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Tuesday 17 September 2019

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 17 September 2019

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:00]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. Our first item of business is time for reflection, for which our leader today is the Rev Canon David Richards, who is rector at St Paul's and St George's Episcopal church in Edinburgh.

The Rev Canon David Richards (St Paul's and St George's Episcopal Church, Edinburgh): Presiding Officer, members of the Scottish Parliament, I will begin with the words of the former Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks:

"There are moments in history, and we are living through one now, when something new is taking shape but we do not know precisely what ... The results lie all around us ... the fraying of the social bond, the partisanship of politics at a time when national interest demands something larger, the loss of trust in public institutions, the buildup of debt whose burden will fall on future generations, and the failure of a shared morality to lift us out of the morass of individualism, hedonism, consumerism, and relativism. We know these things, yet we seem collectively powerless to move beyond them."

Jonathan Sacks spoke those words in 2014, before the Scottish and Brexit referendums and before the electoral success of Donald Trump and others. The mind can only boggle at what he would write now.

For 250 years, the enlightenment has shaped and formed us. In the words of Immanuel Kant,

"humankind's emergence from self-incurred immaturity"

began to shape how we thought and lived, and Scotland was at the forefront. Much good has been accomplished and medical science has made breakthroughs that we thought impossible, and yet, although we can travel further, faster and higher than previous generations could, the question remains whether we are happier. The First Minister raised that in her TED talk in July. Happiness is perhaps a worthier measure of a society's health than economic prosperity alone.

The reality is that we live in a society and culture that is perhaps the most anxious, uncertain and stressed that it has ever been. Some may yearn for a time in the past when Britannia ruled the waves—and some may not—but what if what we see around us is the new normal? Globally, 700 million people still live in extreme poverty; a million children die of pneumonia every year; half a million children still die of diarrhoea or malaria; and 300 million people are diagnosed as clinically

depressed, with 800,000 people a year taking their own lives. The reality is that we are living through five global crises: social, economic, religious, political and environmental.

Two thousand years ago, the apostle Paul wrote these words to Timothy, a young leader who was struggling to develop an embryonic church in a city full of commerce, political intrigue, sexual politics and dissent:

"But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."

If St Paul had come from Glasgow, he might have said, "keep the heid". We need you, as our leaders, to keep the heid. We need you to discharge all the duties of your ministries and, through it all, keep your heads—especially if you are playing swingball. Keep calm and work for the common good, even though we—and you—may disagree on how we might get there. [*Applause.*]

Topical Question Time

14:04

Scottish Prison Service

1. James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the Auditor General's comment that "the Scottish Prison Service faces a combination of severe pressures on many fronts; this poses a threat to operational safety, effectiveness and financial sustainability." (S5T-01787)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): I take very seriously the pressures that Scotland's prisons face, and especially the rise in the prisoner population. I have been working closely with the Scottish Prison Service to see that robust measures are in place to ensure the safety of staff and of the prisoners who are in our care.

As successive independent inspections have highlighted, we must never take for granted the good order that is maintained in our prisons. The most recent annual report by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons for Scotland notes that she is reassured that, despite a rise in prison populations, staff and prisoners reported feeling safe.

As the Auditor General's report stated, the Scottish Government has also confirmed the allocation of additional revenue funding to the SPS in the current year, to help to meet the costs of the increase in the prisoner population and the other pressures that were highlighted. Additional capital funding has also been committed to the prison estate, including the new female estate and the development of a replacement for HMP Barlinnie.

I will reflect on all the issues that the Auditor General's report raised and will address them in conjunction with the SPS. That process will also involve all members looking at the factors that drive Scotland's high rate of imprisonment. It is the highest in western Europe, so it is important that we, in the Parliament, work together to back progressive justice reforms.

James Kelly: The Auditor General's report is, indeed, stark. It highlights issues such as overcrowding in prisons, budget shortfalls and the unavailability of fit and well prison officers. Those issues have been made worse by a 12.5 per cent reduction in the operating budget from 2014-15 to 2018-19 and a 60 per cent increase in the number of officers who are on sickness absence. It seems to me that the Government is short on answers. What specific actions will the Government take to address the budget shortfall and the increase in the number of prison officers who are on sickness absence?

Humza Yousaf: I thank James Kelly for his question. I give him an absolute assurance that the Government takes extremely seriously the Auditor General's concerns and those that have been raised generally regarding the prison population and the prison estate. At the root of the vast majority—if not all—of the concerns raised by the Auditor General is the fact that our prison population is far too high. That adds to the pressure that exists on finance, on staff and right across the prison estate. We must reflect carefully on that root cause and address it so that we can address each of those areas in which there is pressure.

On James Kelly's specific questions, I mentioned in my first answer that we have allocated additional revenue and capital to the SPS. Regarding allocations for the following year, we will, of course, look carefully at what the Auditor General has said. I will have conversations with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work about the future spending review.

James Kelly's second point was about staff sickness. A key issue in the pay award that was recently agreed with the Prison Officers Association Scotland was tackling staff sickness and absence. However, clearly, if we could reduce the prison population, that would make a big difference to the pressure that prison officers face.

James Kelly: One of the options that was previously available to the Government in trying to reduce the prison population was the use of the throughcare service, which, unfortunately, was suspended in July. This morning, the Justice Committee heard about the benefits of that service from organisations such as Sacro and the Wise Group. When will the throughcare service be re-established and the 42 officers to support it reintroduced?

Humza Yousaf: I thank James Kelly for asking that important question, and I confirm to Parliament that representatives of the third sector will meet the SPS tomorrow. Negotiations are at an advanced stage to allow the third sector to step into that space while the temporary suspension of throughcare support is taking place.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): Why is it being suspended?

Humza Yousaf: The third sector should be able to cover the service, which is a very positive outcome. However, it is hoped that that will be a temporary measure and that, if we can reduce the prison population, the throughcare support officers who were previously doing that job can be relieved of the duties that they are currently doing.

Johann Lamont: Seriously?

Humza Yousaf: Presiding Officer, I hear Johann Lamont chuntering from the sidelines. I say to her that it is a serious suggestion that the third sector should come in and provide that service. It is a good outcome—indeed, it is the preferred one for all of us who want to see throughcare support being re-established in our prisons. The fact that that sector might be able to step into that space is a very welcome development. The i's still have to be dotted and the t's crossed, but, once I have absolute confirmation that the third sector will be able to provide such support, I will ensure that James Kelly—and, indeed, anyone else who is chuntering from the sidelines or has a more serious interest in the issue—is kept updated.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Five members wish to ask supplementary questions. I do not think that we will get through them all, but I encourage succinctness, as usual. I call Liam Kerr, to be followed by Rona Mackay.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The report confirms that the number of assaults in prisons has rocketed, although it has been rising for some time. Has the Government initiated a review of the precise causes and triggers of that violence in order to find solutions to better protect prisoners and officers?

Humza Yousaf: We know that one of the reasons for the assaults is the increased prevalence of psychoactive substances in our prisons, which Liam Kerr has written to me about. A number of pieces of equipment are being trialled and piloted in our prison estate to identify what is, for a variety of reasons, a very difficult substance to detect. That is part of the solution.

I go back to what I said about the root cause of the concerns in my answer to a previous question. If we can reduce the number of people in our prisons, that will reduce the pressure on prison officers and staff. I hope that it will also have the effect of reducing violence in our prisons. We know that a number of prisoners are having to share cells where previously they did not have to and that prisoners have less recreation time. Those things add to the stresses and strains in our prison estate.

There are a number of factors. If Liam Kerr wants more detail, I am more than happy to speak to him after topical questions.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary outline what impact the presumption against short sentences will have on female prisoners, in particular, many of whom are serving sentences of less than one year?

Humza Yousaf: This is an important point. There are a number of things that we can do—and

have recently done—that will help to reduce the prison population. The presumption against short sentences is one of those things, and we will look to tackle the remand population. Revising the guidance on home detention curfew on the back of inspectorate reports might be another.

The presumption against short sentences will have an impact. It will help to reduce some of the churn that we see with people coming in and out of our prisons, and—to answer Rona Mackay's direct question—I note that it will have a disproportionately positive effect on the female custodial estate, given that about 90 per cent of females who are in custody are in for less than 12 months.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The report builds on the annual report by HM inspectorate of prisons for Scotland, and both reports talk about the significant additional costs that have been incurred through the acquiring of additional places from private prisons. HMIPS says that that

“will inevitably impact adversely on other planned investments.”

What is the cabinet secretary going to do to stop the situation whereby private companies are profiting at the expense of the inefficiencies in the wider prison estate?

Humza Yousaf: I have no plans to build more prison estate, if that is the suggestion.

I say to John Finnie—I know that he understands this—that the decisions on measures that have been taken, whether it is the purchasing of private spaces at quite a cost or the withdrawal of throughcare support officers, although I hope that we have mitigation for that, have not been taken lightly by the prison service. It has done those things to maintain the good order that exists in our prisons. That is why successive inspectorate reports have mentioned that there is good order in our prisons.

We will look to any solution that can help to ease the current tensions in our prison estate and maintain public safety. If that means having to use the private spaces that are available, then so be it, but these decisions are not taken at all lightly.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The report points to the fact that the use of supervised bail has fallen by almost a third since 2005-06. Given that 20 per cent of our prison population is on remand, which is twice the rate in England and Wales, what steps and investments will the cabinet secretary make to avoid the use of remand as the default option for people who are awaiting trial?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Daniel Johnson for asking an incredibly important question. There are

a few things that we can do. We will continue to increase our investment in alternatives to custody and remand, including bail.

It is important that we see the issue in the round. Recently, I have had some very positive conversations with some sheriffs principal, whose decisions on whether to grant bail are hugely important, and I am very keen that the justice board and our justice leaders network come together to look at the matter in a holistic way. Also, we passed legislation recently that will, we hope, allow us to explore other technologies such as GPS.

There is a whole range and suite of measures that we can help to introduce, but the conversation will involve others as well as the Government. I agree with Daniel Johnson's assessment that our remand population is far too high, particularly in comparison to that in England and Wales. Therefore, the Government definitely sees tackling the number of people who are on remand as part of the solution in reducing our prison population.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I have seen the minutes of a health and safety meeting at one of Scotland's prisons, where the categorisation of new psychoactive substances will stop and they will be recategorised as unknown substances. Might that be the reason why a 1 per cent fall in drugs misuse is reported in the Audit Scotland report at a time of a staffing crisis and prison overcrowding? Will the cabinet secretary investigate the change in categorisation? Staff fear that the prison service is manipulating the figures.

Humza Yousaf: I will have a look at the issue that Neil Findlay raises and will investigate the reasons for any recategorisation. I give Neil Findlay an absolute assurance that, in all the meetings that I have had with the Scottish Prison Service, the Prison Officers Association, the Prison Governors Association and the many other trade unions that are involved with the prisons, nobody—including the prison service itself—has once attempted to downplay the damage that psychoactive substances are doing not only to the prisoners but to the staff. If Neil Findlay wants an assurance that the issue is not being downplayed, I give an absolute assurance that that is the case. I will investigate the reasons for recategorisation as he has asked me to.

Unresolved Criminal Cases

2. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government how it will address the reported backlog of unresolved criminal cases. (S5T-01783)

The Solicitor General for Scotland (Alison Di Rollo): As at today, the number of criminal cases in which no initial decision has been made is

17,342. That represents somewhere between four and five weeks of work in hand.

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service has a target of taking initial decisions in 75 per cent of cases in four weeks. The current work in hand is consistent with meeting that target by the year end. Following the allocation of additional resources, staffing in the unit that is responsible for that work is higher than ever before, with a view to reducing the amount of work in hand at any given time.

Liam McArthur: To many people, 17,000 cases sitting waiting for a decision to be made will seem very much on the high side. The cases are reported to include allegations of the most serious crimes, including rape and attempted murder. While those cases are locked in a holding pattern, victims who are waiting for a decision can often feel further traumatised. One victim is reported as saying earlier this week:

"I felt like I was the accused ... it was an arduous experience, and I would never report a crime again."

In the light of those figures and such comments, does the Solicitor General believe that the Crown Office has the resources that it needs to carry out the work that it is charged with undertaking?

The Solicitor General for Scotland: The COPFS is absolutely committed to reducing the time that it takes for cases to progress through the criminal justice system, for the reasons that Liam McArthur has just explained. As a result of the Scottish Government allocating an additional £5 million of funding to the COPFS, Scotland's prosecution service is on track to have its highest ever number of staff.

Given the specialist nature of the work that we do—the decisions to prosecute, the assessment of whether there is sufficient evidence to bring charges, and the decisions about whether further inquiries of specialist reporting agencies are needed—and an increasingly complex and specialist case load, it is going to take some time for the full benefits of the increased resource to feed through. However, incremental improvements can be expected in the interim and, crucially, the COPFS keeps its processes—including the critical initial decision process—under review. The position is monitored weekly, and the COPFS will respond to its changing case load and progress the whole of its work as effectively as possible.

Liam McArthur: The backlog in unresolved criminal cases has echoes of delays in fatal accident inquiries, as highlighted by my party and others over recent months.

Following earlier research by the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Inspectorate of

Prosecution in Scotland has concluded that FAIs are characterised by

“lengthy intervals of unexplained delays”

and “periods of inactivity”, which

“have the potential to devalue the purpose of the FAI.”

The inspectorate also cited overstretched workloads and inefficient collaboration with other agencies.

Does the Solicitor General accept that that is further evidence that the Crown Office does not have the resources that it needs and that, as a consequence, access to justice is not available to everyone in Scotland who needs it?

The Solicitor General for Scotland: The COPFS has identified a need for resources to address its ever-changing case load. As Liam McArthur will be aware, although the absolute raw number of reports received has declined in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of more serious and complex cases, including deaths investigations.

In response to that changing case load, the COPFS is committed to improving its service performance, particularly in relation to deaths investigations, where it is accepted that, although the majority of cases are dealt with and concluded within reasonable expectations and on target, some cases—very few—have taken far too long. In securing the additional resources, the Lord Advocate has made it plain that the COPFS is implementing an improvement plan, which aims to reduce the journey time of all High Court cases, particularly those that involve children and young people, and to front load work on the large and complex cases that come through. More serious organised crime cases than ever are being detected by the police, reported to us and successfully prosecuted. The additional resources will be committed to meeting the expectations set out in the High Court practice note on the management of lengthy or complex cases.

The additional resources will also be committed to implementing a programme of improvement work with a view to reducing the duration of some of the more complex deaths investigations. I am sure that Liam McArthur understands that those few cases can call for complex factual and legal issues to be investigated before they get to a fatal accident inquiry, and for expert evidence, which, in our experience, can be commissioned from a wide variety of jurisdictions, not just here in Scotland. The reduction of the journey time to FAI in deaths investigations is absolutely at the heart of the overall improvement programme and is what the additional resources are being committed to.

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): Cases are often delayed through being returned to the police

because of errors or missing evidence. Will the Crown Office now start to record those cases so that data on them and the specific breakdowns can be made available?

The Solicitor General for Scotland: Cases can be returned to the police for a wide variety of complex reasons and I am not sure that it is all that easy or straightforward—or in the interests of time—to categorise them as errors or misinformation. It is the nature of our unique system for the investigation and prosecution of crime in Scotland that the prosecutor gives directions to the police. I say again that all of us in the criminal justice fraternity are facing a changing and increasingly complex case load of serious organised crime, serious sexual offending and homicide.

Our priority is to work with the police on the submission and resending of individual reports and to drive up standards, to express our expectations and to discuss the standard and sufficiency of evidence, and thus embrace our continuous improvement programme.

Universities (No-deal Brexit)

3. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the newly-released Universities UK survey, which claims that Scotland’s universities will lose staff and students in the event of a no-deal Brexit. (S5T-01782)

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Richard Lochhead):

The survey further highlights that a no-deal Brexit is utterly unacceptable. Half of Scottish respondents report difficulties in retaining or recruiting European Union staff, and one third say that demand from EU students has fluctuated. We know that more than a quarter of Scottish university research staff are EU citizens. Scotland has the highest proportion of EU university enrolments in the United Kingdom.

The reality is that the UK is not, and cannot be, ready for a no-deal EU exit on 31 October. The UK Government must take no deal off the table. Our commitment to supporting eligible EU students commencing courses in academic year 2020-21 is a clear example of our determination to mitigate the effects of the UK Government’s deeply damaging position, and to keep Scotland an open and welcoming nation.

Gillian Martin: The minister will undoubtedly join me in expressing relief that, after seven years of campaigning by our party, last week the UK Government performed a much-needed U-turn on its decision to remove the post-study work visa. Has his office assessed the impact that the past three years of pre-Brexit chaos, and a Tory

Government that wants to end freedom of movement at all costs, have already had on the sector in terms of funding and in terms of recruitment and retention of staff and students?

Richard Lochhead: I welcome the return of the post-study work visa, which the UK Government has announced in the past few days, and I pay tribute to the campaigning by the higher education sector in Scotland—our institutions and student organisations—and, of course, by colleagues in the Scottish Government who have worked in partnership with them ever since the original visa was scrapped. We welcome the fact that it has been replaced.

Gillian Martin asked about the impact of Brexit on our higher education sector. The findings of the survey that formed the subject of her first question correspond with the Scottish Government's understanding. In that survey, 50 per cent of respondents said that they had already lost existing or potential staff to overseas universities, which they could directly attribute to the prospect of a no-deal Brexit; 40 per cent said that they had experienced fluctuations in collaboration among EU partners; and one in three said that they had already experienced fluctuations in demand from EU students. That chimes very much with the evidence that the Government has received on the damage that the threat of Brexit is doing to research projects in the higher education sector. In addition, key staff who are EU nationals are looking to return to their home countries; I have heard of many examples of that happening from many universities.

Any kind of Brexit would be deeply damaging to Scottish further and higher education and science, and a no-deal Brexit would be an absolute body blow to the sector.

Gillian Martin: Scottish universities have, as far as they can, done a tremendous job in working with their staff and students from other EU countries to prepare for Brexit, but given that one in five academics in Scottish universities originates from another EU country, what can the Scottish Government do to ensure that they continue to want to work here? Does the minister agree that freedom of movement must be put back on the table by Boris Johnson as he speaks to his counterparts from the rest of the EU?

Richard Lochhead: It is absolutely the case that the removal of freedom of movement will make it very difficult for our universities to compete with the rest of Europe in a range of ways. I do not have time to go into all of them now, but I referred to some of those impacts in my previous answer. I absolutely support any calls for the UK Government to reinstate a commitment to freedom of movement and to a much better deal, if Brexit happens. Of course, the best outcome would be

for there to be no Brexit at all, in which case we would have continuity of freedom of movement for students and staff in Europe, which would protect our universities.

The Scottish Government has reached out to institutions and to other European Governments to convey the message that Scotland will remain a welcoming and outward-looking internationalist country. That message has been warmly received by institutions across Europe and by European Governments.

Today, during a visit to the University of the Highlands and Islands' Perth college, I spoke to overseas students who are studying languages there, who said that they had received that message and that they feel very comfortable living and studying in Scotland. Of course, they want our on-going support to make sure that that continues to be the case.

The Presiding Officer: We have gone over time, but I will take a brief question from Oliver Mundell.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Given that the sector highlights the uncertainty that exists, will the Scottish National Party commit to supporting a future Brexit deal? Does the minister regret the fact that his party's members of Parliament at Westminster voted against the withdrawal agreement when it could have secured certainty back in March?

Richard Lochhead: I urge Oliver Mundell and his Conservative colleagues to get their heads out of the sand and recognise the damage that is already being caused to our Scottish further and higher education and science sectors before Brexit has even happened. If Oliver Mundell cared about the future of our students, our knowledge economy and our universities and colleges, he would stop campaigning for Brexit and start campaigning against any kind of Brexit and support what would be the best outcome for the viability of Scottish further and higher education.

Credit Unions

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-18884, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on investing in our credit unions. I call Aileen Campbell to speak to and move the motion.

14:30

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): There are always junctures in life that demand we pay close attention to our finances, such as paying the bills for the summer holidays, school uniforms, and trips away. Now, as autumn approaches, shops are already stocking up for Christmas and all the increased financial pressures that that brings.

These moments provide a useful prompt to encourage us to take control of our personal finances so that we are not paying high interest rates or worrying about how to pay for Christmas. There is pressure on everyone to spend more, but the sad truth is that it is the most vulnerable in our communities who turn to unaffordable credit. That is why it is so important that this Parliament and its members continue to support the important role that is played by credit unions in our communities as providers of ethical financial services.

On 17 January this year, the Parliament celebrated the role of credit unions in Scotland's communities in a debate. As members know, credit unions are member-owned financial co-operatives, which means that they exist only for the benefit of the people who use their services. They are not-for-profit organisations, which means that the money that they make goes right back into providing competitive rates on savings and loans. They are based on the principles of individual responsibility and mutual assistance, which means that they improve people's lives through encouraging the wise use of credit and teaching the importance of budgeting.

Many credit unions provide complementary services in addition to savings and lending, such as business loans and mortgages. Credit unions are diverse, ranging from small community models to large organisations handling millions of pounds. However, all are driven by a singular purpose—to serve their members rather than to make profits for a select few.

More than 410,000 people in Scotland are already members of a credit union, which shows modest growth from last year. However, credit unions should be much more mainstream than they are so that more people can benefit from their ethical services. Although they provide help and support to the most vulnerable, they are not and should not be defined by that. In fact, credit unions

rely on customers from all walks of life to sustain their businesses and to grow.

Although that increase in membership is welcome, there is still much more to be done. During the debate in January, I heard about some of the key challenges facing credit unions, including the need to increase payroll deductions to encourage more employees to save, which remains a key area in which we need to make progress; to use technology so that credit unions become the place to save and to borrow; and to focus on the education of young people in primary and secondary schools to develop their financial skills and promote the use of their local credit union. That is why we welcome Pauline McNeill's amendment to the motion and intend to support it.

In June, I met key members of the credit union movement to discuss the priorities for the sector, what support might be required to ensure that the credit union movement in Scotland continues to thrive, and possible sources of support for that growth. It was clear that although our efforts to date to support and grow credit unions have had a positive impact, more determination to grow the sector is required and we need to focus not on doing things to the sector but on working alongside it.

That is why I am pleased that in this year's programme for government we have committed to co-producing with the sector a new credit union strategy, which will enable it to grow, develop and flourish further. It is worth emphasising the importance of ensuring that co-production is at the heart of developing the strategy—an appropriate acknowledgement of the credit union principles of individual responsibility and mutual assistance. It is also important and opportune to seek members' views at this early stage in order to help to shape the strategy for Scotland.

The credit union strategy will naturally focus on the sustainability of individual credit unions and of the sector as a whole. Typical of the wider social enterprise sector, part of the key to sustainability is ensuring that the next generation of savers and borrowers use credit unions. It is right to focus on future savers, so the strategy will look to ensure that young people are engaged with their local credit union and to identify sustainable ways of doing that.

In creating the strategy, we will explore the success of the junior savers scheme, which has engaged parents, staff and pupil volunteers in promoting a saving culture; delivered school assembly presentations and classroom discussions; and incentivised young people to become junior savers through a range of promotional activity. We have an opportunity to learn from the junior savers scheme and to work out what went well and what can be improved to

ensure that we can support young people to become members of credit unions.

Affordable credit is another area that requires further attention. We know that people who are unable to access mainstream financial services have limited choices on where to go to borrow money. Some may turn to friends and family members, who unfortunately may be on low incomes, too, while others may turn to high-cost lenders and will then be exposed to exploitative practices. There is simply no other place for those people to turn to.

The Scottish Government has a responsibility to help to provide an alternative option for people in those situations so that they, like members, have access to credit that they can afford. That is why we have invested £1 million in Carnegie UK Trust's affordable credit fund. The resource will be used by lenders over a 10-year period to provide genuine alternatives to high-cost credit lenders for people on low incomes and to work to address the financial exclusion that people face. The essence of the affordable credit fund is to help more disadvantaged and vulnerable people. The fund will also help to grow the community lending sector in Scotland through support for not-for-profit organisations. Those lenders, which include credit unions and community development finance institutions, support increased financial inclusion by providing access to debt advice, savings opportunities and banking products and services.

Fair For You was the first lender to draw down a loan from the affordable credit fund in order to expand the services that it offers in Scotland. Capital from the fund is loaned to borrowers from Fair For You so that they can buy essential household items for their homes. Fair For You's repayment rates are affordable and are tailored to the borrower's income. The loans are flexible, in that borrowers can pay them off faster and pay less as a result, if they can afford to do so. Our support for that sector over the next decade will be key to supporting the growth of the affordable credit sector in Scotland. Our investment in the fund will help social lenders to work with people on low incomes in order to increase their financial inclusion and contribute to tackling the poverty premium.

I know, however, that more can always be done, and I am always open to hearing suggestions on the way in which our work in the area could be improved. In the debate on the issue in Parliament at the start of the year, it was suggested that the Scottish Government should use financial transactions to boost credit unions' regulatory reserves. We have investigated that and found that it should accelerate growth in credit union membership and support the vital services that they offer. That is why our programme for

government commits to launching a new £10 million credit union investment fund in spring next year. That will provide low-cost loans to support credit unions to grow memberships and improve their systems.

It is envisaged that the fund will lead to healthier balance sheets for credit unions and in turn will allow a greater level of affordable lending. I am keen to engage with interested members from across the chamber and from the sector on the final form that the fund will take. For instance, we know that support for information technology infrastructure is a key ask from the credit union sector, and the fund will help with developing those key facilities. Given the changing attitudes to banking, particularly among younger people, that will help to ensure that credit unions remain key institutions in our communities today and, importantly, in future.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I welcome the fund. Can the cabinet secretary give a commitment that the Government will look at the lower levels of engagement with credit unions in more rural and island areas, where the benefits are equally obvious but where take-up levels have historically been a bit lower?

Aileen Campbell: Absolutely. We will take on board any views and opinions from across the chamber on what the strategy should include. We will engage with the more rural credit unions. I have met representatives of the Western Isles Credit Union, which I think covers some of the northern isles, who told me about some of the challenges that they face and about the credit union's strengths and what it provides for the community. I am absolutely willing to ensure that rural and island communities are factored into the strategy as it takes shape.

It is important that we reflect the voices and views of the credit unions, part of whose strength is their diversity and the way in which they not only reflect but are embedded in the communities that they serve. We are keen to develop a coherent strategy that seeks to further strengthen and grow credit unions in Scotland, but we recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach is not required. That is why partnership, co-production and engagement with the sector in its widest sense are important.

I look forward to working with members across the chamber on what I think is a shared ambition, regardless of which political party we represent. By supporting credit unions, which unashamedly put people before profit, we have a real opportunity to support vulnerable people and communities. Our national performance framework seeks to create a Scotland based on the principles of kindness, respect and dignity, with a focus on wellbeing. Credit unions will help us in the pursuit of the fairer Scotland that we all want to create.

I move,

That the Parliament commends Scotland's network of credit unions, which are at the heart of communities across the country and serve more than 410,000 people; welcomes that, through offering affordable loans and savings, credit unions can protect people from predatory lenders and unmanageable debt; notes the Scottish Government's Programme for Government commitment to introduce a new £10 million Credit Union Investment Fund to help them grow their membership and increase the numbers of people saving and borrowing from credit unions, and further notes that the Scottish Government will co-produce, with the credit union sector, a national strategy to further grow and strengthen this important sector.

14:40

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I point-blank refuse to think about Christmas while it is still September, but I agree with the cabinet secretary that, for many families, Christmas is a difficult event that gets them into debt.

I hope that this will not just be a cuddly debate about how much we love credit unions—which we do—but that it will be about the principle of wider access to community and co-operative banking, as outlined by the cabinet secretary. There is an ethical side to saving and funding life that is central to the fabric of a modern and progressive Scotland, and there is a wider issue about teaching people how to look after their money.

Worldwide, there are more than 40,000 credit unions in 90 countries. Staggeringly, in Ireland, 70 per cent of the population belongs to a credit union. I like that figure—it is one that we should aim for. Credit unions can transform people's approach to savings and alleviate exorbitant debt.

The Scottish Co-operative Party said in its briefing that we need to move away from the idea that credit unions are a financial institution for poor people, although that attitude might be changing. Credit unions are for all parts of the community, all age groups and all professions.

I agree that more needs to be done to promote credit unions among young people. I was impressed that my 13-year-old niece has a credit union account, which she got at primary school. We are beginning to make progress in schools. If we give school pupils access to a credit union, it helps them to learn about saving while promoting awareness of the existence of credit unions, hopefully for life. Last year, Labour announced that we would expand support for credit unions and give every first-year high-school pupil a £20 savings account with a local credit union. Credit unions are part of the very fabric of what our party believes in. The aim is to reduce the influence of payday lenders and promote savings. Hopefully, if given the chance, we will do that within a generation.

One in four children in Scotland lives in poverty. Many families feel that they have to turn to high-cost credit to pay for everyday household items and bills. StepChange Debt Charity Scotland estimates that 700,000 people in Scotland are in or at risk of problem debt. I have noticed report after report illustrating the levels of personal debt; problem debt affects what seems to be quite a wide group of people, which is deeply concerning.

One in three working families in the United Kingdom are only one pay cheque away from losing their home. Government figures show that 16.5 million working-age adults in the UK have no savings at all. We are facing Brexit and austerity, which is perhaps not the best environment in which to encourage saving, but we need to promote the idea of it. People are relying increasingly on borrowing through payday loans and credit cards because they do not see an alternative.

StepChange highlights the fact that many people are turning to high-cost credit. It reports that its clients have an average of £6,500 in credit card debt. With interest of 22 per cent or higher on high street credit cards, everyone will see why that is a concern.

As an aside, we believe that local councils should have the power to limit the number of fixed-odds betting terminals and betting shops on our high streets to tackle high levels of debt through gambling.

The cabinet secretary referred to the fact that credit unions have highlighted that payroll deduction schemes are a priority for the sector. That works if the person agrees to a deduction at the source—

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I asked the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it would consider extending the number of credit unions with which parliamentary staff, MSP staff and MSPs could have payroll deduction. Does Pauline McNeill agree that it would be good to give us and our staff the choice of local credit unions as well?

Pauline McNeill: I agree 100 per cent with Ruth Maguire's point. Not only can we set an example, but payroll deduction is a good thing and, where it is possible, it should be promoted in the Parliament.

Maintaining a savings buffer can be a crucial lifeline if people are hit by an unexpected expense. It is important to teach people what long-term savings can do for their lives.

I am a member of the Co-operative Party. It is fully committed to doubling the size of the co-operative economy and believes that that must

include doubling the size of the credit union sector in Scotland.

The cabinet secretary outlined the £10 million credit union investment fund, which we wholeheartedly welcome. She answered some of the questions, but it would be helpful to have more detail on how much of the money will be allocated and over what period. Will it be recurring or is it a one-off investment fund?

The Labour Party believes that credit unions are the basis of saving in the community. That concept of banking has probably never been needed so much; it is important in forming the basis of a modern Scotland and we should encourage it in every way. Credit unions will make a huge difference to individuals and communities, and we support the Government's approach to growing the membership and size of the credit union sector in Scotland.

I move amendment S5M-18884.1, to insert at end

“, and believes that this strategy should include the extension of payroll deduction schemes to more workplaces and better promotion of credit unions among young people.”

14:46

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): It is a pleasure to open the debate for my party.

The cabinet secretary is right to say that it is a shared vision. In our manifesto, we said that we would support the credit union movement in making financial services more accessible. Today, we will support the motion and the amendment. I suspect that most of us who speak today will repeat many of the same things.

In that vein, I welcome the announcement by the Scottish Government of the £10 million credit union investment fund to provide loans to support credit unions. I hope that that commitment by the Scottish Government will lead to the credit unions strengthening their presence in the market, both in a physical sense and on a digital platform. Their visibility is an issue for many people. I will come later to a point that Pauline McNeill made about how credit unions sit within the marketplace and how people view them.

When we had consensus on this before, we agreed that we needed to promote the uptake of services from credit unions. I note that, over the year that we have been debating it, there has been a small rise in uptake in Scotland. About 20,000 new members have come in this year. Scottish credit unions now provide about 24 per cent of the UK total of lending.

That makes us look at the worldwide position. Credit unions in the UK provide for just 1 per cent

of the population. When we look around the world, we see that that does not compare well. In the US, 43 per cent of the population engages with credit unions. In Canada, the figure is 22 per cent and, in Australia, it is around 25 per cent. We can see that we have work to do. The cabinet secretary said that there are 40,000 credit unions in the world; I have a figure of 42,000. The number is not exact, but there are a lot of them and we are down at about 0.23 per cent of the world total. Therefore, there is scope for improvement.

We know that we can do better, but how do we achieve that? The cabinet secretary outlined a number of proposals that have been brought forward. We would support some of them. Northern Ireland has done some excellent work. It is forging ahead of us and is lending about 40 per cent of the UK total.

It has also shown us how credit unions should sit within our society. The belief has been that they belong only in poorer areas and are for people who are struggling, but the opposite is true; those of us who have more money should be investing in and supporting credit unions to allow them to flourish and to provide a fair interest rate and an equitable service. We know that credit unions come out extremely well in surveys when it comes to looking after the people they serve.

Credit unions play a key role in offering credit at reasonable rates of interest in a form that suits many low-income consumers, and in providing a valuable tool to encourage saving and responsible budgeting. I hope that everyone will join me in welcoming some of the steps that the UK Government has taken to make credit unions more accessible. It has increased the common bond from £2 million to £3 million, meaning that more people across the UK can access credit unions. That built on the success of the credit union expansion project that provided £38 million to the Association of British Credit Unions in 2013 in order to modernise and grow the credit unions.

However, we hear clearly from trade organisations that they are seeking reform of UK legislation, and, because of the peculiar situation in which the range of financial services that credit unions can legally supply is quite restricted, we in the Conservatives support that. Things that we consider quite normal within our financial institutions, such as credit cards or insurance, really need to be within the credit unions' capacity to deliver.

The sustainability of credit unions is challenging, so the extra money is welcome. The Scottish League of Credit Unions said:

“The challenge for credit unions is that they operate in a restrictive legislative environment in which the interest rate that they charge on loans is capped by law.”

Credit unions therefore also have a narrow margin of profitability. We need to support the changes around that.

Overall, there are very positive movements, and we are more than happy to support the Scottish Government's direction of travel. We will be supporting the motion and amendment tonight, and we look forward to a significant rise in uptake of credit union services over the next five years.

14:52

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): I thank the cabinet secretary for bringing this debate to the chamber.

Scottish Greens, too, were elected on a manifesto to champion not only credit unions but a wide range of other realistic alternatives to the traditional banking sector, including co-ops and mutuals.

The cabinet secretary has announced a new £10 million fund in the programme for government that will support the growth of credit unions across Scotland from financial transactions. I look forward to further details of that in due course. She may be able to say a bit more about how that will be handled when she winds up. She mentioned consultation with the sector.

The latest data that I have shows that Scottish credit unions have about £290 million out on loan. Another £10 million is about 3 per cent. It is critical that financial transactions do more than just conventional capitalisation of credit unions. I am interested in further details, either this afternoon or in due course.

As other members have said, there are about 90 credit unions in Scotland with a membership of over 432,000, which is extremely encouraging. That is a lot of people and it is the biggest mutual sector in the Scottish financial industry.

Although the credit union sector in Scotland is profitable and self-sustaining, there is a strong case for investment in order for the sector to grow in the way that it would like to. Therefore, I welcome the support for a new strategy. However, it is important that that strategy also has the support that it needs to be implemented.

The Scottish household survey in 2017, which is the latest one for which we have detailed statistics—the 2018 one will not be available until October—shows that 22 per cent of households had no savings and 14 per cent had less than £1,000. If that figure is broken down by housing tenure, it shows that there are real inequalities; 49 per cent of people in social rented accommodation had no savings at all and 18 per cent had less than £1,000. In comparison, in the owner-occupier

sector, only 9 per cent of people had no savings and 71 per cent had savings of more than £1,000.

The ability to access finance and to save is critical, and that is massively influenced by such things as one's housing tenure. Therefore, in relation to affordability, it is just as important to think about housing as it is to think about credit. Also significant is the big gender gap.

The credit union movement is a form of mutual co-operative membership association that is not uncommon across the world. In a series of reports since the financial crash, a number of respected institutions have called for greater democratisation of the financial sector. In 2016, Friends of the Earth Scotland, Common Weal and the New Economics Foundation published a report called "Banking for the Common Good", which advocated the development of an "ecosystem" of institutions, including credit unions as well as people's banks, which could be structurally designed to work for the common good.

In the debate that we had in January, I recall referring to the Sparkassen banking system in Germany, which is owned by local authorities. In Switzerland, 45 per cent of citizens are customers at one of the local banks that incorporate the cantonal network. Altogether, the network holds more than £256 billion of domestic finance, and one third of small and medium-sized enterprises conduct their business through it. We should be alert to the bigger picture and remember that it is about not just credit unions but the democratisation of the wider financial sector.

I welcome the debate. Scotland's credit unions are a welcome part of our financial landscape. I thank the cabinet secretary for her commitments. I am happy to build on the consensus that exists, and I look forward to receiving further details of her proposals.

14:56

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Like others, I welcome the debate, which is on a subject that the Parliament has a good track record on and returns to regularly. I confirm the Scottish Liberal Democrats' strong support for the cabinet secretary's proposals.

As I have done in previous debates, I declare an interest as a member of the HI-Scot Credit Union, which operates across the Highlands and Islands, and is almost certainly an enterprise with which the cabinet secretary has had discussions recently. My savings are not central to keeping HI-Scot afloat, but it is good to see that the credit union is making a positive contribution to communities across the region, progressing from its beginnings in the Western Isles. In my constituency, HI-Scot works closely with Orkney

Housing Association and Voluntary Action Orkney, which epitomises the sort of partnership that is key to the success and sustainability of such operations in remote rural and island areas.

Although membership across Scotland is up to 430,000 or so, membership in the Highlands and Islands is a modest 3,200, which suggests that there is room for growth. I hope that the credit union investment fund and the Government's developing strategy will allow specific attention to be given to ways in which the benefits of credit unions can be opened up to more individuals, households and communities across our rural and island areas. HI-Scot Credit Union shares that view.

Those benefits are not in question. As others have said, credit unions encourage a savings culture, provide affordable loans and, as the motion suggests, provide protection "from predatory lenders". Credit unions are also based on the principle of a common bond—a shared connection within a community. They are about people helping people, whether it is the smaller volunteer-run unions with hundreds of members or the larger unions with paid staff and premises.

Perhaps contrary to the common perception, credit unions are not just for people who are in poverty. Michelle Ballantyne and Pauline McNeill were quite right to remind us that they are for all people in all communities. The investment fund can look at reinforcing that point.

Credit unions help to build resilience, improve financial capability and nurture cohesion within communities. Those are all desirable qualities at the best of times, but during a period of economic turmoil such as we have seen over the past decade, their importance increases many times over.

In Scotland, credit unions have proved more popular than almost anywhere else, so I welcome the proposals for an investment fund that were included in the programme for government. With about 100 credit unions in Scotland, more than 400,000 members, more than £0.5 billion in assets and loans approaching £300 million, there is real strength in the sector, as well as an appetite and capacity to grow.

One area for development—this issue was touched on in earlier debates and again today by Pauline McNeill, Ruth Maguire and others—is the scope for more action on payroll deduction. That is a great way of enabling people to save regularly and, where necessary, manage loan repayments effectively. There does not seem to be any good reason why that is not a standard workplace benefit.

To be fair, some employers do offer it, but they are very much in a minority. Even where it is

available, it is often the case that little is done to promote take-up among staff. I would welcome details from the minister on the progress that is being made in that area, and the aspirations for it.

If nothing else, emphasising that it is a simple process for which, by and large, credit unions take on the administration has to be appealing to employers, who can be assured that there is no risk to them regarding loan repayments. Meanwhile, their staff can access credit and repay loans in affordable instalments.

As I said in the previous debate, there seems to be an obvious opportunity to link the work on promoting the living wage more closely to efforts encouraging employers to sign up to payroll deduction arrangements with credit unions and to identify individuals in those companies who can act as credit union champions to encourage take-up.

I welcome the debate and the progress that we are making in expanding the reach that credit unions have in Scotland. I hope that, by the time that we next debate the issue, their popularity, particularly in rural and island areas, and the use of payroll deductions will have increased. For now, I confirm that the Scottish Liberal Democrats will be supporting the motion and the amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Speeches should last a tight four minutes. There is no time in hand.

15:01

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I welcome the Government's commitment to seeing the credit union sector grow and thrive. I also welcome the cross-party support in Parliament for credit unions.

Owned and controlled by members, and with membership being based on a common bond, credit unions are underpinned by the co-operative ethos of people helping people. They are committed to maximising the quality of the services that are provided to members, not to maximising profit for shareholders.

As has been mentioned, membership of credit unions is based on a common bond—an area or a group of people. Everyone in Scotland has access to at least one credit union that they could join, from which to access an extensive range of services.

Credit unions have long played an important role in serving people in our communities who are typically excluded from, or underserved by, mainstream financial services. It is important that the sector has the strong ethos that people who do not have other credit options should not be charged a premium. My constituents are served

well by 1st Alliance Credit Union Ltd, in Kilwinning. As well as supporting a diverse range of savers and borrowers, it has been involved in addressing the challenges that many people in our community face.

A survey of the Association of British Credit Unions Ltd's members in 2018 showed that most credit unions, unlike commercial lenders, do not have a minimum sum that they would lend to a member, and that a large majority—86 per cent—would consider lending to a member whose only income is derived from benefits.

The credit union sector is responsible, profitable and self-sustaining. However, there is a strong case for investment: growth in the sector is of great social and economic benefit. The commitments in the programme for government to a £10 million credit union investment fund, and to developing a national strategy, are much welcomed. I am glad that the motion states that the strategy will be co-produced with the sector. It is important to recognise that credit unions all have in common the fact that they are owned and controlled by members, and that the emphasis is on providing the best service to those members rather than to maximising profit. As the cabinet secretary said, there is diversity in the sector, and it is important that all voices are heard.

At our latest meeting, the cross-party group on credit unions discussed technology: investment in technology has real potential to assist. We know that high-cost credit is easily obtained on digital and mobile platforms, and that consumers expect to do their banking on their tablets and phones, so credit unions being able to reach potential members on their mobiles and tablets would be hugely beneficial. However, it is important to recognise the risks and challenges that need to be addressed in order to deliver that.

It seems to me that, with support and investment from the Government, ethical and appropriate solutions for all sizes of credit union could be found that would open up the benefits of credit unions to even more Scots.

I started my speech by welcoming the Government and Parliament's shared commitment to seeing the credit union sector grow and thrive. I look forward to working with all who want that.

15:05

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I will start by saying to Pauline McNeill that Christmas has started, because my daughters are designing their Christmas cards at school today. I will make sure that she gets copies of them so that Christmas comes at least to her office, if not to her house.

There is consensus among most members in the chamber this afternoon. That is absolutely positive. Sometimes, we think of consensual debates as being not as exciting as other ones, but there needs to be cross-party support to move forward on credit unions, so I welcome the cabinet secretary's recognition of that.

Others have mentioned the relevant statistics, so I will not repeat them. However, I say that we are doing well in Scotland, although there is still room for improvement.

The Scottish Government has a strategy, and the cabinet secretary has said that she will welcome the views from the sector and from political parties, so I will throw my three pennies' worth in this afternoon.

First, as a number of members have said, we need to do some succession planning. There is a danger that credit unions are seen as being for a certain generation—perhaps Liam McArthur falls into that age group—so we need to think about getting people who are younger than that involved, such as the cabinet secretary. *[Laughter.]* I am trying to win friends this afternoon, cabinet secretary.

Joking apart, I believe that we need to ensure that the news about credit unions gets into schools, universities and colleges. It is important that we plan for the future and that we ensure that there is expansion in membership among younger people.

Secondly, I want to pick up on a point that has been made by my colleague Michelle Ballantyne and others. There is a danger that credit unions are seen as being only for people of a certain type or a certain background. That perception still exists among many people. We need to see credit unions as being for everybody in society, regardless of whether people think of themselves as wealthy, middle class or less well-off. Credit unions will be able to grow and lend more money only if all types of individuals in our society get involved. There is work to be done on that by us all.

Finally, there are still people—particularly people who are disabled—who find it difficult to engage with credit unions. Work is being done on social media across party groups that could help in that regard, but we need to drill down to find out why so few disabled people are using credit unions.

I think that I have, in the past three minutes, been able to offend most people in the chamber. To those whom I have not offended, I apologise. *[Laughter.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thankfully, you did not offend me, Mr Balfour. That was a good idea.

15:08

Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): I start by thanking the cabinet secretary. She will recall that on the previous occasion in the chamber on which we celebrated the contribution that credit unions make to a fairer Scotland, I asked the Scottish Government to consider emulating the Welsh Government by enabling credit unions to access financial transactions in order to boost regulatory reserves.

I also raised the issue directly with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work on three occasions during the budget process: I am happy to record that I was urged to do so by my constituents who are members of West Lothian Credit Union, of which I am also a member.

Given the welcome announcement in the programme for government that there will be a dedicated credit union investment fund of £10 million, and the further detail that has been outlined by Ms Campbell today, I can see that she has been persuasive in her engagement with Mr Mackay. I am sure that members will take careful note of that in relation to future requests.

The briefing that ABCUL has circulated gives detail of Scottish Government support over the past 10 years or so. The £10 million investment that has been announced is the biggest vote of confidence in what the credit union sector has achieved—and will achieve—for the communities that it seeks to serve. Information from the Lloyds Banking Group's credit union development fund shows that, to date, the fund's investment of £5 million in capital reserves has had a fivefold leverage effect.

The purpose of the £10 million credit union investment fund is to provide loans to enable credit unions to strengthen their balance sheets and increase their digital and physical presence. That might sound like the dry language of accountants, but it gets to the heart of how we might best support credit unions to help more borrowers and savers, and of how we might strengthen the movement's capacity in the longer term.

We should not limit our ambition to there being more than 400,000 members of 90 credit unions in Scotland. We can and must do more. In particular, we must get the message across that credit unions are for everyone, irrespective of their income. As Ruth Maguire said, the ability to invest in technology enables provision of a better service to customers, and demonstrates that credit unions are not just ethical lenders with strong community

roots, but are trusted, safe and professional organisations.

In our most recent debate on credit unions, at the start of the year, I reflected that at a time when life was dominated by all things Brexit it was uplifting to have the opportunity to consider the practical commitments and contributions of the credit union movement. Today, that stands truer than ever.

I will never forget that on the day after the European Union referendum, when I was thoroughly depressed, I attended an event that West Lothian Credit Union had organised to celebrate the significant milestone of lending out £10 million to the West Lothian community. In its history of more than 20 years, West Lothian Credit Union has lent £13.6 million to the West Lothian community. It should be congratulated on that and on everything else that it has achieved. Nancy MacGillivray is a stalwart of West Lothian Credit Union. She was my local hero at the opening of Parliament in 2007, and she is still a local hero, as is everyone else who is involved in West Lothian Credit Union and the 90 credit unions in Scotland.

15:12

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I declare interests as a member of the Scottish Co-operative Party, as a Labour and Co-operative MSP and as a member of a credit union. The Scottish Labour Party and the Scottish Co-operative Party maintain a commitment to developing the role of credit unions and co-operatives, which they believe should be at the centre of community development and economic strategy.

As we have seen, it is easy to find warm words with which to support credit unions; we have all experienced their effectiveness in our communities. They are created and sustained by the vision and inspiration of volunteers, and their approach is in the sharpest contrast to the predatory practices of payday loan companies and shops that sell household goods at exorbitant prices—companies whose business model is actively to seek out the poorest and most vulnerable people in our communities. Credit unions have a powerful role in offering a different business model that works for everyone.

I recall that, when I was a Government minister a long time ago, a bit of research was done into credit union membership. It transpired, counterintuitively, that their members tended to be better-off people, with better incomes. Therefore, I ask the cabinet secretary to refresh the research, particularly in the light of what has been said about the junior savers model. If the model is working, do we know whether it is working in the

most vulnerable communities or is it working among families who perhaps are better informed about financial education?

We debated many of those issues in January this year; I would welcome an update, specifically on the practical things that the Scottish Government has done—as well as today's announcement—to promote and support the ABCUL Scottish charter “A Credit Union Nation”. What has been done to address concerns of credit unions that I have highlighted about the impact of inappropriate use of protected trust deeds? They impact on credit union business, while making sure that the insolvency practitioner is paid.

We recognise the power of credit unions and I welcome the £10 million credit union investment fund. We now need the details about making the change that we seek. How will the money be allocated? What is the timescale for spending the money and repaying loans? Is it a one-off commitment or a recurring part of the Government's budget?

Given the benefits that can be achieved by credit unions, which we all agree about, why is the funding in the form of a loan? I welcome what has been done, but were other models considered? We see the economic incentives that are given to the private sector to come into communities, so I wonder whether the Government would be prepared to consider the matter further. Will there be legislative or regulatory changes to support the investment? Will the Scottish Government consider means to exempt credit unions from business rates in order to ensure their greater visibility and to sustain town centres? Has the Government explored how credit unions might connect to Scottish welfare fund strategy? There could be a very good fit.

I emphasise that co-operative economic models offer huge opportunities for a stronger and fairer economy: I am sure that many members across the chamber agree. Such models are often not taught in our schools, colleges and universities, so it is important that we mainstream education about co-operative models for the economy in our education system, if the Scottish Government is willing to support that approach. The strength of the credit union and co-operative movements is that they bring together vision and the practical delivery of such ideas.

I thank the Scottish Government for what it is doing, and would be grateful if it could ensure that the practical ways in which its work is taken forward make the difference that we all seek for our communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Tom Mason, to be followed by Tom Arthur. [*Interruption.*] I beg your pardon—I got my Toms

muddled up. You can sit down, Mr Mason—it is my fault, not yours.

I call Mr Arthur, to be followed by Mr Mason.

15:17

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in an excellent debate that is full of ideas from all sides of the chamber. I thank the Government for the debate and compliment the cabinet secretary on the open and engaged way in which she presented the Scottish Government's motion. The commitment to work with the credit union sector and to co-produce the strategy is incredibly important.

I am honoured to have two outstanding credit unions in my constituency. Johnstone Credit Union celebrates its 40th anniversary this year; it was founded in 1979 and was one of the last credit unions to be established before the Credit Union Act 1979. It has more than 5,000 members on a Renfrewshire-wide common bond, serving not just Johnstone but the whole Renfrewshire community. It is an award-winning credit union, having received the Scottish Enterprise millennium award for community development and, in 2004, the Queen's award for voluntary service.

I also pay tribute to Pioneer Mutual Credit Union—formerly known as East Renfrewshire Credit Union—which was established in Barrhead in 1993. Its common bond enables access for 1.8 million people. I commend it for being a signatory to the women in finance charter, with a pledge

“to retain 50% of women in senior management positions”.

There have been many substantive speeches. As Pauline McNeill highlighted, this is not a “cuddly debate”, as consensual as it may be. At the credit union movement's heart is an ethos that has never been more relevant to our society and the contemporary challenges that we face—an ethos of individual responsibility and mutual assistance.

We all understand that the prevalence of cheap, easy and accessible credit led to the financial catastrophe of 2008. My generation and subsequent generations are growing up in the wake of that catastrophe and are having to face its consequences, which have also manifested themselves in the political arena. Such challenges might seem insurmountable, but I believe that the way to approach them is to start at the granular level, in each and every one of our local communities. The ethos of a member-owned institution that is designed to put the interests of its members—and not profit—first is relevant not just to the financial sector but to many other sectors across the country.

Time is limited—I have only a few seconds left—but before I close I want to welcome the exciting commitment to the £10 million investment fund that the cabinet secretary announced. I noted that some of that fund will be available for spending on information technology. It is important that we do all that we can to support our credit unions to keep pace with the latest innovations. I will give an example in relation to which there might be potential. There is now growing use of rounding-up apps on mobile telephones as a means of saving. I am curious to know whether such a process could be applied to the credit union movement to enable people to save more efficiently and with greater ease.

Unfortunately, lack of time prevents me from going any further, so I will close there.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Tom Mason. My apologies for calling you in error earlier, Mr Mason.

15:21

Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con): I am glad that there appears to be broad consensus on the benefits that credit unions can bring to people across the country in providing accessible finance at a much lower risk than using payday lenders. The additional £10 million that was announced in the programme for government is welcome, as are the plans for a new national strategy for the industry, and I look forward to seeing the implementation of the plans that the cabinet secretary has described today. Given that credit union membership has increased by 20,000 people in the past year alone, it is important that support for the sector is able to match the demand that is placed on it.

Exciting things are going on in the sector. Membership of credit unions in Scotland is steadily increasing and stands at more than 350,000 people. Unions hold assets of around £650 million and lend £362 million per annum, which is nearly a quarter of the total for the UK. Those are not just numbers on a page; they represent lifeline financial services for people who might not be able to get credit elsewhere.

However, we must not be complacent. Although there have been very welcome steps forward for credit unions, some areas require further attention to ensure that the industry can continue to improve. In a brief to members that it issued yesterday, the Association of British Credit Unions Ltd described how credit unions have to accumulate capital from their earnings, yet in order to increase those earnings they need to increase growth, which in turn requires increased amounts of capital. The point is that, without sufficient external investment, the industry could find itself in

a downward spiral in which it would be unable to provide for its customers.

The association also stated that most loans go to people in the bottom 10 per cent in the Scottish index of multiple deprivation. If we were able to broaden the base of people who go to credit unions, that would in turn provide for further investment. I hope that the £10 million announced by the Scottish Government, along with the significant work that is being done by the UK Government, will be enough to achieve that, but I urge ministers to keep a close eye on the issue.

Across Scotland, in communities such as my own, people must be made aware of the financial options that are available to them and the services that credit unions offer, so credit unions must be brought into the mainstream. It was good to see the Scottish Government establish a public information campaign last year to raise awareness. I am not sure whether the campaign was intended to be for a limited time, but it seems to have fallen by the wayside in recent months. I hope that in her closing speech the cabinet secretary will address whether the Government is considering making further efforts to inform the public about the value of credit unions.

The intrinsic value of credit unions is such that we should seek to promote their widespread use whenever possible. For those who might not be able to get bank loans or other more accessible options, they represent a far better source of finance than payday lenders, which apply punitive interest rates that run well into the thousands.

I welcome the investment that was promised in the programme for government and I will scrutinise its effect, as well as the new national strategy, in due course. Further work needs to be done to ensure that credit unions continue to be sustainable in the future. However, I am confident that we have the means and the will to make that happen.

15:25

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I am pleased to take part in this debate, as we can never highlight enough the importance of credit unions to our communities. More than 410,000 people are served by credit unions, but I am sure that the potential customer base is much higher than that. As others have said, it is really important that knowledge of the existence of credit unions is embedded in our schools and that saving is started in primary schools and continued in secondary schools.

In my research for the debate, I was interested to read that 6.9 per cent of the Scottish population are enrolled in a credit union compared with only 1.5 per cent in England and 2 per cent in Wales. I

think that that is a testament to the backing and promotion that credit unions get from the Scottish Government. Like Pauline McNeill, I looked enviously at the level of participation in Ireland, which is 70 per cent. We have a bit of a way to go.

In my opinion, banks and credit unions should be seen not as operating in competition with each other but as co-operating to offer a better service to customers, especially those in our poorer communities. That is happening with Lloyds Banking Group's credit union development fund. In 2014, Lloyds Banking Group launched a fund of £4 million over four years to help credit unions to strengthen their financial position and enable them to grow sustainably, build resilience and help many more people in the long term.

To date, the Lloyds Bank Foundation has supported credit unions with more than £6 million UK-wide. I am not sure how much of that support has come to Scotland but, as well as financial assistance, its support includes signposting customers to credit unions; sharing expertise, with a number of bank colleagues volunteering in credit unions; and the secondment of two full-time colleagues to work with the Department for Work and Pensions credit union expansion project.

In Scotland, the Scottish Government has match funded the Carnegie UK Trust's investment of £1 million in the affordable credit fund to allow individuals with low incomes and poor credit ratings to access finance.

That is all good news, as credit unions tend to be much less scary than banks. Their offices are usually in our communities and they are often run by people whom their customers know. It is also important that credit unions are embedded in the networks of support and financial advice in our communities, with signposting to other financial and budgeting advice and crisis services such as food banks, if necessary.

When we talk about credit unions in the Parliament, we tend to focus on the saving part, but it is important that those who save also consider borrowing from their credit union. As well as savers, credit unions need borrowers, because that is what keeps them in business—I think that Johann Lamont mentioned that. One reason why the North East Scotland Credit Union—the credit union in which I saved for many years—folded last year was that not enough borrowers with good credit ratings were borrowing from it. It was asset rich, but there was not enough lending business to keep it going.

There is much unanimity on the subject in the chamber and much support for the work that the Scottish Government is doing in the realm of credit unions, so more power to the cabinet secretary's elbow.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move on to the closing speeches. I call James Kelly to close for Labour. You have four minutes, Mr Kelly.

15:29

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): It has been a good and consensual debate. As a number of members have said, it is key that we take the central points from the debate that will help with the extension of credit unions.

I think that the cabinet secretary set the scene well when she described the benefits of credit unions and how important they are at a time when a lot of people feel financially vulnerable and could get pushed towards unsavoury products such as payday loans. Credit unions at the heart of communities are important as a stable alternative.

There has been a lot of discussion about participation and the fact that 410,000 people in Scotland are involved in credit unions, but what interested me was the point made by Maureen Watt, backed up by Pauline McNeill, that the participation level in credit unions in Ireland is 70 per cent. Clearly, that participation has built up historically and we cannot turn on the tap overnight. The recent improvement in participation in Scotland is welcome, but it shows that we have got so much more to do to improve our standing internationally. It is not about simply being at the same level as other countries, but about giving adequate protection to communities. Central to that idea is the need for a strategy, which, as Andy Wightman pointed out, needs action in order to move it forward. Other issues are also involved, including housing and, as Andy Wightman said, the use of a democratic financial model.

Along with ABCUL, the Co-operative Party has done a lot of excellent work to promote credit unions. More has to be done to promote not only credit unions, but co-op values, which should be central to a lot of the education in schools and colleges. Raising such awareness with young students and pupils could certainly do a lot to increase participation levels.

During the debate, some members have mooted the idea of giving school pupils accounts with a set-up amount. That has been done previously in Glasgow with £10 accounts—it is a good idea and one that would get people into the way of using credit union accounts. Aside from some of the comedy in his speech, Jeremy Balfour suggested that idea, which was one of the very good and serious points that he made.

A number of members pointed out that we need more support from employers, and that employers should use their resources to roll out the use of credit unions. Ruth Maguire and Pauline McNeill made some good points in that regard, and Ruth

Maguire was right to point out that it is worth the SPCB taking up that initiative.

With regard to the Scottish Government's £10 million fund, it would be useful to hear from the cabinet secretary specifically how it is going to be rolled out and used to set up loans.

Johann Lamont made an important point about supporting volunteers, who are crucial to the network that is behind many credit unions.

All the fine speeches were good, but the key point from the debate is that we need to take the nuts and bolts of credit unions and move them forward to increase participation levels, in order to give them more coverage in our communities.

15:33

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): As has been said, the debate has been very consensual, which is not always the case. We have heard from members across the chamber that a credit union is a not-for-profit, co-operative financial body that loans at low interest rates and offers saving services to people who would otherwise struggle to gain access to credit. The key elements are that it helps to build and improve credit ratings, that it provides financial education and that it helps to develop money management skills.

The words "ethical" and "affordable" were in a lot of members' speeches, including those of Ruth Maguire and Pauline McNeill. We all recognise that we need access to credit—I am sure that most of us, at some point or other, have approached our bank and asked for financial help. It is something that we take for granted. If we asked people on the street where they would go if they needed financial help, they might say the bank, or they might talk about approaching family. They might even talk about payday lenders or selling goods to free up some cash. However, surprisingly few of them would suggest using a credit union, and everyone in the chamber agrees that that must change.

Credit unions support people who are struggling with financial management or experiencing short-term hardship. I was not particularly aware of credit unions until I visited my local credit union, earlier in my time in this place. That credit union has been invaluable in helping me to help my constituents who come through the door. Several of my constituents have benefited from the intervention of a credit union. I particularly want to mention a young lad who is still in his 20s. Because of trauma in his early life, he ended up with drug addiction and in jail. To his eternal credit, he is out there, trying to take control of and take responsibility for his life by trying to make a home where he can bring his children to visit. Part of his solution fell within the credit union. These small

stories, which we all know, give us an idea of why it is so important that credit unions continue and flourish.

I welcome the Scottish Government's announcement of £10 million in new funding for credit unions. However, as Andy Wightman said, it is not just about strengthening the balance sheets; it is about looking at the digital and fiscal offer, to promote credit unions more widely. In Scotland, we have a high uptake of credit unions compared to most places in the United Kingdom, but Northern Ireland is showing us the way forward.

At a time when more banking services are moving out of town centres and going online, credit unions have the potential to step in and fill some of the gaps. Visibility and awareness are key to making credit unions successful and viable. They need people who are willing to save and are looking for loans, and they require people to know what credit unions are, where they are and how to use them. As has been said several times, lack of knowledge can drive people towards more unethical sources of money such as high-cost credit services and payday loans, which take advantage of people's need for support and can make them more sceptical of organisations such as credit unions because they assume that there has to be a catch. It is, therefore, imperative that we continue the development of credit unions.

Unsurprisingly, Johann Lamont spoke about the need for the Scottish Government to raise the profile of financial education in schools. Again, I welcome the Scottish Government's provision of financial support for the development of the junior saver scheme.

We must also recognise that both Governments are working on this. The United Kingdom Government is toughening up regulations on payday lenders, looking for further reforms in the high-cost credit market and cracking down on unlawful lending and loan sharks. It is also piloting interest-free loans and prize-linked savings schemes, to help credit unions.

There has been a lot of consensus in the chamber today, but we must make sure that there continues to be action. Credit unions are a vital component of Scotland's financial sector, and their continued expansion can bring real benefit across the country.

15:38

Aileen Campbell: As members who have spoken in the debate have said, this has been a thorough and good debate. I agree with Pauline McNeill that it should not be a cuddly debate, though I was pleased that Jeremy Balfour recognised the significant age difference between

me and Liam McArthur—I was quite happy about that.

There has been some good humour throughout the debate, but when parliamentarians agree fundamentally about the principles of something like credit unions and the good that they can do by promoting an ethical approach to finance, financial inclusion and saving in the community, it carves out a space in which we can all work together to capture thoughts, ideas, expertise and suggestions from parliamentarians from across the chamber about our future vision and ambition for credit unions in Scotland.

Furthermore, I agree that, although there is consensus, the debate has not been cuddly, because it has sought to tackle the extremely serious issues of financial inclusion, financial resilience and social inequality. Andy Wightman was correct to make a serious point about the democratisation of the financial landscape.

Through engagement with the credit union sector and from listening to what was said in the debate on credit unions that we had at the start of the year, I realised that there was a need to have a more coherent, sustained and strategic approach to growing credit unions. In their speeches, members identified significant themes that ought to form the basis of what should be examined in the strategy. Andy Wightman was right to point out that the strategy should not be developed in isolation but should display awareness of the bigger picture and that it will undoubtedly interact with other policy work.

With the economic impact of Brexit uppermost in our minds, ensuring people's financial resilience is ever more important. Using the findings of the Scottish household survey about who is saving and the link across to housing tenure will be vital in our work as we reimagine the housing sector in Scotland up to 2040.

Michelle Ballantyne and Andy Wightman provided a useful international context, enabling us to explore why there is stronger support for credit unions in other countries, and they talked about other models and approaches in other parts of the world.

Members were right to point to the fact that credit unions should not be viewed simply as banks for poor folk. That is an absolute myth that needs to be debunked, and we sought to do that in the campaign that we supported last year. Growing membership, unashamedly promoting the ethos of putting people before profit and rooting ourselves in our communities will give us a strong platform to expand the impact of credit unions. Jeremy Balfour, Liam McArthur and Michelle Ballantyne all made points about that.

I agree with Angela Constance, who said that our ambition should not be limited to being a bit better than the rest of the UK and congratulating ourselves on the 400,000-plus members of credit unions. We need to promote what credit unions do, what they contribute and how they help us to make good on our fairer Scotland ambitions and our desire to rebalance our economy in a sensible and far more ethical way.

Johann Lamont made a good point about research. I will certainly look into that, because a strategy must be based on solid information rather than assumptions. I will get back to her on the issues that she raised.

It was also useful to hear about Maureen Watt's experience of what happens when credit unions do not have enough members. A credit union in that position must pay the ultimate price and close.

I agree with the point that credit unions should be involved in the development of the strategy. The co-operative principles of credit unions must underpin the approach that we take. We must develop the strategy co-operatively and collaboratively alongside credit unions. When I met representatives of the sector in the summer, it was clear that they want to act together for the benefit of their sector. I reiterate what I said in my opening remarks and reflect the points that were made by Ruth Maguire and Tom McArthur—I am sorry; Tom Arthur and Liam McArthur—who, in speaking about credit unions in their areas, illustrated just how diverse the sector is and emphasised that we must not stymie or unintentionally quash that special element through having a national approach and a national strategy.

Pauline McNeill: On the issue of payroll deduction, I do not think that anyone has mentioned the fact that the national health service has a credit union. I do not know whether other public services also have credit unions. Is the Government in a position to encourage credit unions in the public sector, where we have some influence?

Aileen Campbell: I absolutely agree with the point that Pauline McNeill makes about encouraging credit unions in the public sector. The Scottish Government does that, and I know that the Parliament takes the matter seriously. The NHS Credit Union, which celebrated a significant anniversary last year, is important. There is lots of learning that we can do in this area, which is partly why I think we need a strategic approach. There are many good ideas, but they are scattered across different places. If we have a strategic focus, we will be able to make use of the wealth that is in our country for the betterment of credit unions. I will take on board Pauline McNeill's point.

Liam McArthur: I thank the cabinet secretary for being the first member to namecheck my youngest son, Tom McArthur. *[Laughter.]*

A number of members asked whether the corporate body could do more. With my SPCB hat on, I point out that many MSP staff and SPCB staff already pay into the capital credit unions that are advertised on payslips. However, if the Government or, indeed, members across the chamber think that we could do more to encourage the extension of that, I am happy to listen.

Aileen Campbell: That is why our approach needs to be about more than just working with the credit unions. As Andy Wightman pointed out, we need that broader approach and we need to work out how we can influence others so that they understand what they stand to gain if they work alongside credit unions.

Many members asked about the £10 million fund. There is limited detail that I can give at the moment. However, I pledge that we will keep Parliament updated on that, because the fund will provide a significant boost to credit unions. It will continue to grow their membership and increase the wellbeing of our communities and our most vulnerable people in financial and health terms. Alongside breaking down the barriers to responsible lending by improving balance sheets, we need to make sure that the strategy does not end up just doing more of the same. It needs to be innovative, so that the £10 million has an impact on our communities.

There has been a real plea from credit unions for us to understand their need for more support in IT and digital development, and I think that that will be a prominent theme in the work on the strategy. I also recognise that we need to take action alongside theorising about the strategy. Lots of members have talked about many different ideas, including payroll deduction, fair work practices, working with young people and working with colleges. We can use those different ideas to work out what short, medium and longer-term actions we can take to grow the credit union movement in a much more sustainable way.

I am pleased that there is consensus and a lot of good ideas on the issue. I will continue to work with members, with the cross-party group that Ruth Maguire spoke about and with the sector, because we all agree on the importance of credit unions and we all want to make the strategy a success. That is a strong platform, and I will work on it with members and with the Parliament.

Family Migration

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-18885, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the impact of the United Kingdom Government's family migration policy on Scotland.

15:47

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I welcome the opportunity to focus on an issue that affects families and communities across Scotland. Many members in the chamber will have had experience of intervening on behalf of constituents who face the prospect of family separation because of the UK Government's family immigration rules.

The UK Government's approach to migration is simply not working for Scotland. We face different challenges in relation to population, demography and rurality. Our population is ageing, our working age population is falling, and so is the proportion of the population that is children and young people. All our population growth is projected to come from inward migration. Last year, 14 of our local authorities experienced depopulation. Scotland needs people to come here, to bring their families and to build their lives here.

There is a practical case for change, but there is also a moral case. This goes to the heart of what type of country we want to be. Are we a welcoming country—a country that prioritises the needs of children and families—or are we a country that forces people to choose between living in their home country or with their loved ones?

It has been a busy few days for immigration. We have had a whole series of changes to immigration rules. There are 102 pages of changes, which tells us something about the complexity of the immigration system. The UK Government has announced proposals for a 3-year European temporary-leave-to-remain visa and it has made a welcome, if long overdue, announcement on the reinstatement of a post-study work visa.

The reinstatement of a post-study work visa is testament to the hard work over many years of elected members, universities, employers and partners across Scotland. Last week's announcement shows that, when there is a clear evidence base for change and when we work together and with partners, we can make a difference. We can secure change in the system, and we need that change.

Let me be clear: there is an evidence base for a change to family migration policy. Since 2012, the

UK Government has steadily eroded the family reunification rights of UK citizens by introducing a minimum income threshold of £18,600, which rises if there are children; extending the period before which migrant family members can apply for settlement; and restricting the rights of adult dependant relatives to join their families in the UK. That has got to a point where it is almost impossible to meet the requirements.

Since the implementation of the new rules, there has been a 41 per cent reduction in the number of visas granted to family members, from the peak in 2007. Those figures represent thousands of families across the UK being forced into separation and told by the UK Government to rely on emails, text messages and video calls to maintain their family life.

In 2015, the migration observatory published data showing that 58 per cent of people in Scotland did not meet the financial thresholds to bring a non-UK spouse and two children into the UK through the family migration route. The policy has a greater negative impact on women, young people and people living outside London. The Children's Commissioner for England has published research estimating that almost 15,000 children are growing up in so-called Skype families because their parents cannot live together in the UK as a result of family migration rules. The research report states:

"Thousands of children are being forced to grow up without a parent solely as a result of these Rules."

The UK's family migration policies are the direct legacy of a hostile environment policy that is underpinned by an irrational and unachievable target to reduce net migration to the tens of thousands. Under the policy, British and settled families in the UK have had their rights to be joined by family members severely restricted, which has forced many to choose between staying in the UK and being with their family. The exception to that has been free movement. People have moved across Europe, fallen in love, had children and established their lives, safe in the knowledge that, wherever they chose to put down roots, their free movement rights would allow them to return home with their families. However, the UK Government's determination to end free movement threatens that security. In a no-deal scenario, once free movement ends, UK families in the rest of Europe will be subject to the full weight of the UK Government's punitive approach to family migration, should they wish to return to the UK.

Those are the reasons why we are calling on the UK Government to take a different approach to family migration to improve the rights of people in Scotland to bring close family into the country with them. That kind of migration is crucial to

Scotland's future. I have talked about evidence, but there are real people behind each of the statistics—real families and real children. Take the case of Anthony Duffy and Julianna Colaianni, newlyweds from Edinburgh who were told by the Home Office that they did not earn enough to meet the minimum income threshold. They have been forced to live apart for almost their entire marriage, which simply cannot be right.

It is also not right that children who were born in Scotland or who spent their formative years here can be ordered to leave so easily. Denzel Darku spent his formative years in the UK. He was a Queen's baton relay holder for the Glasgow Commonwealth games and had been studying at the University of Stirling to become a nurse. Despite that, his application to stay was refused and he was told to leave the UK. Following high-profile media and ministerial interventions, he was rightly granted permanent residence.

The Habibimarands, an elderly couple from Edinburgh, have been in the UK on and off for 40 years with their four British children and 11 grandchildren. They acted as co-parents to one of their grandchildren to allow the boy's mother to continue her work as a national health service nurse. Despite that, they were ordered to leave the UK because they were not considered to be close family members.

Happily, following a campaign by the community, the Habibimarands were eventually allowed to stay. I welcome the fact that Home Office ministers change their minds on some cases, yet in each of those cases, the families and their communities, often supported by elected members, have had to fight every step of the way to change the decision. While some families have received good news, many other families face being torn apart. What we need is a broader discussion about whether the family migration rules are fit for purpose. That is why the Scottish Government will shortly commission the expert advisory group on migration and population to look more closely at the impact that current family migration rules have on families in Scotland, with particular regard to the impact on areas of devolved responsibility.

I call on colleagues across the chamber: let us speak clearly and seek to make a difference for families and communities across Scotland. We have demonstrated, when we identify that children need to have their family located with them and that rural and remote areas face depopulation, that there is a real evidence base that Scotland needs something different.

Let us also show that Scotland has a heart, and that we are a country that values families and children and does not tear families apart. Let us make the case for change, and for a fair, humane

and compassionate approach to family migration that allows families to build their lives in Scotland and make a positive contribution to our society and economy.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that the UK Government's family migration policies are considered to be some of the least family-friendly immigration policies in the developed world, according to research such as the *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2015*; further notes that the current rules are not fit for purpose and are leading to forced family separation in communities across Scotland; believes that Conservative administrations have steadily eroded the family reunification rights of UK citizens and that its proposals to end free movement of people will mean further detrimental impacts on the families of EU and UK citizens; notes that Scotland's distinct population needs mean that all of its future population growth is projected to come from migration, and calls on the UK Government to end its increasingly restrictive and arbitrary approach to family migration, scrap the minimum income threshold of £18,600, implement a fair and humane approach to family migration and allow families to build their lives in Scotland and make a positive contribution to society and the economy.

15:56

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to open for the Scottish Conservatives on the impact of the United Kingdom Government's family migration policy on Scotland.

Migration policy has always been a controversial topic. For some time, we in the Scottish Conservatives have sought assurances from the UK Government and ministers and have been putting pressure on them to listen to and act on our concerns and demands. Leaving the European Union presents the UK with a unique opportunity to develop and shape a new, fairer immigration system that can work for all parts of the UK. It is an opportunity that should be seized by us all. The UK Government has taken note of our concerns and a raft of migration policies have come out recently. We welcome those.

The UK Government has said that if the UK leaves the EU without a deal, freedom of movement will end. We want a deal and we should do all that we can to achieve a deal. Having said that, EU citizens' rights will be guaranteed, and they will be covered by a temporary leave to remain scheme until the full new immigration system goes live. That will ensure minimum disruption while we put the arrangements in place to chart a new course for immigration.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Alexander Stewart: Time is tight, and I would like to make some progress.

In anticipation of changes to migration policy following Brexit, the UK Government has commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee

to assess international points-based models. That is in preparation for the UK moving towards a points-based immigration system that will ensure that we continue to attract the best and the brightest from around the world.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Sorry to interrupt you, Mr Stewart. There is a little time in hand for interventions. It is entirely a matter for you, of course.

Alexander Stewart: A points-based system will mean that we can prioritise what people can contribute to Scotland and the UK, rather than prioritise where they come from. Indeed, it is exactly the same type of immigration system that the Scottish National Party proposed for an independent Scotland in its 2013 white paper on separation.

All too often in recent years, however, politicians have spent significant time and energy blaming Westminster and criticising the UK Government for its immigration policy. We in the Scottish Conservatives have been uncomfortable about that policy; we have challenged it and we continue to do so. Indeed, we should be looking to have a constructive dialogue about how we can deliver a better immigration policy that works for Scotland.

Fiona Hyslop: I appreciate the member's points. It has taken seven long years for the Tories to undo the damage that has been done. In the spirit of what Mr Stewart is saying, particularly in relation to the subject of this debate, which is family migration, will he join me and my colleague Ben Macpherson, as members of other parties have done, to work constructively to present a case on behalf of all of the Scottish Parliament and try to influence the changes that are about to take place to that immigration policy?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Stewart, you will get your time back.

Alexander Stewart: If we need to come together, I do not see any obstacles to achieving that. As the cabinet secretary pointed out, if we work together, we can achieve things. We have done that in the past, so I will be happy to have some dialogue.

When it comes to UK migration policy, the Scottish Conservatives have always done that. We have not always immediately agreed with our Westminster colleagues' approach, but we have made positive and proactive suggestions on what they can do and where we should be going. That approach has paid dividends.

We called for a scheme that would ensure that, after Brexit, our agricultural sector continues to have access to seasonal workers. The UK Government listened and, earlier this year, began

a pilot for 2,500 non-EU agricultural workers, which runs until December next year.

As we have discussed in the chamber, we have long campaigned for an enhanced post-study work visa to support the Scottish higher education and research sectors. I pay tribute to Liz Smith and Ruth Davidson for what they achieved in that area. I also pay tribute to the university and research sector, which has put forward a strong case. I am delighted that it has been recognised and that there has been a change in the way that we will go forward with that. Once again, the UK Government has listened and has just announced the re-introduction of a two-year post-study work visa.

That is the type of collaborative working between politicians in Westminster and in Holyrood that people in Scotland expect, and that is what they deserve. It is good when we talk and have that dialogue, because it can achieve more for us.

The same principle applies when it comes to debates about family migration. Under the current system, there are some restrictions on family members who wish to migrate to the UK from countries that are not in the European Economic Area. Partners of British citizens require a visa to come and live in the UK for six months or more. They must be able to demonstrate a certain level of proficiency in the English language and earn a minimum salary—that has already been talked about.

Family migration is a controversial and emotive issue. It is a normal and innate human desire for members of families to want to be close to one another. No one wants to see children forced to live thousands of miles away from their parents or for people to be unable to care for their elderly relatives. The current UK family migration rules admit primarily spouses and children. There are greater restrictions on elderly relatives who want to come here.

We all want to accommodate family migration as best we can. However, we need a family migration system that is fair for people from all countries, while ensuring that family members who migrate to the UK have appropriate opportunities.

As we said, since the decision was made to leave the European Union, we have had a great opportunity to create a fundamentally better immigration system for the whole of the United Kingdom. The Scottish Conservatives welcome the UK Government's plans to review the immigration system—including family migration—and we hope that all parties can work together constructively across the chamber and with the UK Government to find solutions that work better for individuals and for Scotland.

I move amendment S5M-18885.1, to leave out from “the UK Government's family migration policies” to end and insert:

“, in June 2019, the Home Secretary asked the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to review salary thresholds and to consider whether more flexibility was required; further notes that, in September, the Prime Minister announced plans for fast-track visas for scientists, two-year post-study visas for international students were also announced, and the Home Secretary asked the MAC for further evidence on flexibility in migration rules; believes that these actions amount to a fresh approach for UK migration policy; further believes this should be sustained into family migration; notes that net migration to Scotland remains positive, and believes that the Scottish Government has many other powers to attract families to Scotland, including tax, economic and education powers.”

16:03

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome this afternoon's debate on family migration policy.

As the cabinet secretary said, the announcement on the post-study work visa is welcome, and the cross-party effort in Scotland should be recognised. It is a small step in the right direction, but we need more. Scotland is facing serious demographic challenges and migration will play an important part in addressing our needs in healthcare, education and many industries.

In this debate, there are two issues to consider. First, we must consider how the current immigration system is damaging family migration, the inherent inequalities in its operation and its impact on people who want to make their homes in Scotland and across the UK. Secondly, we must consider what future migration policy will look like after the UK leaves the EU, and how a continuation of the current approach will damage our economy, society and culture.

Scottish Labour will support the Scottish Government motion.

Our 2015 manifesto committed to scrapping the minimum income threshold that was introduced by the Conservative-Liberal coalition in 2012. That sets an annual income threshold of £18,600 for the sponsoring partner, which rises to £22,400 if the partner being sponsored is bringing one child, and rises by a further £2,400 for each additional child. It places a barrier to family unification for those on lower and moderate incomes. It is applied equally to partners of non-EEA citizens who are either British citizens or non-British citizens with indefinite leave to remain. The policy discriminates against working people on lower incomes who are often doing work that is vital to our economy and our social fabric in jobs that are sometimes difficult to recruit to. The sharp increase in income required for the addition of

each child further discriminates against families and splits parents and children.

Although the UK Government's child policy was upheld by the Supreme Court, it was criticised for the lack of safeguards for the welfare of children. The Conservatives' obsession with reducing immigration, in the face of the evidence of its benefits, led it to treat family migration in the same way as any other migration, and to continue with a policy that puts family reunification beyond the means of too many people. Its approach must be changed if the UK is to uphold values of compassion and fairness.

A 2018 report by Oxfam and the Refugee Council found that three quarters of refugee families in the UK have been separated from relatives who are not eligible for family reunification under existing immigration rules. The UK Government adopts a restrictive approach to families, denying too many refugees—including children—the right to be reunited with their families. UK Government policy continues to break up families, and we need change that approach so that it recognises the right to family life and the need for vulnerable people, who are here legitimately, to have the support of their families.

We have seen a steady erosion of the family reunification rights of UK citizens. We now live in a global economy, and that impacts on the world of relationships, as well as that of industry. A process of checks and balances is needed when relationships require immigration rules, and it needs to be fair, transparent and reasonable. We have a responsibility to UK citizens to appreciate the way in which the world has changed, and to have an immigration system that reasonably supports their decisions.

It is very concerning that leaving the EU under the current proposals will mean that freedom of movement for EU citizens will be replaced by the current family migration policies. Families who currently live in the UK have access to the settled status scheme. In recent weeks, I met with the Perth EU citizens support service and I was at the launch of the Fife EU settlement scheme partnership. Both report a worrying low rate of applications at this stage. The uncertainty that surrounds the UK's relationship with the EU may be contributing, but we all need to help with efforts to make application as easy as possible and support families to stay together.

I recognise the conciliatory tone of the Tories' amendment, but they have only recently had to roll back from the declaration that freedom of movement would end abruptly in the case of no deal, and it is clear from the Brexit white paper that the intention is still to replace it with a restrictive immigration system. The white paper's focus on income and economic needs does not

recognise the human factor that is needed in an immigration system that can bring long-lasting benefits to a country.

People need the opportunity not only to work in the UK but to settle here, have a family, contribute to community life, bring diversity and enhance our society. Evidence shows that those who come as family migrants are more likely to settle in the UK long term than those who are here to study or work. Scotland's demographic challenge shows that we need more migrants who take that decision. We have a history—as does the rest of the UK—of containing settled communities that make significant contributions to our country.

The focus of today's debate is the need for urgent change to the UK Government's restrictive family migration policies, which are damaging to families and to our society and economy. We can send a strong message of the need for change not only for Scotland, but, as Labour's manifesto and policy agenda demonstrates, for the whole of the UK.

16:08

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I welcome the Government's motion on this issue. However, it is worded very diplomatically. It says that the UK has the

"least family friendly immigration policies in the developed world."

That does not fully capture the horror and callousness of the UK Government's immigration policies. They are not just the "least family friendly"—they are overtly hostile and racist.

Last week, my colleague Ross Greer highlighted a couple of individual cases and gave the example of the Home Office officials who were alleged to have lied to their European counterparts in order to illegally deport child trafficking victims. There are many other such examples.

We are all familiar with the examples from the Windrush generation. Paulette Wilson, a mother and grandmother, was detained by the Home Office and threatened with deportation to a country that she had left as a child 50 years previously. She was minutes away from deportation to Jamaica before she received a reprieve. Richard Stewart, a father, was told that he had overstayed and was denied a passport when he wanted to visit his mother's grave in Jamaica. He died before receiving an apology or any compensation from the UK Government. Sarah O'Connor, a mother, was denied benefits due to not having a passport and was unable to get a job. She ended up having to declare bankruptcy, and she also died before receiving an apology or compensation.

At least 83 members of the Windrush generation were deported. The Home Office has been unable to contact 42 of them. At least 11 have died since, but the full number might be higher. Countless other people have had their lives turned upside down as they have lost jobs, been denied welfare and become homeless because of the racism of the Home Office. In many cases, people have spent thousands of pounds and have been driven into poverty by challenging Home Office decisions. Compensation has been promised, but it has not been forthcoming.

It is not just the Windrush generation. The Home Office was so keen to detain one Nigerian woman that it even held her baby son in detention with her. More than 600 children under the age of 11 have been detained since the Government claimed, back in 2010, that it was committed to ending child detention.

The Home Office has proved time and again that there is no tactic too underhand for it. It used a child's medical records—comments that she had provided to a psychiatric nurse when she was suicidal—in an attempt to deport a family to Albania by claiming that they were lying about their asylum application. How many families have been thrown into turmoil because of the racism and incompetence of the Home Office? Those examples are the result of deliberate Government policy.

Some changes have been made following the Windrush revelations, but, for the most part, the policies remain. In fact, the Government continues to make the hostile environment even worse. It has now announced that it intends to end family reunification for child asylum seekers—known as the Dublin regulation—if it succeeds in taking the UK out of the EU without a deal.

We must remember that many of those stories originate from before 2015. It is not only about the current Conservative Government; when the policies were introduced, the Conservatives were aided and abetted by the Liberal Democrats. Prior to that, new Labour oversaw the detention of thousands of children for immigration purposes.

The scale of the problems are too great to solve with a few policy changes at the edges. It is not just that the policies are not working for Scotland. If a hostile environment did work for Scotland, it would still be wrong; it does not work for people. It is clear that racism is embedded in the Home Office. That organisation must be abolished if we are to achieve a migration system that is based on compassion and support.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): We move to the open debate. I call Joan McAlpine.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Excuse me, Presiding Officer, but I have a problem with my laptop.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Do you want to move to the next desk?

Joan McAlpine: It is not the desk; it is the laptop.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry—I misheard you.

In that case, I call Fulton MacGregor.

16:14

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): It is no exaggeration to say that the UK's family migration policy is one of the least family-friendly immigration policies in the developed world. The 2015 migrant integration policy index stated that the UK had

“One of the most restrictive and expensive paths to settle permanently and become UK citizens”.

As Patrick Harvie said, we should remember that that research was compiled before the Brexit vote occurred. Given the rhetoric that we hear on leaving the EU, I cannot imagine the policies becoming any more open in the foreseeable future.

Just last year, we saw the UK Government's appalling treatment of the Windrush generation. That is not the type of policy that we should wish to have in Scotland.

Perhaps the UK Government's approach can be best understood from Theresa May's 2013 statement. She said:

“we can deport first and hear appeals later ... There are some who seem to think that the right to family life should always take precedence over public interest in immigration control”.—[*Official Report, House of Commons, 22 October 2013; Vol 569, c 158.*]

I wonder if the Tory members who are here would care to say in their speeches whether they agree with that.

Scotland needs people to come and settle here. Migration has been a major driver for our economy. Scottish people are living longer and having fewer children. That has created a gap in our workforce, which has been supplemented by those who come from overseas and make Scotland their home.

Those who come to Scotland to live and work contribute by growing our economy and contributing taxes for our public services. Scotland relies on migration for population growth more than any other part of the UK. That applies to both EEA and non-EEA people. Therefore, I hope that all members across the chamber tonight will vote

for the Scottish Government motion and support the calls to scrap the minimum income threshold of £18,600 and implement a fair and humane approach to family migration.

On EU citizens specifically, we are still in the dark about what rights EU citizens will have post-Brexit. The Home Secretary's remarks last month showed that the UK Government wants to end freedom of movement as soon as possible. Any restriction on freedom of movement will be severely detrimental to Scotland's economy. As has been said, Scottish Government analysis shows that, on average, each additional EU citizen working in Scotland adds more than £10,000 to Government revenue and more than £34,000 to gross domestic product annually.

I will take a moment to mention briefly some local examples of how the UK Government's migration policies are affecting people in real life. Colleagues may remember the situation involving Derek and Volha Merry from Coatbridge that I raised in the chamber last year. Mrs Merry is from Belarus and works as a translator. The family has a daughter who was born in Scotland. Despite that, Mrs Merry received quite a hostile message from the Home Office telling her that she had no right to work or study here and that she had seven days to leave the UK. She was given seven days to leave her husband and young daughter.

I wrote to the Home Office and the Prime Minister. Our Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs did likewise. Ultimately, the Home Office relented, but only after the case received significant media attention. Not everybody will get such attention. If the Merrys had not contacted their local representatives, the UK family migration policy would have split up their family. That is not acceptable. I spoke to Mr Merry a few days ago and, every day, the family still lives with uncertainty over their status. That is not acceptable either.

I will give another example. Just a few weeks ago, some constituents came to me after having received a response from the UK Government about a visitor of theirs who was here on a short-term visa to celebrate a significant christening. They reported that they were sent a standard letter that did not even match up with the information provided and did not ask for any further information. I wrote to UK Visas and Immigration, and I am grateful that diligent and hard-working staff there noted the discrepancy, sought the required information and, ultimately, had the decision reversed.

This is where I disagree a wee bit with Patrick Harvie, but I do not disagree with the main point of his argument. That case demonstrates that the fault lies with the policies and not the staff at the Home Office and other departments. Immigration

policies across the board need to be changed and made more flexible in taking into account individual circumstances.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Fulton MacGregor: I will close on that point, Presiding Officer.

16:18

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I, again, emphasise what I said during last week's immigration debate: Scotland and the wider UK owe a great deal to migration.

Historically, this country has been one of openness and tolerance, with a global outlook. That is as true now as it has ever been. In international terms, the UK has a high level of immigration in relation to its population size. That is testament not only to our immigration system but to the popularity of the UK as a destination

People want to come to this country, and we all benefit from that. However, it is also the responsibility of the UK Government to administer a fair, rules-based immigration system that recognises the needs of our communities and takes account of the areas of our economy where immigration can be of most benefit.

As members know, the UK Government is working towards the creation of a new immigration system. That will reflect a new approach after the end of the EU's free movement rules, when the UK's immigration policy will be set wholly by the United Kingdom.

Quite rightly, there is a wide process of consultation taking place at the moment. During last week's debate, I emphasised the importance of passing a withdrawal agreement that will give the country the best opportunity to prepare our future migration policy and will avoid a no-deal Brexit. The same point applies here. Equally, I would hope that this is a process with which the Scottish Government is fully engaged. I do not expect the UK Government and the Scottish Government to agree on every point, but that consultation is an important exercise that will inform the creation of a system that reflects the needs of the whole of the UK.

As Alexander Stewart highlighted, just last week, the Home Office announced the new graduate route, which will make new arrangements for post-study work. That follows several years where the parties in this chamber have been in agreement that post-study work is an area that needs attention and that a new route should be created. After much scrabbling around to find some reason to criticise the announcement, the SNP finally settled on calling it a "screeching

Tory U-turn”, ignoring the fact that, for years, the Scottish Conservatives have been advocating for a post-study work scheme to be renewed. In short, the views of the parties, of universities and academic institutions and of business and employers were heard.

We can also point to the issues arising with seasonal agricultural work. My colleague Kirstene Hair, as MP for Angus, represents a constituency that is particularly famed for its soft fruit production. Again, we have seen a positive response from the UK Government to these needs, with progress made on creating a seasonal agricultural workers scheme.

Fiona Hyslop: The seasonal agricultural work pilot is tiny compared with the needs of the sector. On a related point, if we focus on the issue of the brightest and best graduates, we ignore the main issue, which is that Scotland needs families. If people come individually for temporary agricultural work, they will not bring their families with them. Will Jamie Halcro Johnston work with us to ensure that we attract families to come and stay in Scotland, so that we can tackle the depopulation that is taking place in 14 of our local authority areas?

Jamie Halcro Johnston: As Alexander Stewart said, we will work with the Scottish Government in areas where we agree on action that will be of benefit to Scotland. However, I am trying to highlight the fact that working with the UK Government and engaging in consultation with it has seen results. It would be good if we saw that approach taken more widely across the chamber.

The Minister for Europe, Migration and International Development (Ben Macpherson): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Halcro Johnston is just closing.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Today, the Scottish Government has raised the minimum income threshold for dependent family members who are seeking to come to the UK. In this case, there is a clear balance between migrants’ perfectly reasonable wish to bring family members and partners to live with them in the UK and Government’s responsibility to wider society. Quite legitimately, those who come to the UK do not always have recourse to public funds. In circumstances such as that, it is clear that a family member must be able to provide adequately for that person. We know that, under the current scheme, there are circumstances where different considerations apply—exceptional circumstances, such as situations where the right to a private and family life under the European convention on human rights is triggered.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: There is a legitimate debate about how to apply minimum income requirements for the families of migrants who move here to work. However, we should be aware of the additional hurdles that a differentiated system creates, not only for Government but for migrants themselves, who receive additional restrictions.

I hope that the Scottish Government and my colleagues around the chamber will play a full part in the current process as we move towards a new immigration system that better fits our needs.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are running out of time, so I will have to cut the final speeches short; I will let those speakers know shortly by how much. At this point, I will have to cut people off at four minutes.

16:23

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I want to focus my remarks on refugees, who are the most vulnerable group of people who are affected by the rules that we are discussing. Among refugees, the most vulnerable group is that of unaccompanied children. The Amnesty briefing for today’s debate says:

“Children who are in the UK alone and who have refugee status have no right to be reunited with even their closest family members. Because of this rule, children living in safety in the UK live without their family for perpetuity.”

The Home Affairs Select Committee has criticised that rule and has used the word “perverse” to describe the situation in which children who have been granted refugee status in the UK are not then allowed to bring their close family to join them.

I want to put that cruelty into some kind of historical context. It is 80 years since the last Kindertransport brought Jewish children from Nazi Germany to the safety of the UK, in 1939. The rescue programme began after Kristallnacht, in the previous year, when Jewish homes and communities were terrorised by Nazi thugs. Kindertransport transported 10,000 unaccompanied children to safety and has historically been portrayed as a humanitarian gesture, but aspects of the policy were heartless. Parents were not allowed to accompany their children, who were fostered out to complete strangers. Of course, many children never saw their parents again, because, having been unable to follow their children to safety, they died in the extermination camps.

Great Britain and other countries knew that the situation for Jewish people under the Nazis was

intolerable but still restricted immigration. After the 1938 Évian conference, the UK, France and the United States left without committing to change their restrictive immigration policies. The approach was relaxed, with Kindertransport, but it was made clear that the policy would apply only to children under 17 and that parents and older children would not be included.

When we look back today at Kindertransport, that rule seems barbaric to us. We might be forgiven for thinking that such things would never happen today and that we would take a more humanitarian approach. However, as we have heard, that is not the case. Today's rules are not so very different from the rules that applied to the Kindertransport families all those years ago.

Amnesty has pointed out the deep unfairness in our treatment of the children of refugee parents who get asylum status in this country. Under family immigration rules, parents are allowed to bring children with them only if the children are under 18. That seems terribly uncaring as well as unrealistic. A 19-year-old is officially an adult, but as anyone who has grown-up children knows, young people up to the age of 25 or 26 still require a great deal of support.

Indeed, this Parliament has recognised that. We passed the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which recognised the right of care-experienced young people to have support up to the age of 26. I was proud to be a member of the committee that put that provision in place. Little persuasion was needed, however, because we all know that parents support their children well into adulthood. We help them with accommodation and we support them through relationship break-ups, job losses, exam pressures and all the other challenges that life throws at them. If children from privileged backgrounds need that continuing parental support, how much more do the most vulnerable young people require it, whether they are care experienced, refugees who are fleeing from persecution or migrants who are split up from their families because of the rules?

The rules do not apply only to refugees. It is reckoned that around 15,000 children in the UK are living without a parent because of the migration system—a system that we are now planning to extend to EU citizens.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Joan McAlpine: I agree with the wider points about Scotland's need for migrants. I wanted to concentrate on the humanitarian aspects of a system that is completely unacceptable.

16:28

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Immigration and asylum policy is one of the hardest policy areas. Who would want to be the minister who has to make those decisions?

Over the past few years, most of us have witnessed the scenes of children trying to reach Europe and Britain, often fleeing conflict and war in which we ourselves have been involved. The most notable example was Alan Kurdi, the child who was washed up on a beach. The image of poor Alan's body lying on the beach perhaps changed public opinion and showed people the human reality of how decisions affect children across the world.

According to Oxfam, three quarters of refugee families in the UK have been separated from relatives because they are not eligible for family reunification under existing immigration rules. The children of people who are eligible to remain are sometimes deported because they are not eligible to remain, despite having lived in the country for years. The fact that a child can live here with their family only to be deported when they turn 18 is one of the issues that most breaks my heart. What is the sense in deporting a young person, when their family is here?

I made friends with a Syrian family who arrived here on the resettlement project. Some years ago, they approached me to tell me about their sister who had been left behind because she was not selected to join the family. We see how hard it is for families; they will probably never see their sister again unless they can finally get to the end of the conflict of the Syrian war.

Most notably, it was Lord Alf Dubs, who was himself a refugee, who said that we cannot allow the far right to exploit refugee and migration issues here. We must take time to show the human aspects of family separation and get the public behind a kinder policy. The UK arbitrarily capped the number of lone children to 480, which has been a harmful policy. Children were living in appalling conditions in northern France—I saw that for myself when I visited the Calais jungle—and the Greek islands, with no family to care for them. Alf Dubs said that there should probably be a Europe-wide project, with the UK being part of a wider humanitarian policy; we should certainly do that with our European neighbours.

That hostile background to immigration and asylum seeking leads us to where we are, which is a crazy and unhelpful approach to European citizens who have witnessed that. Now, under the Brexit policy, the lack of confirmation and lack of giving those citizens confidence about letting them live here with their families is nothing short of shocking. Priti Patel, the new Home Secretary,

announced that freedom of movement will end on 31 October. All that she is interested in is being able to say that it will end, regardless of whether or not it is sensible in any aspect. Furthermore, there are reports that she wants to toughen the Home Office stance on immigration by using secondary legislation, where again there is not likely to be any scrutiny.

I support whole-heartedly what Fiona Hyslop said today about the need for a policy for Scotland that recognises that we have a decline in our population. Apart from the values that we hold about immigration, there is a necessity for a policy that would allow us to address that. If the devolved Parliament is truly a partner with the United Kingdom, there must be more movement by the UK Government to recognise that Scotland's economy will be harmed if it does not allow a flexible immigration policy to identify the industry sectors in which we need more workers. There are solutions to the issue, which Claire Baker has spoken about many times in the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Pauline McNeill: I whole-heartedly support that flexibility and I hope that it will happen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that I will have to cut the last two speakers to three and a half minutes each—that is Mr Greene and Mr Kidd.

16:32

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the debate on the need for this Parliament to highlight why the current UK system of migration is failing communities across Scotland. When we talk about migration, we are talking about people who choose to come to Scotland—like my husband, who is a new Scot, originally from the USA. He, like others, chose to come here to live and work and to contribute to our proud, diverse society.

I will focus my contribution on two main points: first, the need for a different approach to migration in Scotland, and secondly, the lessons to be learned from the current out-of-touch UK system.

Scotland faces different challenges in relation to population, demography and rurality from the rest of the UK. The figure of 2,500 seasonal agricultural workers for the whole of the UK is not enough; Scotland's share has been allocated as 650, which would not pick the berries in Mairi Gougeon's constituency.

Population growth has been the main driver of economic growth in Scotland and the UK in recent years, which shows that the best way to boost our economy is through investing in people and

attracting people here. Our population is growing older with a rise in the number of people retiring, and our working-age population is reducing. The Scottish Government's analysis shows that, on average, each additional citizen from the EU working in Scotland adds more than £10,000 to Government revenue and more than £34,000 to gross domestic product each year.

Instead of welcoming people to the country, the UK Government puts barriers and hurdles in the way. I point to the regulations on family reunification, which mean that the families and partners of people who are already here find it harder to come to work and live with them. Information from the migration observatory at the University of Oxford shows that family reunification has decreased by 30 per cent under the current Conservative Government. The system is broken and it must be fixed.

My office has had several constituents come for help with immigration issues. Although members of the UK Parliament should be picking up cases that involve the exercise of reserved powers, local residents have contacted me directly because they have had slow responses—or no response at all—from their constituency Conservative MPs. I will give one local example. The Sbita family—a mum and dad from Tunisia and their four children, three of whom were born in Scotland—have made their home in Scotland for more than seven years. They faced imminent deportation to Tunisia simply because they could not afford to pay the fee of almost £8,000 for processing their family visa application. While a Home Office decision was being appealed, the family were not allowed to work, earn or even seek welfare support. The Sbitas relied on the generosity of a local charity named Massive Outpouring of Love—MOOL—and on the help of their mosque and their neighbours. Thankfully, with help from the First Minister and the Minister for Europe, Migration and International Development, I was able to help to overturn the Home Office decision and the family have since been granted leave to remain. However, for hundreds of other families across the UK, that is not the case.

The UK Government's current family migration policy is considered to be one of the least family friendly in the developed world. The proposed minimum salary threshold of £18,600 is prohibitive and does not take account of salary levels in many sectors across the country, such as healthcare, catering and hospitality.

In concluding, I again put on record my thanks to the Scottish Government. I join others in supporting the cabinet secretary in all that she does to press for powers on migration and immigration to be devolved to this place.

16:36

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Having listened to the debate, I want to begin my contribution by telling the 30,000 civil servants who work for the Home Office that not all of us think that they are racist. To insist that that is the case—

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Greene: No. Please let me make my point.

Clare Adamson: That is a complete distortion—

Jamie Greene: Please let me make my point. Mr Harvie said four times that the Home Office is racist, which I think is an inappropriate way to speak about civil servants.

Patrick Harvie rose—

Jamie Greene: Mr Harvie has already had his opportunity to speak; I have only three minutes to do so.

In the limited time that I have, I also say in reference to another speech that we heard, that we should, as a country, be proud of every life—British and Scottish—that was laid down during the second world war, to fight for children who were escaping the hell of Nazi Germany. Many of those who fought for freedom were our ancestors, so in the debate we should not minimise the role that they played in that event. The hyperbolic attitude of some members differs from the very genuine comments that I heard at the outset of the debate from the cabinet secretary, who made some very valid points in relation to the motion.

In previous debates, Scottish Conservative members have been very clear about whether—or not—they have agreed with proposals that have come out of Whitehall. In many cases, we have agreed with SNP members and we have had discussions on areas of commonality. The needs of Scotland—

Emma Harper: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Greene: I am sorry, but I really do not have time. I wish that I did, in which case I would take the intervention.

There is commonality among us on immigration, which we should pursue through cross-party discussions. It is a very sensitive issue on which there needs to be dialogue that is a little bit more respectful. Such dialogue should happen not just among members here, but between Governments and between them and the industries that we seek to serve.

There is a myth that, in Scotland, attitudes to immigration are somehow hugely different to those

in the rest of the UK. We know that they are not—as poll after poll and survey after survey has shown us. Indeed, I was surprised to read in a recent survey that about half of Scots feel that immigration levels are too high. I do not necessarily agree with that view, but it was an interesting piece of analysis to have come out of that survey. In fact, according to numerous surveys, Scotland is the only part of the UK in which, in some communities, attitudes to immigration seem to have stiffened since 2016.

We should be mindful that, outside the political bubble, there are clearly reservations about the sort of free movement that is advocated by the Government in its motion, and by its members on the front benches, in debates such as this.

We know that we have a deficit of skills and an issue with our working-age population, but despite 40 years of free movement in Europe, our immigration rates fall well below those of the rest of the UK. Immigration policy is not simply about setting rules or entry criteria. We need to have a joined-up and adult discussion about how we nurture talent, retain skills and educate people, so that we have the talents that we need and do not lose people to south of the border or elsewhere.

If the Government is serious about influencing reserved policy on the subject, and if the tone is genuine and respectful, I guarantee that we Conservative members will have a constructive and serious conversation about it. However, I do not think that the motion does justice to the ministers on the front bench. We can all do better than that.

16:40

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Here in the Scottish Parliament, we recognise the benefits of migration to our nation. People who move to Scotland to work or study find new friends, new homes and a new way of life. They contribute in many ways to our nation, and they make it vibrantly diverse.

Migration is not just about visa applications and bureaucratic process: it is deeply personal, and it shows a pioneering and adventurous approach to life. Migration is made up of many people who love Scotland and want to call it home. It is important that we recognise that personal aspect, when we discuss the topic.

It is in Parliament's interest to work towards incentivising inward migration. Scotland has unique demographic circumstances. From the 1960s until the turn of the millennium, there was an almost constant drop in population. That was in contrast with the position in the rest of the UK, which saw almost constant growth over the same period, so there are differences that need to be

addressed. That demographic polarisation necessitates a tailored solution to encourage migration into Scotland.

Our story now is one of population and economic growth, as positive benefits of migration. However, that is under threat from the impending loss of freedom of movement and from the hostile environment that is now faced by people who want to make Scotland their home. The context of Brexit compounds our need for tailored migration policy. Devolution of some migration powers to our Scottish Government ministers and this Parliament, or collaboration with the UK Government on specific regional visas, would facilitate policy that has the capacity to be responsive to Scotland's acute needs.

Projections from National Records of Scotland and the Office for National Statistics show that natural change—that is, the number of births minus the number of deaths—is projected to be negative in Scotland for all of the next 25 years.

The topic should not be divisive. Scotland needs an approach to migration that makes it possible for people to live here on normal salaries with their spouses and children by their sides. It is in our collective interest to create a welcoming environment and visa process—one that is notably different from the current system. To do so, we need to recognise the current system's difficulties. In that way, we can identify how to make it easier for people to live, work and make a home for themselves here in Scotland. I had a lot of really good stuff to say on that, but I cannot say it because I do not have time.

If we have an opportunity to tailor a Scottish visa system, I urge ministers to engage on that issue. By doing so, we can allow families to stay together and to call Scotland their home.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Kidd. Your brevity is appreciated.

We move to closing speeches. Everyone who has spoken in the debate should be back in the chamber. I call Alex Rowley: you have four minutes.

16:43

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): In general, this has been a well-meaning debate. Members seem to agree on the key proposition in the motion, which is that UK policy is failing families of refugees and families who have come here as economic migrants. If that principle is accepted, there must, I would have thought, be some room for us to work together.

I note that the motion says:

“Scotland's distinct population needs mean that all of its future population growth is projected to come from migration”.

It is also true to say that the current immigration policies are failing Scotland.

I note that the cabinet secretary talked about the “moral case”, which undoubtedly exists, but she also talked about Scotland being a welcoming place. However, I take Jamie Greene's point about social attitudes in Scotland. All of us have a responsibility in that respect, and we have work to do to project and talk publicly about the benefits of immigration and the need for economic immigration to Scotland, such that a person could knock on a door anywhere in Scotland and that point would be made to them.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I accept Alex Rowley's point that some individuals in Scotland might hold views that are not much different to views that are held in other parts of the UK, but does he accept that Government and the main political parties in Scotland have shown a completely different view of immigration from that which those in England have shown?

Alex Rowley: Yes—but the point that I am trying to make is that we need to make a positive case in order for more people to come to live here. The cabinet secretary made the point that when families come here, it is more likely that they will put down their roots and stay here, so I think that we are in agreement in that regard.

I have no problem agreeing that the current Westminster Government policy is not serving the needs of the people of Scotland—but, let us be honest: the belief that immigration is a major problem exists partly because politicians have failed to tackle the issue and make the case for it. If we knock on somebody's door and they tell us that immigration is a problem, we find, when they go through the issues, that in fact their concerns are about lack of housing and queues for the NHS, for example, and not immigration. If we can start to make the case for immigration, we will, I hope, build support across Scotland. People will then come here and have a good experience and see the friendly attitude that we all like to think Scotland has. All I am saying is that we should not be complacent about that.

We need to be open to examining what alternative immigration policies could be introduced and how we can work together, so I hope, based on Alexander Stewart's positive contribution, that the Tory party is willing to have that discussion. It should not be beyond us to find an immigration policy that is right for Scotland, and it should not create a constitutional crisis. Let us work together with the Government to find a way forward.

16:47

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): It is clear that this has been a spirited debate. I will keep my remarks brief, given the limited time that is available.

When we discuss immigration, we should all remember the people who are at the centre of the debate. That point was rightly acknowledged by the cabinet secretary. It is easy to get caught up in the sheer politics of the issue, but away from some of what has been spoken about in the chamber today, however passionately, it remains the case that we are talking about the fate of real people—their lives, their stories and, most important, their futures.

I state clearly that the Scottish Conservatives believe that immigration is hugely invigorating and positive for Scotland. It is good for our economy, with people coming and using their talents for the country's benefit. It is good for society, as it makes us more diverse and outward looking. It is also good for our culture, as it allows us to explore new ideas and enhance our own traditions. However, it is also important that immigration is managed and that the rules that are put in place are adhered to and applied fairly and equitably.

Although the Home Office makes mistakes, it is right that we have in place an appeals process that is simple to navigate and can provide redress where appropriate. In my past life as a lawyer, I acted for asylum seekers in the tribunal in Glasgow, and I have seen at first hand the challenges that are presented to those who are victims of the immigration system. I understand the worry that many people feel when a loved one is caught up in that system and I acknowledge the cases that have been referred to. However, we have to apply the rules equally and, in fairness to everyone, we should not promote a situation in which there is one rule for some and another rule for others.

In my view, it would be wrong to suggest that the UK Government has not reformed our immigration system for the better, with a marked and positive change in approach most recently. Alexander Stewart and others have mentioned some of the points that I am about to make, but they bear repeating.

For example, I strongly welcome the announcement of the reintroduction of the two-year post-study work visa, which will allow international graduates in any subject to be able to stay in the UK for two years to find work. We have long campaigned for that, with Liz Smith and Ruth Davidson advocating some kind of post-study visa system in the past. Universities UK said that it

“will put us back where we belong as a first choice study destination. Not only will a wide range of employers now

benefit from access to talented graduates from around the world, these students hold lifelong links with the UK”.

I should also touch briefly on the proposed £30,000 minimum threshold for highly skilled migrants seeking five-year visas. Many of us think that the proposal—and it is only a proposal—deserves reconsideration. I am pleased to note that, in June, the then Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, asked the Migration Advisory Committee to review the salary thresholds and to consider whether more flexibility was required. Pauline McNeill spoke about flexibility, and that is an example of the UK Government considering whether there should be more.

Conservative members do not support the devolution of immigration or a differentiated immigration system for Scotland, given the detrimental impact that that would have on the many business organisations that rely on there being a UK-wide system. We support a pan-UK immigration system that works for Scotland and addresses Scotland's needs, and leaving the EU presents a unique opportunity to develop a responsive migration system that does just that.

The UK Government has just announced it that will move to a points-based system to attract migrants. It is worth reminding members that the SNP demanded that in its 2013 white paper on independence, which said:

“We plan a controlled points-based system to support the migration of skilled workers for the benefit of Scotland's economy”.

I look forward to the SNP supporting the UK Government in that regard.

I reiterate my earlier remarks that Parliament has a duty to debate migration in a frank and honest manner. I believe that there is more consensus around the subject than today's debate might have shown. It is right that the UK Government is now reforming aspects of our immigration system to encourage people with skills to work and live here, and to make it easier for those who study in the UK to remain in the UK and use their talents here.

Without doubt, the mood and tone of the UK Government's approach are changing and we strongly believe that its actions amount to a fresh approach that should be sustained into issues around family migration. That would allow us all to work together and have a sensible and reasoned discussion about how we can improve family migration policy in a way that works for Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Fiona Hyslop to wind up the debate. Seven minutes will take us to decision time, cabinet secretary.

16:52

Fiona Hyslop: This debate is important and I thank colleagues for their contributions. The threat of the UK leaving the EU and the resulting end of free movement has thrown into sharp relief the deficiencies in the existing UK domestic migration system that results in the enforced separation of many families across the UK.

It is clear from members across the chamber that everybody agrees that there needs to be change. There is agreement that there needs to be a fair, humane and managed family migration system. We need to change to having such a system; now, more than ever, it is urgent that the system should change positively to meet Scotland's needs.

The debate has been quite broad—it went beyond family migration, but that is understandable. In Scotland, there is a practical case for changing family migration policy. Figures that were released by the National Records of Scotland on 11 September show that the birth rate in Scotland continues to fall. The number of births registered in the second quarter of 2019 was 5.4 per cent lower than in the same period in 2018 and is the lowest number of quarter 2 births since civil registration began in 1855.

Scotland needs people to come and build their lives here. Evidence shows that the ability to bring family members to Scotland is an important factor when we are encouraging migrants to stay for the long term, and not just for temporary or seasonal work, however vital that is. We need people who can stay here to support our economy, our public services and our communities. We can no longer afford to accept the existing punitive rules when we need families to come here. As Fulton MacGregor reminded us, each migrant contributes £10,000 to the economy.

We know that there are concerns about the UK Government's changes, but we do not know the status of those changes. If there is to be an opportunity for change in the UK's immigration system and

“a radical rewriting of our immigration system”—[*Official Report, House of Commons, 25 July 2019; Vol 663, c 1460.*]

as the Prime Minister has suggested, let this Parliament say clearly that improving the rules on family migration must be part of that rewriting.

The Conservatives have asked us to work with the rest of the UK. We do that—we have consistently engaged with the UK Government on a variety of issues. I even remember speaking to Damian Green, when he was at the Home Office, about some of these issues. However, we need to know what the status of the UK Government's immigration white paper is. Do the Scottish

Conservatives agree with that white paper or is it a dead duck that they expect to be scrapped? Do they agree with us that the white paper, in its current form, should be scrapped?

It is vital that the Scottish Government and this Parliament are fully involved in the development of the UK Government's proposals. The debates and discussions that we have must be open, frank and inclusive if we are to ensure that any new system truly works for Scotland and in the interests of Scottish families. If we as a Parliament can come together to shape family migration policy, it will be all the stronger if we do so collectively and on a cross-party basis.

The proposal to end freedom of movement means that people who in good faith have built their lives across Europe face having to navigate the barriers of the domestic migration system if they want to bring non-UK family members to Scotland. In countries across the world, there are people who were born and brought up in Scotland who would love to return here to bring back their expertise and experience, but the family migration rules mean that they cannot bring their spouse and their children with them to live in Scotland. That cannot be right.

Jamie Halcro Johnston made the point that it is legitimate that migrants seek to bring family members into the UK. However, in many cases, it is UK citizens, not migrants, who are prevented from bringing in their family members. Alexander Stewart said that leaving the EU will provide an opportunity to review the family migration system. It is the UK Government that has reduced the rights of UK citizens to bring family members into the UK—that policy was adopted entirely separately from the EU. There needs to be a bit of understanding on the part of the Conservatives of the family migration issues that we are trying to address.

There is a practical case for change, as Pauline McNeill said, but there is also a moral case, as many members said. Scotland is a country that wants to welcome people, not to tear families apart. This debate is about the type of country that we want to be and how we treat not just those people who choose to come to Scotland, but those people who were born and brought up here. We must understand that the family migration rules are about removing the rights of UK citizens in pursuit of a meaningless migration target. That is why we will commission work from the expert advisory group on migration and population that will be crucial in informing the debate, and I look forward to sharing the group's findings in due course.

Patrick Harvie: The cabinet secretary seems to be implying that she would like the freedom of

movement principle to apply globally. If that is correct, I very much agree.

Is it not astonishing that although the political right constantly argue about human liberty and the need for small government that does not interfere with people's lives, the exception to that is immigration, on which they almost fetishise state power and state violence instead of individual liberty and freedom?

Fiona Hyslop: There is a moral case for change. We must make sure that we provide political leadership in such debates. I think that Alex Rowley was absolutely right: anybody who seeks political leadership must face down the arguments of the far right, who, in seeking to politicise migration and immigration to the extent that they have done, have caused the fear that many individuals have, which is leading, in some parts of the world, to a tension that is extremely worrying indeed. We can and should do something about the issue here in Scotland.

I call on members across the chamber to join the debate and send a clear message about the needs of Scotland's communities. Collectively, we need to be successful in persuading UK ministers to change decisions in individual cases. More important, we need to persuade them to change the policy. We can be positive and constructive in how we do that. We may have different ideas on the means by which we get the powers to make those decisions, but let us shape a family migration policy that is fit for the 21st century, is fit for the Scotland that we seek to create, and is fit for the children and the families we serve, whether they come from Scotland or come to Scotland from the rest of the Europe or indeed other parts of the world. Scotland is not full up; we have a welcoming approach to maintain and we want to make sure that the policy is fit for purpose. Let us develop a migration policy for families that is fit for purpose for Scotland.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-18932, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to this week's business.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 19 September 2019—

after

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Communities and Local Government

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Getting it right for every child—Practice Development Panel's report—[*Graeme Dey.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-18884.1, in the name of Pauline McNeill, which seeks to amend motion S5M-18884, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on investing in our credit unions, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-18884, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on investing in our credit unions, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament commends Scotland's network of credit unions, which are at the heart of communities across the country and serve more than 410,000 people; welcomes that, through offering affordable loans and savings, credit unions can protect people from predatory lenders and unmanageable debt; notes the Scottish Government's Programme for Government commitment to introduce a new £10 million Credit Union Investment Fund to help them grow their membership and increase the numbers of people saving and borrowing from credit unions; further notes that the Scottish Government will co-produce, with the credit union sector, a national strategy to further grow and strengthen this important sector, and believes that this strategy should include the extension of payroll deduction schemes to more workplaces and better promotion of credit unions among young people.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-18885.1, in the name of Alexander Stewart, which seeks to amend motion S5M-18885, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the impact of the United Kingdom Government's family migration policy on Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)

Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 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)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 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)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 30, Against 82, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-18885, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the impact of the UK Government's family migration policy on Scotland, 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, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 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)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 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)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 84, Against 29, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that the UK Government's family migration policies are considered to be some of the least family-friendly immigration policies in the developed world, according to research such as the Migrant Integration Policy Index 2015; further notes that the current rules are not fit for purpose and are leading to forced family separation in communities across Scotland; believes that Conservative administrations have steadily eroded the family reunification rights of UK citizens and that its proposals to end free movement of people will mean further detrimental impacts on the families of EU and UK citizens; notes that Scotland's distinct population needs mean that all of its future population growth is projected to come from migration, and calls on the UK Government to end its increasingly restrictive and arbitrary approach to family migration, scrap the minimum income threshold of £18,600, implement a fair and humane approach to family migration and allow families to build their lives in Scotland and make a positive contribution to society and the economy.

Macmillan Cancer Support's World's Biggest Coffee Morning

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-18636, in the name of Clare Adamson, on Macmillan Cancer Support's world's biggest coffee morning. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes Macmillan Cancer Support's World's Biggest Coffee Morning fundraiser, which runs throughout September every year; notes that 2019 marks the 29th year of the fundraiser; considers that it is Macmillan's biggest fundraising event for people facing cancer and that since 1990 it has raised over £200 million; recognises that Macmillan offers practical, emotional and financial support to thousands of people in Scotland affected by cancer every year; praises the thousands of Macmillan nurses and professionals who work in services and play a vital role in coordinating the care of people living with cancer and making sure that their needs and concerns are met; welcomes the recent announcement that the Scottish Government and Macmillan are each investing £9 million into the Transforming Cancer Care programme to make Scotland the first country in the UK to offer cancer patients guaranteed emotional, practical and financial advice; notes the view that everyone with cancer should be offered a personal care plan and access to the support that they need; recognises that Macmillan will work with the NHS and Health and Social Care Boards across Scotland to ensure that every cancer patient is offered support by 2023; thanks everyone who has raised funds and made donations to Macmillan, and looks forward to as many people as possible joining and supporting this year's World's Biggest Coffee Morning.

17:05

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I am delighted to lead this debate. I thank colleagues who signed the motion and those who will speak in the debate. It is not often that we get to say that we are speaking about a phenomenon, but that is the only way that I can describe Macmillan Cancer Support's world's biggest coffee morning. The event is in its 29th year of September fundraising. Since 1990, it has raised more than £200 million for practical, emotional and financial support to thousands of people who are affected by cancer, including in Scotland.

I thank Macmillan Cancer Support and the Scottish Government for their partnership in the transforming cancer care programme. The Scottish Government's investment of £9 million will be matched by Macmillan to ensure that, by 2023, every cancer patient receives emotional, practical and financial support.

This evening, however, our thoughts are all about our volunteers and fundraisers and the tens of thousands of people who participate in more

than 100,000 coffee mornings. The events happen in homes, workplaces, schools, churches and libraries—anywhere a kettle can be plugged in, it seems. I thank my Motherwell and Wishaw colleague Marion Fellows MP for hosting a Macmillan coffee morning last Friday in our office complex. It was a fantastic event that was attended by council colleagues, including North Lanarkshire provost Councillor Jean Jones, as well as tenants from our building, members of the public and friends and family. The event raised £350 for Macmillan Cancer Support.

The Motherwell and Wishaw constituency has a great tradition of supporting Macmillan coffee mornings and the work of Macmillan Cancer Support. Wishaw Macmillan professionals and practitioners were involved in one of the transforming care after treatment pilot projects, which informed the transforming cancer care programme. I was delighted to meet Macmillan professionals during the pilot and to see how those precious coffee morning pennies were being transformed into world-leading patient cancer journey interventions in my community.

For example, £250 can give five people living with cancer an opportunity to attend a health and wellbeing event; £335 can pay for a Macmillan grant to allow a family affected by cancer to have a holiday to make the most of their precious time and to make memories for the future; £546 can pay for a Macmillan social care worker for a week to help patients, family members and carers to manage the social and practical problems of living with cancer; and £1,023 can pay for a Macmillan nurse for a week to help people living with cancer and their families to receive essential expert medical, practical and emotional support.

I want to highlight a partnership between North Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council services and Macmillan Cancer Support. CultureNL, NL Leisure and South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture have joined forces with Macmillan Cancer Support to provide and improve cancer support services in Lanarkshire. That involves providing information and services, particularly in libraries throughout Lanarkshire; developing Macmillan's physical activity programme, which is called move more; and rolling out new volunteering opportunities.

I take this opportunity to thank the Macmillan volunteers.

There are many opportunities to be a volunteer, and different skills can be used to help people who are dealing with cancer, and their families. People affected by cancer often feel isolated, alone and, crucially, unable to access the right information and support at the right time, but volunteers can improve that situation. Macmillan needs volunteers

“who are warm, supportive and non-judgemental, with great communication skills and a willingness to learn”.

No previous experience is required. People can become cancer information and support services volunteers, who help people to access financial advice, physical activity opportunities and transport for appointments. A gentle movement volunteer works with people affected by cancer using Chinese practices of breathing, physical activity, and mental and spiritual awareness. A move more motivator meets and greets participants, and provides a warm welcome and support to people throughout their journey. People can become gardening volunteers, who provide a warm welcome in Macmillan's gardening groups and support people to undertake gardening activities and develop valuable skills. Volunteers make a real difference to cancer patients and their families and communities. There are many opportunities for people to help in Macmillan Cancer Support.

Macmillan's partnership with North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire is delivered in our libraries. I am happy to say that Wishaw and Motherwell libraries in my constituency are supporting the big coffee morning. Wishaw had its event on 5 September and Motherwell's is yet to come. People in the local community can attend Motherwell library on 26 September and take part in the world's biggest coffee morning.

Tonight could not pass without thank yous, and I say a huge thank you to the Macmillan professionals and nurse practitioners, who work within or in partnership with the national health service to support cancer patients and their families, and deliver vital support and information. I put on record my thanks—and, I am sure, that of the whole chamber—to each and every person who has organised, participated in or attended a Macmillan coffee morning this September. We should all raise a china cup or a mug in support of them.

17:12

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I thank Clare Adamson for bringing this important topic to the chamber for debate. It is always great when we can celebrate success stories in the chamber, and Macmillan's coffee morning fundraiser is a huge success story. The coffee morning is now in its 29th year, and this year's event, which will take place on Friday 27 September, is thought to be the charity's biggest ever, with people all over the United Kingdom taking part.

It goes without saying that we have probably all been affected by cancer in some way, whether it is ourselves or someone close to us. Whatever the situation, a cancer diagnosis can change our lives. It presents emotional, physical and financial

burdens that many families find extremely difficult to cope with. The invaluable services that Macmillan provided to my family when my granny was diagnosed with cancer really helped us to cope and understand. I know that many other families like mine will want to thank Macmillan for all the amazing work that it does at a time when it seems that our world is falling apart.

In Scotland, it is expected that by 2020 around 35,000 people a year will be told that they have cancer—a phenomenal figure. Although the survival rates for many cancers have improved over the past 20 years, the total number of people diagnosed with the disease is increasing year on year. Macmillan recognises how important it is to improve the lives of those with cancer and support them throughout their journey. Amazingly, as Clare Adamson noted, the coffee mornings have raised more than £200 million since 1990—money that has gone towards research as well as emotional, physical and financial support for patients.

It is estimated that, last year, nearly 2 million people received in-depth, personal support from Macmillan professionals or services. On that note, I thank the thousands of Macmillan nurses, health professionals, fundraisers and volunteers who care for people who are living with cancer and support them through difficult times.

Through fundraising events, we can in turn support the work of Macmillan. Those events are by no means insignificant. Macmillan estimates that it raised an incredible £27 million from last year's coffee morning event. Next week, it is expected that thousands of people will take part in the world's biggest coffee morning, making it the biggest yet.

A couple of years ago, I hosted a Macmillan coffee morning in my office in Maryhill in Glasgow. I was impressed by the resource kit that I was given, which contained bunting, cake decorations, stickers and a collection box. I felt heartened by the level of interest that the event received in the local community. Not only was it a great way to raise money for a great cause, it provided the perfect chance to catch up with friends and meet new people over a cuppa and a slice of cake. At a time when we are talking more and more about the importance of community-based events and tackling social isolation and loneliness, such events are already invaluable.

The events are easy to host and I encourage anyone who is interested in doing so to sign up on the Macmillan website. The coffee morning does not need to be held next Friday; people can hold it when it is convenient for them.

I again thank Clare Adamson for shining a light on the fantastic work that Macmillan does. The

world's biggest coffee morning is the icing on the cake for a charity that works relentlessly to improve the lives of those who have cancer.

I wish everyone who is hosting or attending a coffee morning next week the best of luck and I sincerely hope that the event is a massive success.

17:16

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): It is my pleasure to speak in this debate about the incredible service that Macmillan Cancer Support provides and I thank my colleague Clare Adamson for bringing it to the chamber.

We cannot put a value on the work that Macmillan Cancer Support does to help cancer sufferers and their families. All of us, whether directly or indirectly, have been or will be touched by cancer; it is amazing to know that there is comfort, advice and support available.

The public's biggest contribution in the fight against cancer is to raise awareness and funds for research and the invaluable work that is done by charities such as Macmillan Cancer Support.

One of the most pleasurable ways to raise money is by taking part in the world's biggest coffee morning. Who does not like a cuppa, a cake and a natter with friends?

With absolutely no regard to my diet, my office staff have organised a coffee morning in my Kirkintilloch constituency office next Monday. There will be cakes, coffee and tea, and dog biscuits for those who bring their four-legged friends. I am looking forward to it enormously. I feel bound to disclose that my contribution will come in a box provided by the local supermarket, because baking is not my forte. However, Macmillan's partnership retailer, Marks and Spencer, is donating a percentage of cake sales to the charity, so that salves my conscience in some way.

As Annie Wells outlined, Macmillan makes it so easy to host an event; it sends hosts a full kit, complete with bunting, posters and everything that they need.

The annual coffee morning is the biggest fundraising event that is held for people who face cancer. Last year, coffee mornings raised more than £27 million and, since its small beginnings in 1990, when people donated the cost of a cuppa to Macmillan, more than £200 million has been raised for the charity. That is incredible. That money helps everyone who has cancer to live life as fully as they can, while being supported and cared for.

Last month, the Scottish Government announced £18 million in funding for the charity to provide one-to-one clinical support for people with cancer. That is an indication of just how important the work done by Macmillan Cancer Support and its volunteers is, and how far the charity has come over decades.

The support that Macmillan gives is all-encompassing and is forever growing, whether it is financial, emotional or practical.

At Stobhill hospital, the nearest hospital to my constituency, Macmillan piloted the transforming care after treatment programme, which Clare Adamson mentioned. It offered counselling and support to those who had beaten cancer but still needed psychological and physical check-ups to ensure that they were coping. That was invaluable to people left with the trauma of diagnosis and to allay concerns of the cancer returning.

I urge everyone to support the world's biggest coffee morning. People should look out for their nearest event; there is sure to be one near them. Every sip of coffee and every bite of cake will go towards helping someone to cope with the trauma of cancer. That is how we can all do our bit to fight the scourge of cancer.

17:19

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate Clare Adamson on securing the debate and on her passionate opening speech. She has already done her job, because I did not have the world's biggest coffee morning in my diary—that is a terrible confession for a health spokesperson to make. That is now rectified, and I hope that we will all save the date of Friday 27 September. Rona Mackay convinced me by mentioning cake a lot. We are all feeling a bit peckish now.

I pick up where Rona Mackay left off by saying that cancer is traumatic. There cannot be a family in Scotland that has not been touched by cancer in some way. Our family has certainly had to cope with it in the past couple of years. I am pleased that the outcome for my mum has been good. However, that would not have been possible without the volunteers, the fantastic transport service that we have in Lanarkshire—Clare Adamson, who is nodding, knows all about that service as it is based in her constituency—and the personal interactions and one-to-one conversations that people may not be able to have with their nearest and dearest. Those things are so important, and I cannot think of a better cause.

Some of the recent announcements from the Scottish Government and Macmillan have been really positive. It is important that we see investment in the cancer journey. Scotland's

cancer care system has been facing unprecedented challenges. We do a lot of cross-party work to look hard at how we can prevent cancer in the first place and address some of the terrible health inequalities that we see.

The £80 million partnership between Macmillan Cancer Support and the Scottish Government is welcomed by Labour members, because that wraparound support is vital and we want the cancer journey to be improved for everyone. It is worth mentioning some background to that. The 2018 cancer experience survey found that 40 per cent of cancer patients were not offered advice on how to access social security; less than one third received a care plan. From debt to depression, we know that people need support and that we can do a lot to help them through their cancer experience.

As a fellow Lanarkshire MSP, I was pleased to hear Clare Adamson mention colleagues in North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire. Making it accessible for people to drop into their library and leisure centre is important, even if they do not feel physically ready to take part in activities.

It is also worth mentioning the ambition behind the transforming cancer care partnership, which aims to make sure that every cancer care patient in Scotland is reached, and to make Scotland the first country in the UK to fulfil its promise on personalised care. That is also important.

The world's biggest coffee morning is world leading, and it is a good opportunity for parliamentarians to come together with people in their community to enjoy a cuppa and a chat. More important, it is a good opportunity for us to make our commitment clear—to end cancer one day and to do more on research, but also to make sure that people who are going through it now get the support that they need.

17:23

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank Clare Adamson for securing this important debate. Let me start by saying that everybody knows someone close to them who has suffered from cancer. Over a three-year period, my father-in-law, my mother and my father died of cancer. I take a great interest in this issue, which is very close to my heart. That is why I support Macmillan Cancer Support.

Indeed, I must also state an interest at this point and declare that my wife is the chair of a local Macmillan Cancer Support fundraising group. Nothing drives me more than supporting this charity, especially because—as my wife never fails to remind me—as she supports me, I should always support her. I do so knowing that I will have to sign up not only to the coffee morning, but to the Macmillan fun run on Speyside each year. I

know which one I prefer. One is good for my waistline and one is not.

Let me be clear: such fundraising groups allow Macmillan to help cancer sufferers, and their work is more important than ever. Every two minutes, someone in the UK is diagnosed with cancer. Advances in medicine have meant that people with cancer have years added to their lives or even get the all clear. There are 2.5 million people living with cancer across the UK today, but thanks to better treatment, that number is expected to rise to nearly 4 million by 2030. That means that, more than ever, we need the work that Macmillan nurses do, so fundraising must go on.

I know that the charity will rise to that challenge, as it is blessed to have some of the most hard-working fundraising groups across the country. As we heard, last year the world's biggest coffee morning raised more than £1.9 million across Scotland and more than £150,000 in the Highlands and Islands region. Let us not forget that, since 1990, the world's biggest coffee morning has raised nearly £200 million, which is an astonishing sum.

Fundraising is not just limited to coffee mornings. I remind members that, over the course of a year, there are lunches, jazz evenings and fun runs, to name but a few examples. Local committee groups pour so much energy into organising those events, and we as a Parliament should do all that we can to celebrate their efforts. For example, the Speyside committee group recently handed over a cheque for £10,000 to Macmillan. That would not have been possible without devoted volunteers such as Marjorie Walker and Margaret Shepherd, who joined the group just after it was established in the 1970s and have served on the committee for more than 45 years—that is a lot of coffee mornings. Although their service is special, it is not extraordinary, as there are a number of equally committed groups and advocates across the Highlands and Islands region.

I urge everyone to support Macmillan's world's biggest coffee morning this September and to take the time to celebrate the fundraising efforts of local Macmillan groups across Scotland. I will, and I know that my waistline will suffer.

17:26

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): I echo the comments of others in congratulating and thanking Clare Adamson for lodging the motion, which enables all of us to engage in a debate on an important subject.

Let me explain why I am responding on behalf of the Government. Much to her regret, the

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport is engaged on other significant Government business, and is therefore unable to be here. However, I hope to be a worthy—or, perhaps, at least adequate—substitute.

Today's debate gives us the opportunity not only to highlight some of the fantastic work that is done by Macmillan Cancer Support, as members have already done, but to recognise our collective achievements thus far, and to consider the road ahead. We should take stock, but we should also look to the future.

Few among us do not know someone close to us who has been touched by cancer. Edward Mountain, Monica Lennon and Annie Wells shared their family experiences. About 220,000 people in the country are living with the impact of a cancer diagnosis, and that number is set to reach 343,000 by 2030. Cancer can be a devastating disease that tests all aspects of a patient's life. It can also have a pronounced impact on the lives of close family members. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the care that we offer patients helps them not just physically, but with the mental, emotional, financial and wider life impacts of the disease.

That is why the Scottish Government's recently announced exciting £18 million partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support is so important. The transforming cancer care programme makes Scotland the first country in the UK to offer every single cancer patient guaranteed emotional, practical and financial support. The First Minister and the health secretary announced the partnership at the Beatson west of Scotland cancer centre in Glasgow at the end of August. Having the privilege to visit a life-saving centre such as the Beatson, and having the opportunity to speak with cancer patients, drove home to them the real-life positive effects that the initiative will have for so many people—not just the patients, but their loved ones.

As is the case with many new initiatives, for patients and clinicians to get the most benefit out of the partnership, a cohesive uptake by health boards, local authorities and the wider third sector will be needed. By ensuring that patients are signposted to the appropriate resources when that is required, we can begin to assess strategically and to meet the non-clinical needs of people who are affected by cancer, and we can begin to alleviate stress on other areas of our NHS, which will allow clinicians to focus on treating patients. It is vital that all involved—integration joint boards, health boards and the third sector—unite to make the most of the pioneering partnership.

Alongside that work, the health secretary has signalled that there will be a refresh of the Scottish Government's £100 million cancer strategy. Much

has been achieved under the strategy, but as research and technology advance, so should our thinking and focus. The refresh will allow us to realign our attention to the areas related to cancer that need it most. In progressing that work, the cabinet secretary has committed to involving the Scottish cancer coalition: indeed, I understand that we have already initiated that discussion with the coalition.

There are, of course, ways in which we, as individuals, can demonstrate our support for the cause. As other members have noted tonight, Friday 27 September will mark the 29th annual Macmillan Cancer Support world's biggest coffee morning. The proceeds will continue to help Macmillan to support many cancer patients across Scotland. As we have heard, the coffee morning started life in 1990 as a small gathering. Over the years, it has grown larger and larger, to the point at which, all told, more than £200 million has been raised to help cancer patients. Clare Adamson rightly described that as "a phenomenon".

One of the main reasons why the coffee morning is so successful is how simple and easy it is for anyone and everyone to get involved. I, too, encourage every one of my colleagues in the chamber today either to host their own event on 27 September, or to support one that is already being held, because every single penny that is raised helps.

I think that I speak for everyone here today when I say that we cannot thank enough each and every one of our extraordinary staff, nurses and volunteers at Macmillan who work tirelessly to help cancer patients. Rona Mackay was right when she said that

"We cannot put a value on the work that Macmillan Cancer Support does".

Those people make the biggest difference in supporting people through what can be some of the most challenging times in their lives.

I also want to acknowledge the role of cancer sufferers' families in providing love and support and, in many cases, in fundraising for Macmillan, either through hosting a coffee morning or through other means, such as those that were highlighted by Edward Mountain.

As I have mentioned, we still have much to do in our fight against cancer, but through innovative technology, new advances in medicine, a determined workforce of dedicated staff and the selfless acts of charity that we continue to see, I am certain that we are on the right path. Our thanks again go to Macmillan for the huge part that it plays.

Meeting closed at 17:31.

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