsom appeared to suggest that funding for rural development should be fundamentally changed. The UK Government has guaranteed continuation of direct payments in farming until 2020, and structural fund payments—which include farming, fisheries, forestry, rural development and environmental funding—up to the point of exit from the EU. That is welcome as far as it goes, but outstanding issues remain and must be addressed.

Support for less favoured areas is crucial for Scotland; 85 per cent of our farming land is classed as less favoured, compared with only 15 per cent in England. However, the UK Government is yet to guarantee the funding for applications in 2019, let alone beyond that year.

EU funding is vital for continued viability and sustainability of Scotland's rural economy and communities. UK ministers are signalling a major shift, beyond Brexit, in how such funding might be determined and allocated in the future. They are suggesting that there might be a UK-wide scheme, with the UK Government apparently in charge. We have cause to be wary of that approach while we are still asking the UK Government for the full £190 million of CAP convergence moneys that UK ministers top-sliced for their own purposes—money that is rightly Scotland's, to support our farmers and crofters.

Surely there should be repatriation, with power over policy and funding—and the moneys

themselves—transferring directly to Scotland and not passing through Westminster. On that, we agree with the point in Labour’s amendment on repatriation of powers. We have made clear in the document “Scotland’s Place in Europe” our position that the powers should be repatriated from Europe to Scotland. Powers over rural policy that are still reserved should be transferred, and where additional powers are required to enable us to support our rural economy more fully—for example, on immigration—they should also be devolved.

Moreover, discussions on powers over policy should be based on mutual respect for the current constitutional settlement on these islands. It is hard to see any evidence of such respect when we learn of UK ministers’ intentions only through a question-and-answer session at a conference.

However, there is a strong case for stability and certainty—at least in the short term. Rural Scotland now faces three different serious threats—loss of labour through the UK view on immigration, loss of access to the EU single market and loss of financial support. I will give as a specific example the humble Scottish tattie. Currently, EU funding supports not only the production on farms all over Scotland of the potatoes that end up on our plates, but crucial research and development on seed potatoes. That has enabled Scotland to become a world-leading producer of seed potatoes; we export our knowledge, our expertise and—of course—our tatties to other EU states and beyond. Currently, we pay no tariffs for such exports. Further, our application of EU regulations guarantees the provenance of our seed potatoes, which enables their being exported internationally. Indeed, potato producers to whom I have spoken see that the regulations, far from being red tape, are proof of quality and compliance and are necessary to maintain access to vital export markets.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Seed potatoes are an important issue for my constituents. Is the cabinet secretary aware that some of the more northern states in the United States, for example Idaho, which have similar climatic advantages for growing seed potatoes, are poised to exploit any lacuna in our ability to supply seed potatoes to export markets, and that the danger is not simply local but global?

Fergus Ewing: I have always found that one of the distinct advantages of taking an intervention from Mr Stewart Stevenson is that it tends to be an educative process. That was no exception. He made a point of which I was unaware, but it is a very salient point, indeed. There are many growers of potatoes and other produce who are ready to step into the breach, and in a future world where there are tariffs, they will, of course, see the

commercial opportunities to do so. There is a clear commercial opportunity, and all over the world growers of various types of produce—including potatoes—will see advantage for themselves. Of course they will, and they cannot be blamed for that. That extremely important point is illustrative of just one of the several serious risks. I have deliberately sought not to express all this in hyperbolic ultrarhetorical terms, but simply to set out the facts in a calm and reasoned manner.

I return to the humble tattie. People are employed at every stage of the process and are engaged in growing, harvesting, storing, researching, developing, transporting, selling, preparing and trading our potatoes. Many of those people are Scottish, but many of them are from the EU, and we want them to be able to stay here and to continue to give of their work for this country.

I will now fast-forward to a conclusion. I am very much looking forward to the debate. I hope that it will shed more light than it casts heat. The priority for all of us is clear: it is to do all that we can to protect rural Scotland’s interests in these times of uncertainty. I reassure all members that I will continue to work tirelessly towards such objectives.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the importance of public funding for rural development to help drive forward Scotland’s rural economy and continue to carry out works to protect and enhance the natural environment; notes the significant contribution made by EU funding and welcomes the continuation of that funding until 2020; regrets that the current UK Government has failed to provide Scotland with its fair share of funding for rural interests; is concerned at recent statements by UK ministers on their intentions for future funding for rural development; notes the substantial potential adverse impact that such changes could have on rural Scotland after 2020; is further concerned at UK ministers’ apparent desire to create a UK-wide policy approach on devolved rural matters without consultation with, or the agreement of, the Scottish Parliament and Scottish ministers, and resolves to continue to make the case for fair funding for rural development in Scotland that best meets its needs and interests and to ensure that the current devolution settlement is enhanced through repatriation of appropriate powers and the devolution of additional powers to protect rural Scotland’s interests.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I never thought that I would hear “lacuna” and “potato” in the same sentence, but I have today.

15:15

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members’ interests. I also welcome the new, cuddly Mr Ewing.

We have just heard the cabinet secretary’s concerns over the future of rural development in

the years to come. It is, unfortunately, typical of the SNP Government to treat everything that the UK Government does as another sign of impending doom for Scotland. It is incredibly disappointing that Fergus Ewing cannot and will not recognise the opportunities that we have before us.

There is a huge prize to be won for Scottish and UK agriculture in the ability to design our own system to cater specifically for our farming sector. We need a policy that is simpler and easier to access. We need a policy that delivers support to the farmers who are producing our food, not one that supports slipper farmers. We need a policy that drives innovation and the uptake of new technology and which delivers an efficient and profitable industry that respects and enhances our environment and has high animal welfare standards at its heart.

For the past 20 years of the CAP, each review has involved a reduction in the pot of money that is available for farmers and an increase in complicated red tape and bureaucracy. The cabinet secretary cannot look at that information and seriously expect that the position would have been any different going forward. Across Europe, budgets are under pressure and, with the CAP being the largest spending item on the EU's balance sheet, it was never realistic for CAP spending to be maintained when southern European economies are struggling so much.

Fortunately, going forward, the UK economy looks in much better shape to deliver the support that agriculture needs. We need to argue strongly and with one voice that agriculture should receive roughly the same level of support after 2020 as it is receiving now. The future prosperity of agriculture demands nothing less.

Stewart Stevenson: I am sure that the member will be aware that Scotland gets 16.4 per cent of the support that is given to agriculture in the UK. Is he arguing for that proportion of support to Scotland to be maintained or indeed, perhaps because of the lower acreage payments in Scotland, to be increased as a proportion of UK agriculture support?

Peter Chapman: I am basically saying that we must argue for roughly the same level of support as we have been used to.

It is time for the SNP to accept that we will not be members of the EU after 2019 and to start planning for the future after Brexit. Starting that process will require a clear set of objectives. It will need guiding principles that inform policy throughout.

There are serious concerns that the population of farmers is ageing, which is a definite sign that more needs to be done to encourage new

entrants. That is why I am so angry at the lack of funding for the young farmers start-up scheme. I know that more than £5 million out of a pot of £6 million has been spent in year 1, which shows how important the fund is. That scheme should be operating throughout the SRDP period from 2014 to 2020, but how can it when most of the money has already been spent? I urge Fergus Ewing to allocate additional money to the scheme to help new farmers into business. It is vital that new entrants gain access to all support payments from day 1 of their starting to farm. Sadly, that does not happen now, which is a great disadvantage to young folk starting.

The objective for Scottish ministers should be clear: a system that is built to work specifically for our agricultural industry. The last thing that anyone in rural Scotland wants is totally different systems on each side of the Tweed, because that would distort competition too much. A UK framework is needed that allows unique Scottish interests to be catered for without creating, in NFU Scotland's words,

"Significantly diverging agricultural policies across the UK".

That is why my colleagues and I are today calling for the SNP Government to engage with DEFRA's upcoming consultation. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and her team have started to set out what they see as their priorities for the future of farming south of the border, but we know nothing of Scotland's plans yet. The UK Government will seek to scrap the three-crop rule, cut back on red tape, simplify rules and abolish absurd regulations on, for instance, what makes a hedge a hedge. The UK Government is also committed to encouraging innovation and efficiency and to reducing Government inspections through increasing the use of technologies such as aerial photography.

The cabinet secretary should not be using Parliament's time to make political points against Westminster; he should be figuring out what regulations Scotland's farmers can do without and helping us to become more efficient. Of course, we know that the Government is not focused on making our farmers more competitive, which is why I had to write to the cabinet secretary about our overprescriptive greening regulations, for instance. As members will be aware, the unnecessarily strict management rules are holding Scottish farmers back compared with their competitors in England. I remind the cabinet secretary that he has already promised to look at our greening rules and make them fit for purpose, so why does he not get on with it?

To take the example of vining peas, limited harvesting dates combined with the SNP Government's two-crop rule are making that potentially attractive option almost irrelevant in

Scotland, while English farmers face no such restrictions. That is not by any stretch of the imagination the SNP Government's only failure on managing the rural economy.

As we well know, there are still on-going issues with 2015 CAP payments; many farmers are still waiting for pillar 2 money because of the knock-on effect from the catastrophic handling of the loan payments. Not only that, but the SNP Government is at least a month behind where it should be on 2016 pillar 1 payments. Farmers would usually expect to have full payment in early December, but here we are in mid-January and many farmers have received, at best, an 80 per cent loan—or, indeed, nothing at all—with little prospect of payment of the 20 per cent balance before June this year.

Is it any wonder that the total income from farming has fallen for two years in a row? From 2014 to 2015, the Scottish Government recorded a fall of £110 million, which is about 15 per cent in real terms. On the back of those shocking figures, I fail to see how anyone could be surprised that the finances of the Scottish farming community are in a perilous position. Farm debt levels have never been higher—they have increased by nearly £200 million to a record £2.2 billion—while the SNP Government has failed to deliver CAP moneys. Nearly 50 per cent of farmers are not making enough money to earn the minimum wage and, worse still, 20 per cent of farm businesses posted losses in 2014.

What do we need to do? We need to take a hard look at the problems that have grown over the Government's past two terms. I hope that today is a genuine attempt by the cabinet secretary to start a debate about how our future support for Scottish agriculture might look and is not another attempt to drive division and mistrust between here and Westminster.

I move amendment S5M-03463.3, to leave out from "continuation" to end and insert:

"UK Government's continuation of that funding until 2020; further notes the opportunity to cut bureaucracy and red tape on leaving the EU; welcomes the chance to design an agricultural support system more suited to domestic needs, rather than those of the whole of the EU; understands that the UK Government is committed to working with the devolved administrations regarding the UK's exit from the EU; recognises NFU Scotland's view that significantly divergent agricultural policies across the UK could lead to distortion in agricultural markets, and recognises the uncertainty that delayed CAP payments by the Scottish Government has caused the agricultural sector."

15:24

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): We all welcome the commitments of both our Governments to funding rural development along

current lines until 2020, which have provided producers and communities with a degree of stability. That said, we know that farming and crofting involve long-term planning, so three years does not buy a lot of planning time. The commitment is therefore, at best, staving off panic. It is right and proper for consultation and discussions about what will take place beyond 2020 to begin now. As with all discussion about Brexit and its implications, the constitutional question rears its head and too often overshadows the issues that we should be concerned about.

Agricultural policy is devolved within the parameters of our status in the EU so, going forward, there will be parameters for the whole UK that are set by trade deals and World Trade Organization rules. Therefore, it is right and proper for the UK Government to represent the needs of all our farming communities in those negotiations, and to do so the UK Government needs to talk to them.

We believe that devolved Governments have a role in the negotiation of trade deals, too, and the UK Government would be negligent if it ignored the knowledge and expertise that they hold. We are clear that changes to the rules that we trade by should not be used to claw back devolved powers—indeed, quite the opposite. When powers and decision making are repatriated, it follows that those powers should come to devolved Governments.

The reason why we lodged our amendment is not that we disagree with the direction of travel of the Scottish Government or with its need to be involved. Our amendment sets a more positive tone. If both Scotland's Administrations are to work together for the good of our rural communities, we surely need to lead with a positive approach. This is not the time for party political or constitutional squabbling; our farmers and crofters cannot be pawns in those political games.

With that explanation, I turn to what should be the substance of the debate. What strikes fear into the hearts of most of our producers is the New Zealand example, which is often used to show what can happen if subsidies are removed, with people pointing to that country's profitable farm enterprises now. However, they do not point out the number of small farms that went to the wall and the impact that that had on rural communities, which we really do not want. We need to start discussions about what we want and need from our farming communities.

It is obvious that the first goal is food production. We need to have food security. Leaving the EU, and the following currency fluctuations, will make imports more expensive and therefore imported

foodstuffs more expensive. Should we therefore be looking to be more self-sufficient?

Our producers will also look at exports. A low pound makes their exports more attractive abroad, albeit that trade tariffs, if they were in place, could offset that. If we end up with trade tariffs, they will be in place going forward, whereas the value of the pound might stabilise, depending on our country's economic future. The market will always find its place. The role of Government intervention is to deal with the problems that that creates and to make sure that we are secure. We therefore need to look at food production for the home market.

There is a suspicion that farm subsidies are used to fuel the profits of supermarkets, which in turn pay hefty dividends to their shareholders. That cannot be right when too many of our people are living in food poverty. The fact that people in our country—in Scotland—are living without enough food to eat is a disgrace. Any future farming subsidy regime should have the elimination of food poverty built into its foundations, rather than being tacked on as an afterthought. I find it utterly bizarre that, in a country whose biggest net export is our fantastic food and drink, we have farms and crofts that cannot make a living, and they have neighbours who cannot afford the food that they need to eat. Food poverty is not inevitable for either producers or consumers. We can choose to end it, and we need to use the future subsidy regime to do that.

We must look at the needs of rural communities, where many of our producers are based. We need to find a balance between food production profitability and the need to support rural communities. The EU has recognised peripherality and the difficulties that remote rural areas face in a way that neither of our Governments does or has done in the past. We know that the way in which EU rules were interpreted led to their having less of an impact on peripherality than they could have had, but that was in the past. We must learn from those mistakes and make sure that, if we are putting public money in, there are public benefits, which should include community cohesion and population retention.

Environmental benefits and protection are also things that public money should support. When we look at climate change, we see that emissions from farming have hardly changed. We need to use public funding to help that change to happen. However, we also need to recognise that many of our land managers militate against climate change by planting trees and carrying out land management activities that make the countryside a place for all of us to enjoy.

Such balances need to be struck. We all know that there is no money tree to shake, but we also

know that, without public support, food production and the communities that producers support are likely to fold, and we cannot afford that. This is the time when we need to take a holistic view of what needs to happen, how both our Governments can support that and what trade deals we can make to enhance it.

Scottish Environment LINK has called for a commission of stakeholders to be put in place to look at the subject. I tend to agree with that suggestion, which the Scottish Government might take to the other Governments in the United Kingdom with the purpose of setting up a commission jointly that also stands for each of the devolved nations. It is clear that all stakeholders need a voice in the process. We will therefore support the Liberal Democrats' amendment.

We face huge challenges, but we also have the opportunity to take a long, hard look at what we need to do for the good of our producers, what they need from both their Governments and how we can fix historical problems. Let us not miss the opportunity by wrangling; let us grasp it and make a real and lasting difference to how we deal with food production and eliminate food poverty.

I move amendment S5M-03463.1, to leave out from "is further concerned" to end and insert:

"understands that the UK Government will require to draw up trade agreements with the EU and other countries; welcomes that it will consult widely with producers throughout the UK on this; urges it to also work with the devolved governments to ensure that the differing needs of all of devolved nations are met; believes that devolved powers over policy should not be centralised and, where powers are repatriated from the EU, should be devolved in line with the Scotland Act 1998, and further believes that producers will continue to require support and that this should be distributed fairly, taking into account natural and geographical disadvantage in order to create a level playing field for all producers in the UK, and to ensure that appropriate funding is available to support farmers, land managers and rural communities to meet biodiversity and climate change targets."

15:31

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):

The United Kingdom's impending withdrawal from the European Union is to bring to an end nearly 40 years of rural development funding under the common agricultural policy. Since the vote to withdraw from the European Union last June, much has been said about the lack of information from the UK Government, in particular about the future level of that funding now that there will be no obligation to deliver it. It will be entirely up to the UK and Scottish Governments between them to decide on both the level of funding and the way in which that funding is delivered.

The only thing that is certain about this situation is uncertainty. Although funding is secure until we

leave the EU, nothing is certain after that. It is surely the task of both the UK and Scottish Governments to act responsibly. Too much is at stake for our rural communities for any blame game to take hold about too much or too little funding or, indeed, about how funding is to be allocated. That is why I am pleased that Fergus Ewing has indicated support for my amendment.

Since September, I have been suggesting gently—and, I admit, not so gently at times—that it is essential that a group be set up to examine options for designing a new system of delivering public money for public good in our rural economy. As the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for rural development, I have been in discussions with various stakeholders over the period since the vote to leave the EU in June. I am particularly taken with the proposals from both Scottish Environment LINK and NFU Scotland. Both have come up with practical ways of ensuring future funding post 2020. The NFUS says that we need to agree the correct policy direction and secure the necessary budget. It states:

“The real prize will be a future policy framework which is simplified and suited to Scotland’s unique landscape and needs, and allows the primary producer to take more back from the marketplace—enabling farmers and crofters to become more resilient while delivering for the market, consumers, for public goods, and for the taxpayer.”

Scottish Environment LINK agrees that we need to retain funding for agricultural and rural development, reshape the way in which it is given to farming businesses and thereby renew Scottish agriculture. It says that the key to that is the creation of a commission chaired by an independent person that, within a short timeframe, would be tasked with getting agreement on a set of policy principles upon which Scottish agricultural policy frameworks could be based.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Mike Rumbles: I will just finish the point.

That has formed the basis of my amendment to the Government’s motion. If Parliament votes for my amendment at decision time—as, I believe, it will—the Scottish Government will set up an independent group of relevant stakeholders to provide advice to it on the principles and policies that should underpin the design and delivery of an appropriate system of rural development funding post 2020.

Mark Ruskell: I thank the member for giving way. Would he see a role for the Scottish land commission, given its unique role as an independent adviser?

Mike Rumbles: I see a role for every person and body who feels that they have something to contribute. We should be inclusive rather than

exclusive, as far as we possibly can be. Everyone has something to contribute. This is a really radical change and it is an opportunity that we have not had for 40 years.

In my view, this has to be the more sensible way to proceed and I would have thought, or hoped, that all parties in the chamber—and I mean all parties—could have supported our amendment regardless of whether they support the whole motion in its final form.

It might sound as though 2020 is a long way off, but our rural businesses and stakeholders need to have as much certainty about the future of rural development funding as they can. We know only too well that huge numbers of stakeholders are reliant on such funding for their very livelihoods. The last thing that we need is people or organisations digging their heels in and being unwilling to compromise about where limited funds—and they will be limited, not unlimited—are directed.

It is really important that as much agreement as possible is reached among stakeholders on the principles of how those limited funds will be distributed before the next set of discussions take place on the actual level of funding. That is absolutely essential, so that we have a system that is designed to ensure that the public money that is to be invested for the public good is invested in a way that meets the needs of our rural economy.

On the Conservative amendment, I say gently to Peter Chapman that it is a pity that we could not find a way forward on which all parties could have agreed. This is such an important issue that we should have come together on it.

It is interesting that even Scottish Land & Estates, in its briefing paper, says that it is disappointed that the Conservative amendment would remove a clause in the Government motion that happens to express regret that the UK Government has not provided Scotland with its “fair share of funding”—even Scottish Land & Estates recognises that point.

I will not say too much more about that—I just wanted to make the point—but I say again to Peter Chapman, who talked about the CAP, that there is, as he knows, no fiercer critic of how the CAP farm payments have been rolled out than me, but today of all days should not be about the CAP payments; it should be about trying to get agreement on the way forward for a new system of rural development funding.

We agree with and support the Labour amendment, especially where it says that

“where powers are repatriated from the EU,”

they

“should be devolved in line with the Scotland Act 1998”.

Do we have to say that? I cannot believe that that would not happen. It would be unacceptable if it did not happen and I think that Parliament should speak as one voice on that.

There is much work to be done. Fergus Ewing, as the minister responsible for the process, has a huge task ahead of him. I want him to know that the Scottish Liberal Democrats will support him in the endeavour of designing a new system of public support for rural Scotland, because the aim of having a successful and vibrant rural economy post 2020 is an aim that we share.

I move amendment S5M-03463.2, to insert at end:

“, and calls on ministers to establish an independent group involving relevant stakeholders to provide advice as to the principles and policies that should underpin options for appropriate rural support beyond 2020, and, in the intervening period, provide as much certainty and information as possible to farmers, crofters and the wider rural economy.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Everyone has a very tight six minutes.

15:38

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I remind members that I am the parliamentary liaison officer for the cabinet secretary, Mr Ewing.

Securing the future of funding for rural development in Scotland has always been an important issue. However, against the backdrop of this week’s confirmation that the Prime Minister is indeed determined to rip us out of the single market, the sense of urgency is even greater.

Rural Scotland accounts for 98 per cent of the land mass of Scotland and nearly a fifth of the population are resident there. The future of funding for rural development, as the motion is titled, is about more than how a hedge is defined. Membership of the EU is worth billions to the rural economy—much more than the £4 billion received in EU funding.

Permanent and short-term migrants add considerable value when they come here to work in the agriculture, tourism and food and drink sectors. The uncertainty surrounding the future of EU nationals working in the food supply chain is a real concern that Theresa May continues to fuel with her red, white and blue rhetoric. These are skilled workers whose departure will do real damage to the economy.

Although rural Scotland is a beautiful place to live and work, it has stubborn pockets of deprivation as a result of a combination of factors including remoteness and an ageing population.

Rural communities—and, indeed, the UK as a whole—have benefited immensely from EU funding, and it is time that the Westminster Government acknowledged not only that but the inevitable impact of the removal of that money.

Tuesday’s announcement by Theresa May was devastating. The hard Brexit for which we are now headed will be especially cruel to our rural communities as it represents a two-pronged attack that will strip them of EU funding while in effect denying the industries that underpin their economy access to their biggest market, through prohibitive tariffs.

Currently, Scotland receives 16.5 per cent of the UK’s CAP funds. From 2014 to 2020, Scotland would have received around €4.6 billion under CAP from the EU, €477 million of which is delivered via pillar 2 funds for rural development. In the lead-up to the referendum, pro-Brexit campaigners insisted that all agricultural funding would be protected and we were assured equally that Westminster would redistribute the silver bullet of £350 million a week that it would allegedly save from no longer funding the EU. Indeed, the farming minister said:

“The UK government will continue to give farmers and the environment as much support—or perhaps even more—as they get now.”

However, earlier this month, both the secretary of state and the minister refused to confirm that funding would match current levels beyond 2020.

Likewise, the Scottish secretary, David Mundell, promised to

“ensure that Scotland gets the best possible deal and that deal clearly involves being part of the single market.”

Yesterday, however, he appeared to give up on membership of the single market completely. When asked by a BBC presenter,

“Aren’t you a Scottish Secretary to defend the interests of the Scottish people in cabinet?”,

astonishingly he replied, “No.”

Of course, it is not just the agricultural sector that is set to lose out. In Scotland, EU funding has helped to support the roll-out of superfast broadband, business development, housing investment and improvements to infrastructure. For five years, I have listened to my colleague Joan McAlpine talk about the importance of securing NUTS 2 status for the south of Scotland. The Scottish Government had approved plans to amend current boundaries, which could have made the region eligible for an uplift of £840 million from the EU. The prospect of the south of Scotland now missing out on that transformative amount of funding is bitterly disappointing. That is £840 million that the folks in the south of Scotland

will never see and which could have made a real difference to their lives. It is now in jeopardy.

To listen to the Brexit cheerleaders at Westminster—and in this chamber, even—one would believe that the EU had contributed nothing tangible to the rural communities that we represent. EU funding has made a huge difference to Dumfries and Galloway and its removal has serious implications.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the member give way?

Emma Harper: Actually, no. I want to proceed.

Local projects are currently being funded by grants from the European social fund for employability, worth £7 million; the European regional development fund, worth £1.4 million; and the LEADER programme, worth about £6.1 million. Those grants alone support the jobs of some 50 staff who are directly employed to deliver the schemes, and many more partners rely on that and other funding to support employment. Those jobs are now in jeopardy. Will the Tories at Westminster, who have caused this mess, commit to replacing that money?

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): No.

Emma Harper: Thank you. That is the reality of Brexit.

There is no doubt that our exit from the EU and the loss of funding opportunities will hinder our efforts to create a sustainable future for Scotland. However, the EU referendum result does not reduce our desire to protect Scotland and the rural economy. The Scottish National Party Government will exhaust every avenue to create conditions under which Scotland will flourish. There can be absolutely no question of the UK Government attempting to reserve powers that are currently devolved to the Scottish Parliament

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): You must close now, please.

Emma Harper: It has proved 100 times over that it cannot be entrusted with the task of protecting Scotland's interests.

15:45

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this afternoon's debate on the future of funding for rural development, which gives members from all parties the chance to raise the profile of our rural communities and to highlight some of the excellent work that goes on there.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's new year's resolution and I look forward to holding him to it.

Unfortunately, gripe and grievance has crept in again—it seems to be the order of the day from Emma Harper and members on the Government benches—and its appeal is wearing thin. We need to forget about what has happened in the past and get on with the job of getting the best deal for Scotland in the future. We must not allow the Scottish Government to use the smokescreen of Brexit to avoid getting on with that job.

Earlier this week, the UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, set out a clear and credible plan ahead of the triggering of article 50. In her speech, Mrs May was very clear in her commitment to delivering a Brexit that works for the whole of the United Kingdom. That is why Scottish Government ministers are fundamentally incorrect when they claim that they are being sidelined and ignored. They should stop the rhetoric and political posturing, and get around the table to secure the best deal from the negotiations—that is what our rural communities deserve.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Finlay Carson: I am in my first minute.

As has already been mentioned, leaving the European Union means that we will be able to deliver a system that best meets the needs of those who work in our agricultural sector. Brexit allows the UK to design a new system of support from first principles. We have the chance to address Scotland's priorities, to support and reward efficiency and innovation, to promote sustainable production, to ensure habitat and species protection, and to require primary producers and processors to work in a sensitive and correct way to ensure that the supply chain from producer to consumer is fair.

Stewart Stevenson: I agree with a great deal of what I hear from Finlay Carson. He talked about the collaboration between the Scottish Government and the UK Government as well as the Welsh and Northern Ireland Governments. Can he tell us a single thing that any of the devolved Administrations has successfully got the UK Government to change its policy on during the negotiations?

Finlay Carson: I will leave it to Scottish Government ministers to tell us about that as they are the guys who are sitting around the table. We have just started negotiations and I would like to think that, unlike in the past, our cabinet secretary will be able to go down to London and do his best for the Scottish rural economy.

The NFUS considers that this is a

“real opportunity to design and implement a new system appropriate to Scotland's unique circumstances and farming systems, which will create environmental protection, innovation and profitability.”

That will be one of the real prizes of the negotiations.

In a speech at the start of the month, Andrea Leadsom correctly pointed out that

“for too long, a bureaucratic system, which tries to meet the needs of 28 different member states, has held farmers back.”

Post-Brexit, it will be for the Scottish Government to decide the funding priorities for Scotland’s agricultural sector and rural development. We must start that hard work now. My only worry about that is whether the Scottish Government is capable of delivering it. One only has to look at the Government’s shambolic track record on managing the current CAP payment system to be presented with a catalogue of failures. Let us not forget that, as a result of the SNP Government’s mishandling of the system, farmers the length and breadth of Scotland were left worried about their cash flow, and the knock-on effect was that Scotland’s rural economy was on the brink of collapse.

Only last week, the NFUS called for a “step change” in the CAP information technology system, which continues to affect pillar 2 schemes, and millions of pounds from 2015 schemes are still to enter farmers’ bank accounts, which is a ridiculous situation.

Farmers want certainty, which is exactly what the UK Government provided them with when the Chancellor of the Exchequer guaranteed for their lifetime all pillar 2 payments that are signed before we leave the EU and pillar 1 payments to 2020. That welcome announcement provided farmers with an important assurance that they will be financially supported throughout the negotiations as the UK leaves the EU.

It is time that the Scottish Government started to be optimistic about our post-Brexit future. We are going to be presented with a unique chance to start from scratch and come up with our own support system in the deal that is negotiated with all areas of the UK. Such a system could support our rural economy in a way that the current system simply does not allow. In its briefing, the NFUS outlined a number of potential measures, including incentives to improve efficiency and productivity, initiatives to promote and assist collaboration, schemes to prevent environmental damage and enhance the environment, and more support for new entrants and developers.

We on the Conservative benches are ambitious for Scotland’s rural communities. We want less red tape, a unique Scottish support system and more control over our priorities. Scotland’s rural communities need a Scottish Government that is ready to embrace the opportunities and be open

mindful and imaginative about how to deliver on them.

The UK voted to leave the EU and we now need to do the right thing for Scotland. I welcome the opportunity to work with Fergus Ewing and help him keep his new year’s resolution.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members should please remember that we are tight for time.

15:51

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): The Highlands and Islands have been transformed by European support over the years. Roads, bridges and other important infrastructure have been built there with support from the European Community and then the European Union. Indeed, if we were to take the north coast 500 route, which is largely in my constituency, we would see a multitude of EU flags on signs at the side of roads and bridges that were built with European funds. That is just one legacy of the EU. Unfortunately, potential has been lost. That is not a gripe or a grievance, but a real and tangible worry.

Education, agriculture and renewable energy are sectors that, throughout the years, have greatly added to the economy and society in rural areas. Those three sectors have benefited and continue to benefit from European co-operation and support.

As I have said before, the effect on education of the decision to wrench Scotland from the EU could not be clearer. The University of the Highlands and Islands will be hit worse than any other university in Scotland. Thirty-five per cent of the UHI’s external funding comes from the EU, which means that there is a potential cut to UHI of more than one third of its budget post-Brexit. That figure should make everyone in the chamber pause for thought.

It is not just funding that will be lost to UHI. On pan-European academic co-operation, the horizon 2020 scheme, in which UHI has been playing a leading role, is a chance to swap ideas on and find solutions to a range of issues in areas such as carbon reduction and offshore development. Also set to go is the chance to participate in the Erasmus plus programme, which for decades has given students and lecturers the opportunity to interact and collaborate with colleagues across the continent. The benefits of those experiences are intangible and we will be the poorer for their passing.

Over the years, there has been great investment in UHI from the EU; indeed, the EU has been at the heart of the university since UHI started. It is a great shame to see things end this way and I and

members of UHI have real fears about the ground-breaking and excellent work that has been achieved, especially in the environmental research institute in Thurso.

The situation could not be starker for the farming, forestry, fisheries and food and drink sectors. They are key players in many rural areas and receive the greatest support from the EU. As Emma Harper said, that support amounts to more than £4 billion of funding from 2014 to 2020. That tells its own story. It helps create jobs, it underpins communities and it creates landscapes where the land is used, which helps ecology as well as putting food on our tables. In short, it allows people to live, farm and contribute in our rural areas.

European support for farming cuts across the whole industry, from arable fields to sweeping hillsides. Beyond 2020, the future is uncertain and people in rural communities are rightly concerned about what will happen.

Edward Mountain: Will the member take an intervention?

Gail Ross: No, thank you.

As I have mentioned, there are many schemes to support farming. One such scheme is the less favoured area support scheme. LFASS comes under pillar 2 of CAP and is directed at those people—our crofters and hill farmers—who farm on marginal lands on which they turn a marginal profit. LFASS land accounts for 85 per cent of the land mass of Scotland, and the funding for the scheme is vital—indeed, critical—for those areas. The great worry for me and others is the fact that, as the cabinet secretary said, the UK Government has not committed to funding applications in 2019, which is only two years away. Fergus Ewing has raised that situation with the UK Government, and I add my voice to his today.

One of our greatest exports is food and drink. A hard Brexit, as it is called, could threaten many of our exports to the EU, which is our closest and biggest market. The food and drink industry directly employs—

Finlay Carson: Will the member take an intervention?

Gail Ross: No, I will not.

The industry directly employs around 116,000 people, including many in rural areas.

One issue that needs clarity concerns funding for the agricultural sector and farmers, from the arable farmer to the hill crofter. Those people help to influence the biodiversity of many rural areas, and they create the communities that are so important. The CAP system, while it is not perfect, has helped to protect that way of life for many

years. It is important that, whatever post-Brexit may bring, there is a way to allow that way of life to continue.

The renewables sector is another that has received sustained backing via the EU. It helps to deliver high-quality jobs in rural areas, including through the Beatrice offshore development, which has received hundreds of millions of pounds in support and is due to create hundreds of jobs in construction and maintenance, and through the money that was recently given to help to develop the MeyGen tidal energy scheme.

If we are serious about supporting our rural areas, and if we value them, we need to recognise that they have been immeasurably improved by the funding and support that the EU has given over the years. It is incumbent on the UK Government to listen to and work with the Scottish Government to make sure that, post-Brexit, our rural communities get the help that they need and are not left behind following the loss of major funding streams caused by our exit from the EU. The best solution for the future of rural funding is, of course, to remain in the EU.

15:57

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I start by focusing on the draft climate change plan that has been brought to Parliament today. Agriculture and related land use account for 22.8 per cent of Scotland's total greenhouse gas emissions, although it must be recognised that agricultural emissions have decreased by 25 per cent since 1990. We can all acknowledge that, as farming is the sector with the third heaviest emissions, improvements must be made through greening it appropriately—I use the word “appropriately” advisedly, because the improvements must be appropriate for Scotland.

Furthermore, it seems that Scotland will not meet the biodiversity targets for 2020, and it is ranked in the lowest fifth of all the countries analysed in the intactness index. Amid the uncertainty around the future of CAP, I am concerned that further progress may falter.

Our farmers are not only producers of food; they also act as custodians of our land. Of Scotland's land mass, 75 per cent is used for agricultural production, and the sector directly employs 63,000 people. Limiting global warming is a responsibility that we all share, but we must respect the fact that farmers' shoulders cannot be expected to bear the brunt of that, and it is unreasonable to demand and expect those business owners and rural communities to act in the public interest without being provided with proper support in the transition.

There are brilliant examples of positive changes that farmers can make, and I commend the nine monitor farms in Scotland, some of which are in my region. By sharing knowledge with others, those farmers have improved their own sustainability and profitability. It is paramount that we bring agricultural workers with us to the forefront in the green shift, and Scottish Labour will fight for farmers' rights—yes, rights—in trade negotiations and rural policy and in securing a just transition.

In the future, I see a sustainable and strong Scottish agricultural sector, with food production and climate mitigation fully integrated. Even before the Brexit vote, Scotland spent the second lowest amount per hectare in the EU on agri-environment schemes from CAP pillar 2. As we are faced with an opportunity to reconsider the agricultural subsidy regime, I urge the Scottish Government to link environmental and economic objectives with a bottom-up approach.

I take the opportunity today to specify—briefly—three aspects of our rural economy to emphasise the necessity and the benefits of the support given to rural Scotland up to and beyond 2020.

First is the need for more support for the organic sector and continuing consideration by the Scottish Government of the benefits of agroecology. I have been welcomed to Whitmuir Organics, in my South Scotland region, several times by the owners, Pete Richie and Heather Anderson. Their commitment to organic production, along with that of other organic producers, shows what is possible. I also applaud the Soil Association's contribution.

On climate change, the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture states:

"The main mitigation potential lies in the capacity of ... soils to sequester CO₂ through building organic matter. This potential can be realized by employing sustainable agricultural practices, such as those commonly found within organic farming systems."

Of course, good soil husbandry is essential across the agricultural sector, and many farmers, although not in receipt of organic certification, manage their soils and wider businesses for a better climate and biodiversity. Those who do not must be supported—indeed, I argue, expected—to do so, not least because they are in receipt of public money.

Secondly, I stress the need to support innovation. In order to develop new systems and to build confidence, support is essential—sad as I am to have to say this—post-Brexit.

I can use the example of agroforestry or silvopasture, depending on whether I am speaking in today's debate or next Tuesday's debate on forestry. The Forestry Commission Scotland

recognises the significance of agroforestry. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations states:

"Agroforestry's mixed land-use approach makes it a tailor-made example of how the agricultural sector can contribute to the global effort to curb greenhouse gas emissions."

Significantly, the UK Committee on Climate Change has stated that a new policy is required to "address barriers to and awareness of agroforestry."

Thirdly, I highlight the continuing importance of the co-operative models in rural Scotland. I am a member of the Scottish Co-operative Party parliamentary group. The Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society does a terrific job of supporting co-operatives. James Graham, its secretary, states:

"Farmer co-ops are self-help businesses that add to the development of both economic and social capital of rural Scotland—investing and employing in areas where plc businesses will not."

EU pillar 2 grants, which assist co-operatives and community groups with investment and access to facilitation support, are essential. Key schemes are the food processing, marketing and co-operation grant scheme, the knowledge transfer and innovation fund and LEADER. We must protect those and similar funds.

I hope that those three examples highlight the need for continued Scottish Government support across rural Scotland. Together, we can bring about a healthier and more equal society, as highlighted by Rhoda Grant, and a stronger rural economy.

16:03

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I draw members' attention to my registered extremely large 3-acre agricultural holding, from which I receive no income whatsoever.

I am an MSP for an intensely rural area, which is dependent on farming and fishing, albeit that we have other industries, too.

I start on a consensual note. I very much welcomed Peter Chapman's response to my intervention that we would be guaranteed a minimum of 16.4 per cent of the agricultural support that the UK gets. However, I will give a little bit of context to that. We might consider it in the light of a tweet from George Eustice on 4 January saying that there will be

"No more 'subsidies' post 2020 for farmers".

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

Stewart Stevenson: One moment, please. I am not much encouraged by getting 16.4 per cent of nothing, and I do not think that that is quite what Peter Chapman—and certainly I—had in mind.

Peter Chapman *rose*—

Stewart Stevenson: Of course, George Eustice also said on 26 May, before the referendum, that we would have as much support or, perhaps, even more once the referendum is out of the way. I accept that we are where we are.

I will take the Tory spokesman first.

Peter Chapman: Stewart Stevenson says that there will be no support. I do not accept that in any way, shape or form. I have had meetings with Andrea Leadsom and George Eustice, neither of whom said anything of the sort that there would be no support after 2020.

Stewart Stevenson: I know that my opposite number on the Tory benches is an honest and straightforward man and I am pleased to hear him say that, but I can only repeat what George Eustice tweeted on 4 January. I accept that putting something in 140 characters can sometimes eliminate meaning, but the words that he used were:

“No more ‘subsidies’ post 2020”.

In a spirit of collaboration, I invite Peter Chapman to communicate further with his political colleagues and establish whether the meaning has been eliminated by the words that were used.

We have all been quoting from various sources—that is what we politicians inevitably do—and the NFUS has properly been quoted as an important player in the policy area. In her blog following the Prime Minister’s speech, Clare Slipper said:

“NFU Scotland wants barrier and tariff-free trade as well as the freedom to set our own appropriate rules for farming.”

I do not find it terribly difficult to agree with the objectives that the Prime Minister set out in her speech, by the way, because they are probably the objectives that we would all think are proper in the current circumstance. The difficulty lies in the confidence that we may or may not have in our ability to achieve agreement with 27 other countries on the delivery of something that supports those objectives. In my six minutes—it is rather less than that now—I do not have time to explore what that means, but we must have better relationships in Europe and I genuinely hope that the UK Government draws on all the devolved ministers who have an interest in the matter to be part of a collegiate team who individually go and engage with different countries throughout Europe.

As a minister, I attended more than 20 EU councils of one sort or another. In that environment, I used to have responsibility for particular countries as a UK representative. That is a good model going forward and it happened under the Labour Government and the Conservative Government. Therefore, I know that it can work and it needs to work again if we are to get the kind of result that we want.

Fundamentally for Scotland, the money that comes from the EU is significant. It is significant for farming, of course, but the LEADER programme has been an enormous help to people in my constituency. It recently gave £64,000 to Macduff scout group, £4,000 to the North East Scotland Preservation Trust for work in Portsoy, £9,500 to the Portsoy Players and £90,000 to Scottish Enterprise for a development project in the Banff area. I am sure that other members will make references to their local circumstances. It is important that we are able to continue to support our rural areas, because it is not simply a matter of rurality. The quality of life in rural areas is important to attracting professional support that will often work in urban areas. Therefore, there is a benefit to supporting rural areas that is translated into a benefit in urban areas as well.

It is not clear to us that the Prime Minister has the same priorities for the rural economy as we are expressing across the political divide in the chamber. When she talked about the disbenefits of not achieving a result between the UK and the 27 EU countries, she was talking about the disadvantages for the EU members. However, there are of course substantial disadvantages for the UK and, in particular, Scotland. I wish her well, but I have relatively limited optimism.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Come to a close, please, Mr Stevenson.

Stewart Stevenson: Wales is doing well. The Welsh are on the same page as we are.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Stevenson, you must come to a close.

Stewart Stevenson: I hope that we will all be able to support the motion as amended by Labour and the Liberals. I hope that the Tories will do that too.

16:09

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests.

I will take interventions, especially from members who refused to take interventions from me if they feel that they want to intervene. However, they should let me get a little way into what I am going to say before they do so.

Before I look forward, I want to reflect a wee bit on the past so that we can understand where we want to be post-2020. Those who were involved in farming or agricultural policy in 1992 will remember the excesses of that time. There were lots of unwanted mountains—mountains of butter, mountains of beef and mountains of cheese, to name but a few.

Stewart Stevenson: Mountains of Edward.

Edward Mountain: That was a predictable intervention that I am glad I allowed the member; I will not allow him back in later.

There were lakes of wine and lakes of milk. None of us saw them, but we knew that they existed in the EC.

I am pleased to say that the unwanted mountains are a thing of the past. That came about because of the MacSharry reforms, which were needed because the common agricultural policy had been built purely to deal with food deficits, and it boosted production beyond needs. To put it into context, in 1991 we sat on 3.7 billion ecus of goods. That was too much, and it was beyond even what we in Europe could shift to the rest of the world.

Let us look at some other interesting points at that stage. Fifty per cent of all the European Community's farmers were over 55, and it was accepted by all that the CAP budget, which was based on intervention, was out of control. Not enough work was done to improve the environment, and farming lacked new entrants. Rural development had been limited to the primary farming sector, and policies had been driven by a lack of understanding of interdependence between countries. Farms with the necessary capacity needed to become more competitive, and support for farmers had been driven to inflating food prices, which remained artificially high.

Those details were taken from a Commission of the European Communities report dated 1 February 1991. Now, 26 years later, with massive subsidies having been paid to farmers, many of those comments are equally valid.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take a brief intervention?

Edward Mountain: I have already taken one comment from Stewart Stevenson. I will take comments from other members in a moment.

I want to mention two other facts that seem to slide by many commentators.

First, I have looked back to 1992 and referenced back to today. Although there have always been winners and losers, the level of farm payments to farmers has always been on a downward direction of travel. Secondly, whatever scheme the EU has

introduced, an effort has always been made to make it fit all—I stress all—of Europe. Set-aside and the three-crop rule are but two examples. Therefore, the past was not always perfect.

To look to the future, I find the Government's motion a bit depressing. Not every glass is half empty; some glasses can be half full. That is certainly reflected in what Scottish fishermen believe. It is not all doom and gloom. We can design a system that looks to the needs of the UK in the same way that the current system looks to the needs of the EU. By agreeing—this is critical—a UK framework and ensuring that control of the exact details and implementation in Scotland is retained by the Scottish Parliament, as it is now, we can be assured that, with careful negotiation, the Government will get the best deal. For members who might find that a difficult concept to understand, I am suggesting working together as part of a team with negotiations, consensual agreement and a light touch. I think that we can do that.

What of the future? Let me tell members what I think it must be. I will give three brief examples, if I may. The system must be simple to administer, cut red tape and ditch complex computer systems. Things must be received by those that the scheme targets, and the system must deliver public good while protecting the environment.

Let me be clear. Before I am accused of wanting to cut basic support payments, I say that I do not want to do that. Farmers and the rural economy need support.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Edward Mountain: I will, as no one else has intervened.

Stewart Stevenson: I thought that the member might. Does he agree—he might well do so—that there are also social objectives associated with supporting rural economies that were perhaps very strong, particularly in the early days of CAP? We have to get them right and get the right balance, but there are also social objectives beyond simply farming.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have less than a minute left, Mr Mountain.

Edward Mountain: I absolutely believe that rural support is not just for farmers; it is for achieving things for the countryside and for the country as a whole. I probably know as well as any other member how important support is to the rural economy.

I do not have all the answers, but I believe that, together, we can work them out. All stakeholders in Scotland must get together and work with the cabinet secretary to decide what Scotland needs.

We must then engage with the UK Government. At my recent meetings with Andrea Leadsom and George Eustice, they made it clear that that is exactly what they are waiting for.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Edward Mountain: As I have said previously in the chamber, farmers are can-do people who respond to what they see in front of them. I welcome the opportunity to take up the offer that the cabinet secretary made at the beginning of the debate and to work with him to take forward rural subsidies and support for Scotland.

16:16

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Presiding Officer, I will try to take less than six minutes, in line with your request.

I am pleased to be able to contribute to this afternoon's debate on funding for rural development in Scotland and to offer a perspective on the issue as an Ayrshire MSP.

According to Scotland's Rural College's very detailed recent publication, "Rural Scotland in Focus", rural areas make up about 98 per cent of the landmass of Scotland, they are home to more than a million members of Scotland's population and they have a third of its registered small and medium-sized enterprises, and about 50,000 businesses in total. The publication offers us an important perspective on the rural economy. It includes many contributions from farmers and small business owners, and I commend it to colleagues.

Ayrshire and the south-west of Scotland—in particular, Dumfries and Galloway—play a huge part in the agricultural economic landscape of rural Scotland, with 80 per cent of Scotland's dairy herd and nearly 800 specialist dairy farms being located in that wonderful part of our country, so it is important that the potential consequences of the changes that are certain to come in rural development funding and their disproportionate impact on the south-west of Scotland are fully considered and debated.

I am grateful for the briefings that we have received from NFU Scotland over the past couple of days; we received one of them just before this week's announcement by the Prime Minister and the other just after it. They provide a useful and focused summary of the main issues of concern. In particular, they describe the potential "decimation" of Scottish agriculture that will occur if a future funding arrangement post-Brexit does not mirror the current arrangements whereby 16 per cent of the UK's total CAP funding comes to Scotland. Under a possible Barnett funding

arrangement, that could shrink to just 8 or 9 per cent.

The UK Government must give a clear commitment to maintaining that support at its current level and remove what is perhaps one of the greatest concerns for our farmers. Given that 85 per cent of Scotland's land is designated as less favoured, with the converse being true in England, NFU Scotland also argues that a devolved agricultural policy solution for Scotland is likely to be necessary. None of that needs to wait until the outcome of negotiations with the EU. All that it would take would be for the UK Government to give those commitments now.

The speeches of UK ministers before the EU vote were full of promises that farmers would get as much, or perhaps even more, support than they get now, but now we hear that there will be no more subsidies after 2020. Only this morning, we got no assurances that farm payments will not be cut after 2020.

Food and drink producers in Ayrshire and Arran are renowned for quality, and their products are in demand throughout Europe and right around the world. We have exceptional beef, lamb, pork and game; world-class fish and shellfish; the Ayrshire tattie, which the cabinet secretary mentioned; award-winning Dunlop cheese; wonderful ice creams and handmade chocolates; craft beers and distinctive whiskies; Mossiel milk; and Brownings' now famous steak and Scotch pies, which won another world award only last week.

All of that contributes to Scotland's reputation as a world-class producer and exporter of quality food and drink, and food and drink account for about 30 per cent of Scotland's total exports; the equivalent figure for the UK is about 7 per cent. Our food and drink industry has a turnover of about £14 billion and it employs more than 100,000 people. The sector is crucial to Scotland, and food and drink represent our biggest export to the EU, worth about £2 billion. Unless the UK Government can agree a deal with the EU within the two years following the pressing of the Brexit button—which many say is unlikely—the whole sector could be facing a disastrous period during which tariffs are reimposed and access to the wider market, even beyond Europe, is restricted or, at worst, closed off. What a scandalous and unnecessary situation for Ayrshire and other Scottish food producers to be facing.

One very important area of concern—and not just for the rural economy—is whether the UK is also intending to walk away from the European digital single market. While the Tories are planning their escape from the single market, it surely makes no sense to walk away from the further integration of digital services across Europe. The digital single market is worth about €415 billion to

the whole European economy, and it will offer €11 billion in savings for consumers shopping online. Are we to walk away from that, too?

In June this year, when data roaming charges for mobile phone users in Europe are finally flattened out, are the Tories going to bring them back triumphantly for millions of people in the UK who will still go on holiday to Europe after Brexit? I can see that going down like a lead balloon.

Living and working in the rural economy was never easy, but the unnecessary and uncertain future that is being imposed on many of our Scottish farmers and food and drink producers is surely one of the most unnecessary acts of political folly that we have ever seen. No matter how the Brexiteers try to dress this up as a golden opportunity, the harsh reality is that the timescales here are nigh on impossible and Scotland's key agriculture and food and drink sectors face the grim prospect of the return of tariffs and restricted market access.

As usual, the Scottish Government will do everything in its power to protect our producers from the damage to come. However, if the signs are not good, I have no doubt that the Scottish people will exercise their right to steer a different course, which offers them a better and more secure future.

16:22

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Funding for rural development and agriculture recognises the vital role that is played by land managers and rural communities in protecting, preserving and enhancing the natural environment that is so vital to our identity and livelihoods. That is why it is vital that we maintain rural development funding during this constitutionally uncertain time. Repatriation of powers from Europe to Scotland and devolution of additional powers, as is called for in today's motion, will go some way towards protecting Scotland from the hard Brexit that was announced by the Prime Minister this week.

The starting point in building the progressive future that our rural communities need has to be a commission that asks this fundamental question: What are we trying to deliver from farming and what are the tools that we need to achieve that? The commission would need to be broad, cross-sectoral and independent. Its work could not be delivered by a lone part-time industry secondment here, or even a sectoral champion there. I am, therefore, thankful that the Scottish Parliament has just approved such a body with the status and remit to deliver: the Scottish land commission. There has never been a more important time for the commission to come into being and focus on

the question. Its independence, expertise on delivery of public interest and connection with vulnerable agricultural communities makes it uniquely placed to lead consideration of the question by marshalling fairly all those who have a stake in our farming future.

There is a lot of reform to consider. For example in the current round, the SRDP is being delivered through 14 different funding schemes, which are administered by five different Government departments and agencies. It can be a complex and bewildering process, especially for new entrants and small family-run farms. Although the farm advisory scheme should go some way towards addressing that problem, more improvements can be made.

For example, there are growing calls to establish an agency that not only sets out the vision and values that we have for a future Scottish agricultural sector, but takes on the task of administering rural payments and support in a joined-up manner. A Scottish food and farming agency could take the form of a non-departmental Government body and could bring together farmers, land managers, environmental non-governmental organisations, researchers and representatives of rural communities to ensure that our vision of a good food nation is delivered. The creation of a national agency would not necessarily mean greater centralisation of rural development policy and funding. Rather, it could be used to facilitate greater participation in rural development through local decision-making panels and regional distribution of specific funds. I will give an example of that.

The LEADER programme has been one of the major success stories of the SRDP. It is due to deliver over £80 million of funding during the current CAP phase through the local action group model, which supports local rural communities to identify the challenges that they face and develop grass-roots solutions. Stewart Stevenson alluded to the fact that, in my region, a diverse range of projects have been funded by LEADER since 2007, including Fife Rural Skills Partnership and the Balquhidder Community Broadband Community Interest Company. Although those projects address very different aspects of rural life, both have provided direct employment for local people and are addressing the need for the skills and infrastructure that have helped people to find employment, set up businesses and contribute to thriving local rural economies.

Other aspects of current SRDP funding would benefit greatly from the local decision making that a national agency could facilitate. For example, rural enterprises could collectively establish their own training schemes through the knowledge transfer and innovation fund, and they could

provide training close to home that addresses specific needs in their areas. As Claudia Beamish said, regional farmers co-operatives could get support from their local decision-making board to submit a competitive and viable bid for public procurement. Co-operative models still play a central role in delivery of rural and farming policy in other parts of Europe, including in France, which has adopted a world-leading agroecology model for farming policy. That should be a key method in the delivery of a future rural development policy that understands and meets the needs of our remote and rural communities.

I turn to subsidies. Although we remain committed to keeping Scotland in the European Union, we are not naive about the failings of the CAP, so we urge the Government during this time of constitutional crisis to continue to engage in the debate that is taking place in Europe on the future of the CAP. In particular, the principle of direct payments according to land area that is contained in pillar 1 has directly contributed to consolidation of farms into ever-larger units, and it has pushed the price of land up beyond the reach of many people across Scotland. Since area-based direct payments were introduced in 2004, land prices across the UK have tripled and the UK Government has persistently refused to introduce measures—as is permitted by the EU—to taper payments for larger farms. The winners under that system are clearly not rural communities, but the richest landowners in our society. The Queen received more than £500,000 in single farm payments last year. Unless the system undergoes radical reform, the principle of direct area-based payments will not be something that we can support in any future subsidies system.

The job of protecting Scotland's rural interests starts with building a progressive vision of our land and the communities that need to thrive on it. I believe that the Scottish land commission is the right body to marshal that vision.

16:27

Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): At the tail end of last year, I took part in the debate on the impact that leaving the European Union would have on the rural economy. In that debate, I focused primarily on the importance of funding, because during the EU referendum debate I was particularly frustrated by what I saw as the lack of focus on the extent to which EU funding underpins many different services and diverse projects—local and national—that are vital to our economy and society. I therefore welcome the Government's motion, because although we now know, or have a better idea of, what the Westminster Government's negotiating position will be, for better or worse—depending on where

we sit in the chamber—we need to continue to fight for fair funding for our rural economy, as well as for devolution of additional powers, so that we can best protect the interests of all of rural Scotland.

I will start by setting out the context and outlining exactly what is at stake during this period of negotiations, by looking at my constituency. Aberdeenshire Council has published a very interesting report that went to its policy and resources committee today, about its EU referendum position. The report helpfully illustrates that information and clearly outlines what Aberdeenshire needs from negotiations with the EU. I urge north-east MSPs in particular who have not had a look at that report to do so. It outlines that Aberdeenshire is Scotland's foremost fishing area because the region accounts for 56.4 per cent of fish landed in Scotland by value and, with Aberdeen, provides 31 per cent of Scotland's regular fisheries employment. Moreover, since 2010 the quantity of fish landings in the north-east has increased by 23 per cent, and total employment by 5.4 per cent.

In agriculture, Aberdeenshire has 26 per cent of the national arable land total, despite having only 9 per cent of land overall. The forestry, fishing and agriculture sectors between them employ about 6,000 people. Those sectors, which will receive about £4 billion of EU funds, are absolutely vital to our rural and wider economy. The continuation of EU funding is crucial to their continued viability.

As has already been highlighted by a few other members, it is not just those sectors that benefit—directly—from rural development funding; our communities and community groups do, too, through schemes such as LEADER. In my constituency, that funding amounted to £2.8 million for south Aberdeenshire for the current funding period, and £2.7 million for Angus. Those figures exclude the extra monies that tend to be levered in on the back of such funding. Those funds have had a huge impact and continue to have a growing impact in our communities through helping a huge variety of different projects.

There is one example that I am particularly keen to highlight to members today. It is not quite in my constituency—I hope that Graeme Dey does not mind my going into his territory of Angus South. This is the point where we go from farming, fishing and forestry to rock. By "rock", I do not mean the geological variety, but the kind that comes with lightning bolts, guitars, drums and loud vocals. I am referring to a project in Kirriemuir with DD8 Music, which is a community organisation whose aim is to work with young people. Through LEADER funding, the group was able to find premises that it turned into a recording studio. That has provided the group with a base and a

completely new and exciting facility, from which it has been able to build as an organisation.

DD8 Music now organises one of the main festivals in the north-east, which I hope members have all heard of: Bonfest. “What is Bonfest?” I hear members cry. Bonfest is a celebration of Bon Scott, the legendary AC/DC vocalist, who was from Kirriemuir in Angus. It attracts rockers and fans—I am a huge fan—from all over the world. Last year the event attracted 5,000 visitors, with an economic impact of £403,000. I extend a warm invitation to the cabinet secretary and any other interested members to come to Bonfest this year—it takes place from 28 to 30 April.

Angus LEADER is considering other innovative ways of working, including by using Angus Council’s Crowdfunder platform, crowdfund Angus, which is the first of its kind anywhere in the UK. It is the brainchild of the business manager for funding, policy and projects at Angus Council, Shelley Hague. The crowdfunding project was nationally recognised by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities with a gold award at last year’s COSLA awards, and was further recognised at UK level when it gained a nomination at the *Guardian* public service awards in London. There are 15 projects, which have so far levered in more than £400,000.

LEADER is considering ways in which it can work hand in hand with other organisations, with participatory budgeting and wider community empowerment, to truly transform our rural communities. For such work and projects to continue, we need to know that the funding is in place for that to happen, and the policies behind it need to be right. If the nature of the policy or the funding is to change, those involved in all the sectors that I have mentioned today need to be involved—farmers, fisherman and the people who help to design and deliver rural development projects on the ground.

We need to retain and protect the specific financial support that is vital to the pillars of our rural community that I have outlined. I am proud that we have a Government that is continuing to fight Scotland’s corner in this area and that will continue to try and get the best deal for our farmers, our fisherman and all the people in our rural communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to closing speeches. Time is very tight, so you have no more than six minutes, please, Mr Rumbles.

16:34

Mike Rumbles: It has been a very good debate. The nine contributions to the open debate were particularly good, so I will concentrate on them and respond to some points that were made. The

debate started a bit rockily with Emma Harper attacking the UK Government and Finlay Carson attacking the Scottish Government. I thought that we were going to go further down that route, but I am glad to say that we did not.

I gently say to Emma Harper and Gail Ross that it is helpful if members take interventions, because it creates a better debate; otherwise, we just get a series of statements from members. Gail Ross made an important point when she said that 35 per cent of the funding for the University of the Highlands and Islands comes from the EU, and that she was not griping about that but describing a reality, with real issues around it. Claudia Beamish wanted to focus on the opportunities that any new system would give to aiding our environment, which is an entirely legitimate approach to take.

I like Stewart Stevenson’s contributions to debates, as I know that many other members do, but I think that he was rather unfair to Peter Chapman. I was even about to intervene on him on that point, because, as important as Peter Chapman is to Parliament, it is not fair to hold him personally responsible for guaranteeing that the UK Government will deliver to Scottish agriculture the equivalent of the 16.4 per cent share of the UK CAP subsidy from the EU. I thought that Stewart Stevenson was a little hard on Peter Chapman on that point.

Peter Chapman: I am very grateful for Mike Rumbles’ support for my position.

Mike Rumbles: We north-easterners stick together.

Edward Mountain gave a very good speech, but after asking members to take interventions, he refused one from Stewart Stevenson. However, he did take another one. He talked about mountains of butter, cheese and so on and pointed out that the past was not always as rosy as it is painted, which was an important point to make. He said that all stakeholders need to get together, which is the very point that I am trying to make through my amendment. I hope that the Conservatives will feel able to support it.

Willie Coffey also talked about Scotland’s 16.4 per cent share of the UK CAP payments and said that, under Barnett, we might get only 8 per cent. That is a legitimate and important issue to iron out. Mark Ruskell talked about the importance of the Scottish land commission. Mairi Evans also made a good contribution, although I am not au fait with what she said is being done at Kirriemuir.

To an extent, the debate has been about whether we will receive more or less funding for agriculture than we currently receive through CAP payments. Although I believe that that is an important issue, it is putting the cart before the

horse. I certainly believe, as do my fellow Liberal Democrats, that it is essential that we focus on getting right the agreed principles for any future moneys so that the Scottish Government can allocate them appropriately and properly when it gets those funds, at whatever level they come through. If we just talk about whether the money is or is not enough and plead special cases rather than coming together across the chamber for the good of the Scottish rural economy to agree the principles on which the funding will be delivered, we will get it wrong and cause real divisions out there in the rural economy. I genuinely feel that it is important to get the principles right, otherwise people will defend their own patch.

I will not take up the whole of my allocation, because I know that time is short. I have made the points that I wanted to make.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Much appreciated, Mr Rumbles—thank you. I call Rhoda Grant—up to six minutes, please.

16:38

Rhoda Grant: I am glad that we have had this debate, because time is tight for many of the decisions concerned and they need to be made sooner rather than later in order to give comfort and security to our rural communities.

I am a little disappointed that members cannot unite tonight around my amendment and Mike Rumbles's amendment, because I think that they set a more positive tone. I urge Conservative colleagues to reconsider their position on those amendments. However, we are united around the view that we need to support our rural communities in farming, fishing and the many other rural activities that members have talked about that need support to ensure that our rural communities thrive.

Fergus Ewing opened the debate and rehearsed some of the challenges, as did some SNP members. We are very aware of the challenges, but in our mind that means that there is a greater need for putting aside our differences and working more closely for the good of our rural communities. We know that the issue of the movement of labour will cause challenges for farms. We have heard about a points system in that regard, but that will not work for low-skilled, migrant farm workers. While we need to protect their working conditions, which are often poor, we also need to make sure that they are able to continue, because our farming communities are as dependent on them as they are on the work that they do across Scotland and, indeed, in the rest of the UK and Europe.

We need access to the single market: it is really important for our farmers and producers that that

happens. I was interested to hear about the tattie and, indeed, with the exchange between Fergus Ewing and Stewart Stevenson, I could see a save the Scottish tattie campaign starting. I hope that it will not come to that, and perhaps I make that comment a bit too flippantly, because it is really important that we protect those suppliers who have markets beyond Scotland and the UK—and not only for our benefit. That is where we have to sell that to the rest of the EU, because it is not only we who benefit from that trade: the rest of Europe benefits from receiving our high-quality produce.

Financial support was mentioned. Gail Ross talked about UHI, and others talked about financial support for farming and fishing and, indeed, rural communities. It is important that we reiterate the need for that support.

Fergus Ewing talked about agreeing with us on repatriating powers, which was very welcome. To be honest, I think that most people in this Parliament would agree to that. However, he also talked about how we then distribute funding for farming and rural communities throughout the UK. I made it clear in my speech that we need a much fairer distribution, because, with our geographical disadvantage compared with the rest of the UK, we would not be agin having a level playing field across the UK, where farmers receive similar amounts, and perhaps even fighting for a bit more because our disadvantage is greater. At the same time, that will require us to work very closely with the UK Government—perhaps ceding some powers—so we need to be careful what we are asking for and how we go about achieving those aims. We need wider discussions on those things.

Peter Chapman used his speech to talk about the horrendous issues with CAP. Everybody agrees that that has been a huge problem for our rural communities, but perhaps this was not the time for it. We will have those debates again, and I am sad to say that I think that there will probably be more problems than there have already been before that issue is resolved. We can discuss those problems and, indeed, hold the Government to account on that, at that time. Peter Chapman also talked about red tape. He is right, but we have to remember that a lot of that red tape did not come from the EU but from our own Governments gold-plating domestic policy.

Mike Rumbles's amendment, which we have said we will support, is good. He talked about how wide that commission had been, and about the work of the NFUS, on which we totally agree. Its briefings are coming in—I was going to say daily, but it is more often than that—and it has already started thinking about those things. It needs to be involved, as do the NGOs, the Scottish

Fishermen's Federation, consumers and producers.

That is where I would have a slight disagreement with Mark Ruskell, who talked about the land commission doing that. I think that the commission has enough to do in dealing with the matters, such as farm prices, that he spoke about in the debate. The system of land ownership that we have in Scotland is way wrong and we need to focus on that; that is what the land commission needs to do, while we need another commission to look at the way forward, with a wider base of stakeholders.

My colleague Claudia Beamish rightly talked about all the environmental issues; I was depending on her to do that, because I only touched on them. She spoke about farming, organic farming, forestry and, indeed, co-ops, and how pillar 2 funding helps co-ops and community groups from brewers to chocolatiers and the like—and, indeed, LEADER funding, which is important to many of our communities.

I hope that this debate has sent a clear message to colleagues in the UK Parliament. We need to be part of future negotiations on trade deals and the parameters that those will set for our food producers from rural communities. We need to be clear that the new structures do not cause further poverty to their producers and consumers. We recognise the challenges going forward, but we also need to make the best of them in order to protect those whom we represent.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Maurice Golden. You have up to seven minutes, please, Mr Golden.

16:44

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): It has been an engaging debate with some interesting speeches. Fergus Ewing started things off by talking about fruitful cross-party discussions—not with us but with other parties. He followed that up with a new year's resolution to work across the chamber. I feel that it is appropriate to point out that just 8 per cent of people successfully achieve their resolutions, although I look forward to seeing the cabinet secretary at Bonfest, as was suggested in a slightly bizarre comment from Mairi Evans. The cabinet secretary then spoke about a repatriation of powers and indulged in some quantum theorising over possible futures—that point was taken up by Emma Harper.

The UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has said:

"it's vital that we start planning now, for life beyond 2020."

She has also said that the UK Government is

"committed to supporting British farming in the short and the long term".

We welcome those words and recognise that leaving the EU presents us with the opportunity to design a rural development system that is fit for purpose and which will cut red tape and bureaucracy. We would prefer to work with the UK Government to ensure that we have a system that not only works for Scotland but works better for Scotland than the current system does.

Rhoda Grant made some interesting points, particularly around food production and food poverty. However, on Labour's amendment, it is important to note that the Scotland Act 1998 was drafted while we were a member of the EU; therefore, to suggest that further powers can be devolved in line with the Scotland Act 1998 is misleading. In addition, the priority should be on getting the best deal for the UK and getting powers repatriated. We can then consult on what powers should go where. Stakeholders such as the NFUS are not clear about what powers should be devolved, and squabbling between the devolved Administration and Westminster will just distract from the important job of getting the best deal for the whole of the UK.

Stewart Stevenson: I will express no dissatisfaction if the UK gets a good deal. However, I encourage the member to consider whether, in seeking a deal of a particular character, there is intrinsic value in that deal reflecting the particular needs of Scotland—and, for that matter, the needs of Wales and Northern Ireland—as well. It is not just about the UK listening to the devolved Administrations; it is about its acting on concerns that may be raised—perhaps privately, in which case we may not hear about them. It is about genuinely changing what is being done, and not waiting until the deal is done but ensuring that the devolved Administrations contribute to the deal.

Maurice Golden: I agree with the member that we have to recognise concerns, and I believe that the UK Government will do that in a positive manner.

I like the idea in Mike Rumbles's amendment of establishing an independent stakeholder group to provide more certainty across the sector. His speech, in which he highlighted the need for a more simplified system, was also welcome.

Gail Ross spoke about the impact of EU funding in her constituency. I recognise those concerns, but it is worth noting that the UK contributes tens of billions of pounds a year to the EU and around £8 billion does not come back.

We also heard mention of unwanted mountains—I am not referring to my colleague Edward Mountain.

Mark Ruskell made a thoughtful speech, but we would find it difficult to support the creation of new agency powers for the Scottish land commission.

I will focus the majority of my closing remarks on the opportunity that regenerative agriculture presents for Scotland. However, before I do that, I have to point out that it is disappointing that we are debating Brexit again. The SNP is no longer content with Brexit Tuesdays but is shoehorning the subject into other debates as well. The SNP Government's focus should be on matters of importance to the people of Scotland that are within the competence of the Parliament. That is why I welcomed the speeches of both Peter Chapman and Finlay Carson, who highlighted the CAP payments fiasco—a situation that is still not fully resolved.

Claudia Beamish spoke passionately about organic farming and I agree with much of what she said, but I would go one step further, certainly in relation to regenerative agriculture, which offers many opportunities for Scottish farmers. It can be broadly defined as a combination of practices including permaculture, organic, no till, holistic grazing, and keyline land preparation. It will help to shift us towards an agricultural model that helps the environment by improving the soil and encouraging biodiversity. That transition would also see economic benefits based on a reduction in fertiliser and pesticide use alongside an overall reduction in agriculture-related greenhouse gas emissions.

Those regenerative practices will not fit the business model of every farm, but they should be encouraged. The benefits of those practices include the removal of greenhouse gas emissions by acting as a carbon sink; decreased water usage; and giving farmers better control over their cost base as the inputs needed for a farm are generated by the farm itself.

What do we need to do to embrace that change? We must educate farmers who are not familiar with regenerative practices and who may be risk averse or resistant to them by making a strong business case. We must develop new skills and we must heighten consumer awareness of regenerative practices.

A good example of those practices is the 0.4 per cent or four per 1,000 initiative that is being driven by the French Government. The Parliament must show vision for our agricultural sector and look to maximise innovative opportunities. I urge members to support the amendment to the motion in the name of Peter Chapman.

16:51

Fergus Ewing: I thoroughly enjoyed the debate and I was delighted to receive an invitation from

Mairi Evans to the Bonfest. I confess that I was previously ignorant of it, but after her contribution I understand that it showcases popular music of the post-Frank Sinatra era. [*Laughter.*]

The debate included a great many contributions and I thank all members for them. I will briefly reply to some points and then move on. I am sorry that I cannot reply to them all, but if members wish me to reply to any particular points, please let me know and I will work with them as per my new year resolution.

Mr Chapman pointed out the delays in CAP payments. We will discuss that at the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee meeting next week under the convenership of Mr Mountain. Resolving that has been a top priority for me and remains so. I make that undertaking to members. It uses up, quite correctly, an enormous amount of time and effort. I am pleased, of course, that we have had some success on the payments—99.9 per cent of payments by value were made by 15 October 2016, in respect of the pillar 1 payments. The loan scheme has injected £267 million into the rural economy and I think has been appreciated by farmers. However, that is not enough. As I have said before, I will not be satisfied until the whole system is back on track. I thought that it would be sensible to start off by repeating that undertaking.

I agree with much that Rhoda Grant said about the importance of protecting rural communities, especially in the Highlands and Islands, which she represents. Mr Rumbles made a very positive contribution and I am pleased to have had fruitful discussions with the Liberal Democrats prior to the debate about the setting up of a group. We need to continue close engagement with stakeholders and consider all the options and we will therefore heed the call in the Lib Dem amendment, which we will support,

“to establish an independent group”.

We will also support the Labour amendment. I do hope, as Mr Rumbles exhorted our colleagues on the Conservative benches, that we can reach a unanimous agreement tonight, but we shall see.

It is clear that public funding for rural development is critical. We all agree that it drives our rural economy and that it protects and enhances our natural environment. We had excellent examples from Gail Ross about Erasmus, from Stewart Stevenson, Mairi Evans and Mark Ruskell about LEADER, and from Claudia Beamish about the contribution towards organics and soil improvement.

All those points were very well made but the debate went wider than that. Mr Coffey talked about the EU's contribution to broadband and connectivity, which is so important now and is another extremely pressing matter for me. Many

members, including Mairi Evans, pointed out the contribution to society beyond agriculture. To be fair, it was, I think, either Mr Chapman or Mr Mountain who acknowledged that, too.

I think therefore that there is a consonance of objectives, but serious doubts about funding remain. Mr Rumbles is correct that we need to marshal a set of principles around which we can coalesce, but we also need clarity about the future of funding. Both go hand in hand and are required—we cannot go for one or the other.

In my defence and in defence of the Scottish Government, I should point out that the vision for Scottish agriculture, which was launched by my predecessor Richard Lochhead, went a long way toward setting out those principles. In accordance with my new year resolution, therefore, I undertake to write to spokesmen with a copy of that document, which I think sets out very useful principles and might form the basis for further discussions with party spokespeople. I am more than happy to discuss these important matters in the spirit of co-operation that I have suggested.

As I said, there is a consonance of objectives. We have been concentrating on pursuing opportunities, although I thought that I heard a slightly churlish suggestion that we were not doing so. I can assure all members that, for my part, I have been absolutely determined to grasp all opportunities available in rural Scotland. That is why I and my colleagues, including Mr Russell, Ms Cunningham and Mr Stewart, have led various summits and meetings. We have brought people together to discuss timber in the south and north of Scotland, shellfish, aquaculture and, on Monday, food and farming. We have Ms Cunningham bringing together NGOs in respect of the environment and me bringing rural development parties together to talk about rural environment; and very shortly, we will have a summit on food and drink and manufacturing. The whole purpose of that activity is to galvanise effort and ensure that we grasp rural development opportunities and work with all stakeholders in that respect. I am happy to work with all members and grab all opportunities that are available to us.

I think that the concerns raised in this debate are threefold: future funding; access to markets; and immigration and labour policy. It is absolutely correct that we pursue first of all unresolved matters and issues before we clear the way for negotiations with the UK on the future of funding to replace CAP. As I have identified, the three issues in question are convergence funding, the sea fish levy and the red meat levy.

To be fair, the UK Government has acknowledged that those issues exist and require to be resolved. It was said that I should get round the table with Ms Leadsom and Mr Eustice; I have

done so, but the trouble was, I am sad to say, that there was not very much on the table. However, I am meeting them next Thursday—the day after Burns night—and I will be pleased to discuss this matter again with Andrea Leadsom and Mr Eustice. We will be putting proposals on the table for discussion, setting out some of the principles and describing some of the circumstances that we have applied.

The key question is: what will replace the EU funding on which our rural community has depended and, in many ways, thrived over the past decades? We have heard contributions in that respect from members from each party in the chamber, including the Conservatives. What will replace that funding?

Mr Eustice, with whom I have a workmanlike relationship, made it very clear when he said on 26 May last year that leaving the European Union would pay

“an £18bn a year Brexit dividend”,

which would allow the UK

“to spend £2bn on farming and the environment.”

That was before the referendum. What he said was:

“The truth of the matter is if we left the EU there would be an £18bn a year ... dividend, so could we find the money to spend £2bn a year on farming and the environment? Of course”

he could.

“Would we? Without a shadow of a doubt.”

We should hold him to that pledge and promise.

When, representing the Scottish Government, I meet him next Thursday, I hope that I will be able to say that I have enjoyed cross-party support from colleagues in the Labour Party, the Green Party and the Scottish Liberal Democrats. It is never too late for the Scottish Conservatives to come on board.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Peter Chapman is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Rhoda Grant will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S5M-03463.3, in the name of Peter Chapman, which seeks to amend motion S5M-03463, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the future of funding for rural development, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)

Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)

Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 30, Against 88, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-03463.1, in the name of Rhoda Grant, which seeks to amend motion S5M-03463, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the future of funding for rural development, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)

Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 88, Against 0, Abstentions 31.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-03463.2, in the name of Mike Rumbles, which seeks to amend motion S5M-03463, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the future of funding for rural development, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: Someone said no, but the result of the division is: For 119, Against 0, Abstentions 0. [*Laughter.*]

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-03463, in the name of Fergus Ewing, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)

Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 88, Against 31, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament acknowledges the importance of public funding for rural development to help drive forward Scotland's rural economy and continue to carry out works to protect and enhance the natural environment; notes the significant contribution made by EU funding and welcomes the continuation of that funding until 2020; regrets that the current UK Government has failed to provide Scotland with its fair share of funding for rural interests; is concerned at recent statements by UK ministers on their intentions for future funding for rural development; notes the substantial potential adverse impact that such changes could have on rural Scotland after 2020; understands that the UK Government will require to draw up trade agreements with the EU and other countries; welcomes that it will consult widely with producers throughout the UK on this; urges it to also work with the devolved governments to ensure that the differing needs of all of devolved nations are met; believes that devolved powers over policy should not be centralised and, where powers are repatriated from the EU, should be devolved in line with the Scotland Act 1998; further believes that producers will continue to require support and that this should be distributed fairly, taking into account natural and geographical disadvantage in order to create a level playing field for all producers in the UK, and to ensure that appropriate funding is available to support farmers, land managers and rural communities to meet biodiversity and climate change targets, and calls on ministers to establish an independent group involving relevant stakeholders to provide advice as to the principles and policies that should underpin options for appropriate rural support beyond 2020, and, in the intervening period, provide as much certainty and information as possible to farmers, crofters and the wider rural economy.

Points of Order

17:05

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We will hear Gillian Martin's point of order first.

Gillian Martin: This is a point of order under rule 1.6 of the standing orders. This afternoon, during questions to the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform on her statement, Alexander Burnett asked a question relating to Government grants that are available for house builders. He did not declare that he is the director and chairman of a house-building company, the North Banchory Company, which has significant interests in house building in the north-east of Scotland.

Presiding Officer, given that that is yet another instance of Mr Burnett consistently using the chamber to deal with matters of importance to him personally, which is an issue that you may have seen in the *Sunday Post* last week, will you remind him that if he is asking such self-serving questions, he should obey Parliament's rules so that his constituents are at least made aware of the fact that he is doing so and can draw their own conclusions?

The Presiding Officer: I thank Gillian Martin for alerting me to the fact that she was going to raise a point of order. It is up to all members to make a judgment as to whether to declare their interests.

Christina McKelvie: Forgive me for not alerting you to the fact that I was going to raise a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Earlier today, Ruth Davidson used First Minister's question time to raise an individual business rates case on behalf of the Score Group. It is my understanding that that company and its chairman have given considerable support to a number of political causes that are close to Ruth Davidson's heart, including the better together campaign and Scotland in Union.

Presiding Officer, will you give members guidance on whether it is appropriate for Ruth Davidson to use the weekly opportunity to hold the First Minister to account to advance the cause of her Tory cronies and, crucially, to do so while not declaring any interest?

The Presiding Officer: The political allegiance or otherwise of any organisation is certainly not a matter for me to rule on. That is not a point of

order. With that, I suggest that I bring the meeting to a close.

Meeting closed at 17:07.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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