



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 14 January 2020

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Tuesday 14 January 2020

CONTENTS

	Col.
TIME FOR REFLECTION	1
TOPICAL QUESTION TIME	3
Primary Schools (Capacity)	3
Caledonian Sleeper Services	6
IMPROVING THE LIVES OF GYPSY TRAVELLERS	11
<i>Motion moved—[Christina McKelvie].</i>	
The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie)	11
Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con)	17
Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)	21
John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green).....	24
Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD)	27
Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)	30
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)	33
David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)	36
Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP).....	39
Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	41
Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)	44
Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	46
Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP).....	48
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)	51
Mary Fee.....	54
Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con).....	57
Christina McKelvie	62
BUSINESS MOTION	68
<i>Motion moved—[Graeme Dey]—and agreed to.</i>	
DECISION TIME	69
SHOWMEN'S GUILD OF GREAT BRITAIN	70
<i>Motion debated—[Richard Lyle].</i>	
Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP).....	70
Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)	74
Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con)	75
David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)	77
Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)	79
Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP).....	81
Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green).....	82
The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham).....	84
CORRECTION	87

Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 14 January 2020

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We start today's business with time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is Pastor Geoff Findlay, Lifegate Church, Dundee and Work Place Chaplaincy Scotland.

Pastor Geoff Findlay (Lifegate Church Dundee and Work Place Chaplaincy Scotland): Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for inviting me to share with you today. My theme is, in fact, a time for reflection. As we move into this new year, it is good to have a vision and—you have probably heard this a few times, and I say it with tongue in cheek—a 2020 vision.

The Bible says that, without vision, people perish, so we need to have a plan and look forward. However, I always think that, in order to look forward and plan, it is good to look back and learn from the past and past experiences. When I was a community education worker and doing my degree in community education, we were taught to be reflective practitioners. We would plan an event and, after it, reflect back on our practice. We would look at whether there were lessons that we needed to learn. Could we have done things differently? What worked well and what did not? Could we make changes? How did we feel about it?

Reflecting back on my life, I reflect on the decisions that I have made and the actions that I have taken, and I ask what kind of impact they have had not only on my life but on the lives of those around me. Two major decisions impacted my life and had a knock-on effect on those around me. On the day that I asked Jesus to reveal Himself to me, I asked whether He was real. "Then show me," I said—and He did. It totally changed my life. He entered into my heart and I have never been the same since.

Serving Him faithfully for 30 years, I have worked in Africa with orphans and I have cared for the homeless and those struggling with substance misuse, those in prison and those who are hungry and lonely. Jesus is quoted in Isaiah as saying:

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me ... to bring good news to the poor ... to comfort the brokenhearted and ... captives",

who shall know freedom.

Because Christ has been in my life, that has been my life's work, with my wife and family. Asking my wife to marry me was the other greatest decision I have ever made—and so she keeps reminding me. Over 30 years of marriage, my wife has been a great source of inspiration for me and for others. She has served Dundee faithfully for over 30 years, overcoming her own battles with cancer, not missing a step and loving and serving the people of Dundee.

As a workplace chaplain and a pastor in the city of Dundee, I get the opportunity to bring hope, love and peace to the people I have grown up with. My hope is that, as we go forward into our 2020 vision, we will take time to look back and see what kind of experiences we have had. Thank you.

Topical Question Time

14:04

Primary Schools (Capacity)

1. Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):

To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that the number of primary schools exceeding their capacity has increased by a third since 2009. (S5T-01947)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): School occupancy levels will vary due to changes in pupil population arising from local factors such as housing developments and parental choice. The proportion of primary schools at or exceeding their capacity has increased by 35.4 per cent since 2009, but the number of secondary schools at or exceeding their capacity has fallen by 46.5 per cent over the same period. The change in the primary school figure represents 1.4 per cent of all primary schools.

It is the statutory responsibility of all local authorities to manage and maintain the school estate in Scotland. However, through our £1.8 billion schools for the future programme and its successor, the £1 billion learning estate investment programme, we are supporting local authorities to deliver high-quality learning environments for our children and young people. Through the learning estate investment programme, we will consider issues with capacity on a case-by-case basis in collaboration with local authorities.

Beatrice Wishart: The Scottish Government's own statistics show that 111 primary schools are now at or over capacity—that figure has gone up by 83 since 2009. Some pupils are being crammed into schools and classrooms that were not designed to operate with the number of pupils that they accommodate. The Educational Institute of Scotland is clear that overcrowding

“has significant implications for the educational experience of young people”

and that overcrowded environments are not conducive to learning.

What is the cabinet secretary's response to those very real concerns? Do overcrowding and larger classes not hinder efforts to close the attainment gap?

John Swinney: We need to retain a sense of perspective around some of those questions.

Beatrice Wishart has correctly set out the figures. In 2018, 111 primary schools were at or above 100 per cent capacity—a figure that had fallen by 34 per cent since 2016. The number

peaked at 169 in 2016, and the current number is lower than in any year since 2012. As I indicated in my earlier answer, that represents a very small change of 1.4 per cent of the overall number of primary schools.

I believe fundamentally in investment in the school estate and in ensuring that young people are educated in a high-quality learning environment. That is why I am so pleased that, since 2007, when this Government came to office, we have managed to reduce the number of pupils who are educated in schools that are in a poor or bad condition from 37 per cent of all pupils in Scotland to 10 per cent today. That is a phenomenal achievement in the face of the austerity with which this Government has been wrestling.

I take the issue seriously. We invest in the school estate and in teacher numbers, which are crucial in closing the attainment gap. I am very pleased that the statistics that came out in December demonstrated that the pupil-teacher ratio in Scotland, which is the key measure of educational engagement, has been stable for another year.

Beatrice Wishart: The cabinet secretary refers to teacher numbers, but the EIS also told *The Herald* that jam-packed classrooms have significant implications for teacher workload.

The Government tells us what it is doing about teacher recruitment but, in fact, we know that there are 2,853 fewer teachers in Scottish schools than when the Scottish National Party Government came to power, in 2007. One current example is that of a secondary 3 class at Anderson high school in Lerwick, which has no teacher of English—I know that because one of my grandchildren is in the class. Some pupils are being let down, and already-overworked teachers are being left to pick up the pieces.

Will the cabinet secretary explain why 12,000 more primary school pupils are being taught in supersize classes than in 2012?

John Swinney: There are a number of issues in there.

I am engaged in dialogue with the EIS around teacher workload. We are taking forward a lot of very good joint work to make sure that, as part of the pay and workload deal that saw teachers receive a very significant increase in their salary, measures have been taken to reduce their workload and that some of the time that is necessary to enhance learning and teaching has been enabled through the additional in-service days that the Government has provided for.

In relation to the number of pupils in large classes, the number of pupils in primary 1 classes

of 26 or more has almost halved since 2018 and has fallen from 16,845 in 2006, before this Government came to office, to just 267 in 2019. That equates to around 10 classes in the totality of Scotland's schools.

We are taking a number of steps to ensure that young people are educated in smaller classes. I point out to Beatrice Wishart that teacher numbers are at their highest level since 2010, which has been achieved despite the austerity that the Government and local authorities have had to wrestle with. Of course, that austerity was ushered in by a Conservative Government that was supported by the Liberal Democrats at Westminster. Given the consequences of the actions of the Liberal Democrats, the irony of Beatrice Wishart's question is in no way lost on me.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I thank Beatrice Wishart for raising those issues, because they are of particular concern in my constituency, where I have four schools with school rolls of around 600 or above. The cabinet secretary stated that capacity issues will be taken into account on a case-by-case basis through the learning estate investment programme. However, should that not be incorporated more systematically within those criteria? I understand that the LEIP is still being finalised. Surely, a growing city such as Edinburgh needs investment in its schools?

John Swinney: The most recent data on Edinburgh city secondary schools that I have available to me show that the number of secondary schools in Edinburgh that are operating at more than 100 per cent capacity has fallen by one secondary school. *[John Swinney has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]* The number of primary schools in the same situation fell from 19 in 2017 to eight in 2018. Good progress is being made by City of Edinburgh Council.

Issues of capacity are being considered in the learning estate investment programme. Indeed, they led to my decision to award funding—under the auspices of Midlothian Council—for a new secondary school around the A701 corridor, because of the population expansion that is taking place to the south of Edinburgh, adjacent to the Midlothian Council area. Those issues are very much part of our discussions. I look forward to discussion with City of Edinburgh Council as we look to the next phase of bids in the learning estate investment programme, which I expect to conclude during the autumn of the coming year.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware of the newspaper article that appeared at the weekend. He may also be aware that six of the

17 schools that are operating over capacity in North Lanarkshire—which was referenced—are in Coatbridge and Chryston. They include Chryston high school and Stepps, St Kevin's, Glenboig, Gartcosh and St Mary's primary schools.

One thing that those schools have in common is that they are in areas of housing growth and development. The countless constituents who have spoken to me about the issue are often frustrated as to why the rapid increase in pupil rolls does not appear to be anticipated or factored in locally. What does the Scottish Government do to support councils to be more proactive in increasing school capacity where there are large-scale developments and, therefore, predictable increases in the number of pupils who require places at local schools?

John Swinney: That point was at the heart of my original answer to Beatrice Wishart. School occupancy levels will vary due, invariably, to decisions that are taken by local authorities on development and housing expansion in localities. Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that they have adequate school estate to meet the needs of pupils in their areas. Given that they are also responsible for planning decisions on the zoning of land for housing and the approval of individual developments, it is incumbent on local authorities to consider all aspects of those questions as they settle on the size of the school estate that is appropriate in their area. I encourage local authorities to act in the fashion that Mr MacGregor has set out to Parliament today.

Caledonian Sleeper Services

2. **Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that complaints about Caledonian sleeper services have increased by 221 per cent. (S5T-01953)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): It is well documented that the 2019 introduction of the new Caledonian sleeper carriages was difficult for the operator and passengers. The manufacturer—CAF—did not provide sufficient vehicles in a service-ready state to allow for full service introduction.

The increase in complaints is related to last year's summer period, when new trains had reliability problems and the 1970s and 1980s rolling stock was in continued use on some routes. The vast majority of the rise in complaints was related to on-train quality issues that are being resolved. The Scottish Government continues to monitor Caledonian sleeper services closely. A performance improvement plan is being implemented following below-target performance

and it is working well—we are already seeing performance improvement as a result.

Colin Smyth: The cabinet secretary referred to the improvement plan for Serco Caledonian Sleepers. Given the failure of multiple improvement plans on the ScotRail franchise, why should anyone have any faith that this improvement plan will work? The Government has accepted that the Abellio ScotRail franchise that it awarded has failed. Is it not the case that the Government also got it wrong when it awarded this franchise?

Michael Matheson: Colin Smyth is confusing two different things. The complaints relate to service provision on the Caledonian sleepers. The improvement plan does not specifically relate to service provision, but to wider issues around the Caledonian sleepers, including punctuality.

The member will recognise that the data that was published last week for the autumn period showed a significant improvement in ScotRail services and their punctuality, which was a direct consequence of the remedial plan that was put in place.

However, the improvement plan in this matter does not relate to complaints about on-service matters. It is about punctuality and wider issues in the service, and is to make sure that there are improvements, which we are already starting to see happen.

Colin Smyth: It is still not clear how that improvement plan will work, when previous improvement plans that were instigated by the Government and our rail services failed miserably.

The reality is that complaints are up by 221 per cent and the performance level today—not in the summer—is closer to breach than to target on the Serco services. Emergency exit windows recently would not open; trains are overshooting platforms; services were introduced a year late in the north of Scotland; and staff are walking out due to high stress levels and workload.

Surely the cabinet secretary accepts that the current service is not good enough? Will he apologise to the passengers who are putting up with an inferior sleeper service?

Michael Matheson: I reiterate that the purpose behind improvement plans is to see improvements, and we are already seeing improvements in punctuality and in wider service provision. Alongside that, there is a reduction in the level of complaints from passengers about on-board service provision, as a result of actions that have been taken to close out some technical issues on the new rolling stock. The overall picture is one of improvement, which I very much welcome. I recognise that staff are working very

hard to address the deficiencies and challenges that are associated with the introduction of new rolling stock. The focus is on making sure that the improvements are sustained and will continue.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): This iconic service has the potential to improve tourism business and connectivity and help us to meet our climate objectives. It is clear that there are problems and that many customers are unhappy with both the recliner and cabin services. Given that the trains may be around for decades, what conversations has the cabinet secretary had with the current operator on the potential for improvements or retrospective upgrades to the CAF fleet, that may be able to be installed to improve the passenger experience? Has the operator shown any desire or willingness to engage in retrospective upgrades to the service that may make more customers happier and more likely to recommend it to others?

Michael Matheson: A range of work is being undertaken. I have engaged not only with Serco but with CAF senior executives on those matters and the specific problems that have been experienced with the introduction of the new rolling stock. A range of measures are being taken forward as a result, including a rolling programme of retrospective technical work on the new rolling stock by CAF to close out on-going issues that have had an impact on the passenger experience. Good progress has been made on that matter, according to Serco Caledonian Sleepers. It expects that work to be completed in the next couple of months, which will ensure that all the technical issues that have had an impact on the passenger experience will have been closed out. Alongside that, it has taken the opportunity to review a number of the arrangements that it has in place, such as for cleaning and laundry services, and that has also resulted in improvements. The picture over the past couple of months is one of improvement and the focus must be on making sure that that is sustained and built on.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I had occasion to use the Caledonian sleeper when I travelled south on 23 October and returned the following day. There was a bit of alarm on my part when one of the services arrived 22 minutes early, because I thought that I had done something wrong. Will the cabinet secretary join me in congratulating the staff on board the Caledonian sleepers? I found the on-board service to be beyond complaint. The breakfast was absolutely magnificent, and I know that other passengers on those two journeys shared my delight at the new service.

Michael Matheson: Stewart Stevenson's experience is a very good advert for using the Caledonian sleepers. It is important that we

recognise the progress that is being made. It might be of interest to members that, since action has been taken to address a number of issues, there has been an increase in sales and train occupancy levels continue to grow. Since the new year, the number of bookings for forward sales on the Caledonian sleepers has been at record levels. Yesterday, there were the highest ever daily sales figures for the Caledonian sleepers, which is very encouraging, and there has been a particular increase in the number of international bookings being made for the services. Since the introduction of the new trains in October, journeys have increased by 20.8 per cent compared with the same period in the previous year.

There is a real appetite to make use of the service, and it is attracting new people. We want to ensure that the service is of the highest possible standard and that it complies with the provisions that are set out in the franchise agreement. The focus is on achieving that. The figures of late demonstrate that the improvements that we have seen in recent months are starting to reap benefits.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): We all want everyone to enjoy the same experience that Mr Stevenson enjoyed. Personally, I would like to see that happen in the public sector rather than with that particular pernicious company.

As of this morning, there are on-going issues with the doors to the berths not opening. It takes multiple attempts to get people in, and people get shut in and shut out. The cabinet secretary will be aware that the emergency exit windows are locked, which has already been alluded to. We are assured that the windows themselves are not a primary means of egress during an emergency but, coupled with the problems with the doors, they represent a significant health and safety risk. When will those issues be rectified?

Michael Matheson: That relates to the work that Serco Caledonian Sleepers is taking forward with CAF and that is expected to be completed over the next couple of months. It is important to reassure members that the Office of Rail and Road has oversight of any actions taken by Serco Caledonian Sleepers relating to safety matters on the vehicles. My understanding is that the ORR is satisfied with the actions that are being taken to address the issue with the emergency windows, to which John Finnie referred. The ORR has responsibility over the safety arrangements on the Caledonian sleeper. The ORR must be satisfied with the actions that are taken, and my understanding is that it is satisfied with the measures that are being put in place.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): I welcome the measures that are being taken to

speed up the handling of complaints. Given that there has continued to be an increase in sales for the service, as the cabinet secretary said in his response to Stewart Stevenson, will he outline what steps are being taken to ensure that on-board service conditions and quality are maintained?

Michael Matheson: Specific measures that are being taken forward include Serco Caledonian Sleepers' work with its staff to continue its operational excellence training programme, which was agreed with the trade unions. Additional on-board staff have been recruited to manage the transition to the new fleet. As I mentioned, work is being done with the manufacturer, CAF, to close out any residual on-train defects. That work is expected to be completed in the next couple of months.

Additionally, since the introduction of the new trains, Serco Caledonian Sleepers has been reviewing some aspects of its supply chain, including catering and cleaning supplies. We have seen the positive impacts of that work. Alongside that, Serco Caledonian Sleepers is engaged directly with Transport Scotland's service quality incentive regime—SQUIRE—which is the inspection team. It is using the team's feedback to continue to focus on areas of improvement.

Improving the Lives of Gypsy Travellers

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-20404, in the name of Christina McKelvie, on improving the lives of Gypsy Travellers. Members who wish to contribute to the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons. I call the cabinet secretary.

The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie): The Presiding Officer has given me a promotion.

The Presiding Officer: I apologise. I meant to say “the minister”.

14:25

The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I am delighted to bring the motion to the chamber for debate. This is an important opportunity for members of all parties to commit to working together to improve the lives of Gypsy Traveller communities in Scotland, and it is a chance for Parliament to take a united stand against unacceptable levels of prejudice and discrimination towards Gypsy Travellers. I welcome our friends from the Gypsy Traveller community and organisations that work with them who are here. They include members of the Gypsy Traveller women’s voices project who have worked very closely with us on formulating our plans, and a group of young people who have also been key in helping us to develop our plans.

As the First Minister said when she welcomed members of the Gypsy Traveller youth assembly to Parliament in 2018:

“This is your Parliament, and you deserve the very best representation from your elected politicians.”

I hope that our debate today will demonstrate at least some of that.

It is important to point out—

I am sorry. I missed a bit out. I have something else to say later about a different debate.

“Improving the Lives of Scotland’s Gypsy/Travellers” was published last October. It was developed jointly with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, so I am delighted to welcome to the gallery Councillor Peter Barrett, who is here representing COSLA. The report is an example of what we can achieve when we work together in partnership. Councillor Elena Whitham has been key in the work, too. That partnership has been incredibly important.

As we know from all the available evidence, our Gypsy Traveller communities continue to experience poorer outcomes in terms of living standards, education, health and employment. They also often face extreme and persistent stereotyping and hostility, as they go about their daily lives. The action plan recognises those injustices and the need for urgent action to improve the lives of Gypsy Travellers. In the past, we have all rightly been accused of talking too much and doing too little. I see my colleague Mary Fee nodding her head: I am sure that she has lots to say, and is expecting lots of action. That we talk too much and do too little was concluded by Kaliani Lyle, the Government’s former race equality adviser, and by the Equalities and Human Rights Committee. We take their comments very seriously.

Now that we have published the plan, we must move from words to action, so I hope that I will, for Mary Fee and everybody else, demonstrate the action that we will take to make a difference to people’s lives. The plan sets out five key areas in which we will take that action. Number 1 is provision of better accommodation, which was a pivotal issue for everyone to whom we spoke in the community. Number 2 is provision of access to public services, number 3 is to increase incomes in and out of work, number 4 is to tackle racism and discrimination, and number 5 is to improve Gypsy Traveller representation across the board.

I want to speak a little about all those areas. Everyone has the right to a safe and secure warm home. That can make a difference in how people take up their opportunities for education and work, and in how they look after their health and wellbeing. It is clear that the commitment to develop more and better accommodation is the most important one for the Gypsy Traveller community. We will make a one-off investment of up to £2 million to improve existing public sites, and we will take direct action to improve provision in the short term. Council leaders have pledged to work to agree how the money should be spent: the vital thing is that the Gypsy Traveller communities themselves know best what they need. It is therefore absolutely crucial that the communities, with the agreement of COSLA, are fully involved in all decisions about improvements to their sites.

The plan also commits the Scottish Government and COSLA to reviewing our housing investment programmes, and to working with Gypsy Traveller communities so that we better understand their accommodation needs, in order to inform future provision. That work is being done cross-portfolio with many ministers in the Government: on the accommodation aspects, my colleague Kevin Stewart’s work is absolutely key. We will continue to work with partners.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):

I am grateful to the minister for taking an intervention. I am delighted to hear her use the words “home” and “accommodation”. Does she agree that that is very positive use of those words, which are far more inclusive for the Gypsy Traveller community?

Christina McKelvie: I am pleased, and members will hear much more about the change in language. We identified that we needed to ask whether our policy demonstrated, in its language and purpose, that it does what it says on the tin. In this case, it did not, so we are now remedying that. I hope that John Finnie will be pleased about that.

As I said, we will work with partners on the longer-term strategic actions in the plan so that the accommodation needs of the Gypsy Traveller community are systematically identified and met.

Everyone should expect good-quality public services, and to be treated with dignity and respect when they access those services. We have heard from Gypsy Travellers that they feel excluded from accessing our public services and that they might often not trust them because of previous experiences of discrimination and poor treatment. The action plan builds on effective work that is already under way in a variety of local settings. One such example is the “Keep well” initiative in my area in Lanarkshire. Its team provides health checks on council sites, private sites, roadside camps and at Gypsy Traveller conventions and meetings. Anyone who has an identified health need is supported to engage with the mainstream services that meet their needs.

As part of the action plan, we have invested £400,000 in three innovative pilot projects with local health and social care partnerships. The projects are aimed at informing how we tackle the health inequalities that are experienced by Gypsy Travellers, and at improving their health and wellbeing. One of those, which is called “Community health matters”, will be run in Grampian and Aberdeenshire. It will recruit and support community health workers from the Gypsy Traveller community to provide health advocacy on a wide range of health and social care issues. The second project, which is called “Mums matter”, is being tested in Fife and aims to improve Gypsy Traveller access to maternal and child health services, as well as to income-maximisation services. The third project, which is called “Communication matters”, will be run by NHS Lothian and will support and train community pharmacists to use health literacy tools and techniques in order to increase awareness and uptake of services among the Gypsy Traveller community.

We have already implemented some practical but simple solutions that can improve information

and access to services. For example, we have recently developed general practitioner registration cards for the community, which promote Gypsy Travellers’ right to register at GP practices, and flag up where they might need help with the registration process. It is a simple wee card that can be put in a purse or wallet, or carried in a pocket, but it demonstrates very clearly what people’s rights are, and can be used to access those rights. It is a simple process, but it is absolutely pivotal in the Gypsy Traveller community getting access to GPs. It has been incredibly well received and has had an immediate effect—and not just in the Gypsy Traveller community; refugees and people who are experiencing homelessness now have access to the cards, too.

As we all know, education is key in all this, so let there be no doubt that we want all Gypsy Traveller children and young people to benefit from an education system that is engaging and relevant, and which best prepares them for the future life that they want to live. We want a system that sees education partners collaborating to meet a shared moral and statutory duty to deliver the right to an education, and to provide a positive educational experience for all Gypsy Traveller children.

As part of the action plan, we are investing in an ambitious and focused programme of work that will be taken forward by the Scottish Traveller Education Programme—whose representatives are in the gallery—in collaboration with children and young people, their families and communities, schools and local authorities. The programme includes innovative work—for example, piloting of pre-school family programmes; working with young men to identify pathways to employment; improving training for families and education staff; and trialling of new digital approaches to participation in learning. We know that education is key to avoiding poverty and to moving people out of poverty, so in addition to the work that is being taken forward by STEP, we will invest an initial £500,000 over the lifetime of the child poverty delivery plan to work directly with Gypsy Traveller families and other partners, as part of a tailored children and families community education programme. Crucially, it will be a flexible approach that maximises the benefits for the whole family. It will be developed and delivered with the full involvement of the Gypsy Traveller community.

Members of the Gypsy Traveller communities are at high risk of experiencing poverty, whether they are in work or not. Living costs can be excessively high and incomes are often too low. The “Mums matter” project will go some way towards addressing that. We are working hard to help to improve incomes and access to employment, and to ensure that families get all the financial support to which they are entitled. Further

to that, we want to ensure that families also access programmes that are designed to alleviate poverty, including parent employment support programmes and energy efficiency programmes, which can be missed by families who live in non-traditional accommodation settings.

Through the ministerial working group and visits to sites we have heard harrowing examples of the racism that is targeted at the Gypsy Traveller community. Working with COSLA, which will take the work forward, one of the key actions in the plan is to create a local leaders programme that will support champions in every part of the country to stand up for Gypsy Traveller rights and encourage a positive shift in attitudes at local level. I encourage all members of the Scottish Parliament to be part of the local leadership work in their constituency or region.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful to the minister for taking an intervention on that. The minister will be aware that each local authority has a Gypsy Traveller liaison officer. Will the minister briefly tell Parliament how the Gypsy Traveller liaison officer will feed into the programme that she has just mentioned?

Christina McKelvie: Absolutely. We have already been working with the Gypsy Traveller liaison officers in order that they can feed into and be an integral part of the process. The main thrust is to have the local leaders informed by the people who know best—the Gypsy Traveller community and their liaison officers. COSLA is progressing and developing that work as we go along. I can get more information for Mary Fee and others, should they want it.

Mary Fee: That would be helpful.

Christina McKelvie: I will be happy to update Mary Fee as soon as I can.

Alongside the local leaders network, the Scottish Government will work with the Gypsy Traveller community to develop a marketing campaign to challenge stereotyping. A very clear way in which we can do that is by challenging the negative attitudes towards Gypsy Travellers at national level. The Gypsy Traveller community will help us to develop that, as well.

Through our continuing support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month in Scotland, we will recognise and celebrate the contribution that Gypsy Traveller communities make to our history and culture. I have something to say a bit later on, on that.

Many members here will have heard me use the phrase, “Nothing about them without them.” It is really important that we develop solutions with the community, and that we do not assume that we know best, which is what has happened for a very

long time. We will give practical and financial support to help Gypsy Traveller communities to work with us at local and national levels, so that they can be heard and have their say actioned on a wide range of issues that matter to them, and play their part in delivering that change, and have ownership of it.

As I have already said, as we move from words to action, the action plan will rightly be judged on the impact that it has on people’s lives. The role of local government is crucial in that, so we have funded an additional post at COSLA to support councils to deliver the actions locally. We will monitor progress closely and will meet Gypsy Traveller community members every six months to hear directly from them about the changes that they are seeing. If they tell us that they have not seen changes, we will take action to remedy that.

I have given a very positive update to Parliament today, but there is an issue in the background that I want to raise. I hope that I have shown that Scotland is taking decisive action to improve the lives of Gypsy Traveller communities. That stands in stark contrast to the actions of the United Kingdom Government. A current Home Office consultation proposes to increase police powers to take action against Gypsy Travellers by arresting individuals and seizing their assets, effectively criminalising their traditional way of life. We should all be shocked and angered by that, and we should express our strong opposition to what amounts to a clear breach of human rights.

Members should make no mistake: supporting my motion makes our opposition to the actions of the UK Government absolutely crystal clear, so I call on all members across the chamber to speak out against the regressive and punitive approach to Gypsy Travellers that is proposed south of the border. We must all take a stand against discrimination, whether it is in Scotland—and we take responsibility for what happens in Scotland, now—the UK, or wider.

I will reiterate a point that I have made several times. We can no longer allow racism towards our Gypsy Traveller communities to be normalised or tolerated. The Scottish Government and COSLA leaders have committed to taking decisive action. That is not just a job for Government; it is a job for all of us to play our part in. Those of us who have an elected position of authority have a particular responsibility to speak out and challenge what has been described as

“the last form of acceptable racism.”

That is not a nice thing even to say out loud.

I will give the final word to the Gypsy Traveller women who spoke at the launch of the plan in October. One of the women told me:

"We want this plan to give our children and young people and future generation a better life. It has been like this for too long."

I could not agree more. The time for change is now. With that in mind, I call on all members to play their part in delivering that change.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the joint Scottish Government and COSLA action plan, *Improving the Lives of Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers*, which aims to deliver better outcomes in the key areas of accommodation, health and education, and incomes; recognises the vital role of local government to transform the life chances of Gypsy/Travellers across the country; commends the Gypsy/Traveller community for the role that it has played in developing the plan, and supports its continued involvement to shape and deliver the actions at the national and local level; welcomes the contribution that Gypsy/Traveller communities have made to Scottish history and continue to make to its culture and heritage, and agrees to actively challenge any form of prejudice or discrimination towards Gypsy/Travellers and work together within a human rights framework to accelerate improvements for this community.

14:39

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I thank the Scottish Government for bringing forward this important and timely debate on Gypsy Travellers and how we can support them. I commend Christina McKelvie, Angela Constance and Mary Fee for all the work that they have done in the area. I was pleased to speak in Mary Fee's members' business debate in the Parliament in May 2018 and in Angela Constance's members' business debate the following month. Since those debates, those MSPs in particular have continued to fight to improve the lives of Gypsy Travellers, and they deserve a great deal of credit for that.

It was way back in 2001 that the first Scottish Parliament committee report on Gypsy Travellers was published. Nearly 20 years on, it is clear that a lot more work still needs to be done, so I welcome the Scottish Government's latest plans to help the community. In particular, I welcome the COSLA and Scottish Government joint national action plan, which is mentioned in the motion.

As a member of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee, I have seen and heard at first hand the many issues that the Gypsy Traveller community faces. The population of the community in Scotland is approximately between 15,000 and 20,000. As we have heard, and as the evidence shows, for far too many of those people, a great deal of progress is still to be made on housing, education, employment and health.

As the minister set out, the Gypsy Traveller community has lived in Scotland for generation after generation. There is a considerable amount of diversity among Gypsy and Traveller

communities in Scotland. From one group to another, the language used might be entirely different and groups of Gypsy Travellers might often have entirely distinct customs and traditions. That can be as simple as some people referring to themselves as Gypsies while others refer to themselves as Travellers. As Amnesty International has identified, Gypsy Travellers are not a uniform group or section of Scottish society. Some continue to live a nomadic lifestyle, whereas many live in conventional homes.

John Finnie: The member mentioned the nomadic lifestyle, which is not just within the boundaries of Scotland but outwith them. I hope that the member will mention the concerns that the minister expressed about the UK Government's approach, which is absolutely disgraceful.

Annie Wells: I will reflect on what the minister said and write to her with my views on that.

Regardless of their language, customs or everyday way of life, every group of Gypsy Travellers is recognised in law as a distinct ethnic group and all routinely suffer from discrimination.

Despite residing in Scotland for hundreds of years, Gypsy Travellers remain one of the most marginalised and isolated communities in Scotland. Discrimination towards Gypsy Travellers is still very much accepted and has been described by the Scottish Human Rights Commission as the

"last bastion of respectable racism".

Amnesty International considers Scottish Gypsy Travellers to be a marginalised community that continues to be discriminated against, and it wants an end to the widespread and enduring failure to respect the rights of Scottish Gypsy Travellers.

From evidence taken by the Equalities and Human Rights Committee, we know how Gypsy Travellers are viewed by many people. Members of the Gypsy Traveller community believe that there has been very little change in attitudes in recent years. In 2017, the committee took evidence from Gypsy Travellers to mark human rights day. At that time, Davie Donaldson, a member of the young Gypsy Traveller assembly, said that "very little has changed" and that, since the inception of the Scottish Parliament,

"The situation has remained completely stagnant."—
[*Official Report, Equalities and Human Rights Committee, 7 December 2018; c 3.*]

The committee also heard about the fear that surrounds openly identifying as being a Gypsy Traveller. That can affect people with regard to housing, education, social care and a host of other issues.

The evidence that proves the existence of discrimination against Gypsy Travellers is far from

only anecdotal. The report “Scottish Social Attitudes 2015: Attitudes to discrimination and positive action” showed that social attitudes to Gypsy Travellers in Scotland remain deeply negative. Gypsy Travellers were viewed as the group least suited to being primary school teachers, with around a third—34 per cent—of respondents saying that someone from the community would be unsuitable. The report also showed that 31 per cent of people in Scotland would be unhappy if a relative married someone from the Gypsy Traveller community.

Those attitudes could be a consequence of another of the report’s findings: that most people living in Scotland have never had any direct contact with a Gypsy Traveller. The second-hand information that people receive through the media and other sources has a significant impact on their opinions and understanding. Whatever the source of that understanding, the Scottish Conservatives are clear that prejudice against Scotland’s Gypsy Travellers is on-going and must be stamped out. Discrimination on the basis of race or culture is unacceptable.

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): I am glad that Ms Wells says that none of us wants any attack on the Gypsy Traveller community. However, I am concerned about the fact that racism is often exacerbated by elected members. Will the Scottish Conservatives take action against any of their members who say anything untoward about Gypsy Traveller communities? For example, the current Scotland Office minister Douglas Ross said that, if he were Prime Minister for the day, the first thing that he would do is take action against Gypsy Travellers’ unauthorised encampments. Will Ms Wells ensure that any Scottish Conservative members are punished if they put forward racist attitudes?

Annie Wells: I make the commitment today that any form of racism or discrimination would not be tolerated by the Scottish Conservatives.

The impact of on-going discrimination on Gypsy Travellers is well documented. Many people in that community are alienated from public services, which is one reason why I support the action plan’s focus on the vital role of local government in improving the lives of Gypsy Travellers. If they are to engage with public services, the solutions must be at a local level, because obvious barriers remain in place. Many Gypsy Travellers come from a culture that is self-reliant. Others in that community will have no permanent address. We will reach and help those people only through a plan that begins and ends with local government taking the lead.

It is clear that marginalisation is having a real impact on those communities. Basic health needs

are not being met. Many Gypsy Travellers face difficulties when trying to visit a GP, and we know from the evidence that some will travel as far as 300 miles to see a dentist or doctor who they trust and who they know will see them.

Those are key reasons why Gypsy Travellers experience inexcusable health inequalities and lower life expectancy. The age profile of Gypsy Travellers is much younger than that of the population as a whole. Only 28 per cent of the community’s population are aged 45 and over, compared with 44 per cent of the population of Scotland as a whole. I welcome the joint action plan’s approach to tackling those problems by delivering joined-up services and through collaboration between the national health service and community partners across the north-east and Dumfries and Galloway.

We see a similar pattern in education, in which outcomes were the worst for Gypsy Traveller families. An analysis of the 2011 census found that half of Gypsy Travellers aged 16 or over had no qualifications, when the figure for the whole of Scotland was 27 per cent; only 16 per cent of Gypsy Travellers held qualifications of level 4 or above, compared to 26 per cent of the population as a whole; and 38 per cent of Gypsy Travellers aged 16 to 24 were full-time students compared to 46 per cent of the general population in that age group. Clearly, we must do more to provide the community with flexible learning alternatives. I am also pleased that the joint action plan seeks to deal with that issue and that it references the Gypsy Traveller education group in South Lanarkshire, which has expanded provision for local kids.

There are also housing issues to deal with in the Gypsy Traveller community. There is evidence that minimum standards have not been achieved at council-assigned sites. At times, housing has been built in undesirable or unsafe locations such as unpopular brownfield sites. We have also heard that sites experience issues with dampness, mould and access to water. I therefore welcome the fact that the joint action plan will deliver a review of housing and investment programmes by March 2021, which I hope will ensure that all Gypsy Traveller accommodation meets standards and is fully considered in local housing policy.

The action plan seeks to ensure equality of opportunity for all of Scotland’s Gypsy Travellers. As we have heard, it focuses on five key areas: providing more and better accommodation; improving access to public services; maximising household incomes; tackling racism and discrimination; and strengthening community development and engagement. As we have heard, the involvement of the Gypsy Traveller community is even more important than having local leaders.

Any solution to the discrimination that Gypsy Travellers face and the problems that they incur in accessing services must be implemented alongside that community.

The plan also states that consideration will be given to what further data we require, which is an issue that I have raised previously. I hope that the data will be developed quickly so that we can see more clearly where the problems lie and what actions are having a positive impact. The issue might sound inconsequential compared with some of the problems that Gypsy Travellers face, but there is no doubt that more accurate recording and measurement of data would help the community over the long term.

I welcome the Scottish Government's work so far and I hope that we will start to see progress for a group that has too often been left behind.

14:51

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): As a long-term advocate for Gypsy Travellers, I am delighted that such an important debate is taking place. In opening for Scottish Labour, I thank the Scottish Government for lodging the motion and confirm that we will support it at decision time.

The motion allows us to address the array of issues that impact on the daily lives of Scotland's Gypsy Traveller community. That community is among the most marginalised communities in Scotland, and it is vital that we listen and give a voice to its issues and concerns, whether the Gypsy Travellers are living or travelling in Scotland or come from other countries for periods of time. Scottish Labour welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to addressing the long-standing discrimination and social and economic inequalities that the Gypsy Traveller community faces.

I have been a member of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee in this parliamentary session and the Equal Opportunities Committee in the previous parliamentary session, and I know that the Minister for Older People and Equalities is sincere in her commitment to resolving the many issues that will be discussed today. I hope that, through the establishment of the ministerial working group and the continued ambition of its aims, we will see real and lasting change that will deliver on the ambition of improving the lives of Gypsy Travellers.

It can be said that Gypsy Travellers' needs are overlooked in discussing access to education, health and housing. That theme has come from the voices of Gypsy Travellers on the working group and in general.

I welcome the joint action plan for 2019-21 and the funding pledge of £3 million. A lot of admirable and achievable actions are contained in the plan, and I will come back to them when I close for Scottish Labour at the end of the debate.

I have said on numerous occasions that the discrimination against the Gypsy Traveller community appears to be the last acceptable form of racism, and the minister made that point in her opening comments. That discrimination comes in all manners, it is driven by prejudice and a lack of understanding, and it is perpetrated by some elected politicians and the media. That should shame each and every one of us, as elected representatives who sit in the Scottish Parliament.

It is our collective responsibility, working with colleagues in local government, to take leadership and set an example to the wider population that racism in all its forms is not to be tolerated. The public are more aware than ever before of the discrimination against and harassment of members of the black and minority ethnic community and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, but there is still underlying racism and discrimination against the Gypsy Traveller community. That is witnessed in the results of the previous social attitudes survey, which Annie Wells mentioned in her opening remarks. Despite some progress having been made between 2010 and 2016, there are still some shocking statistics in that survey. We need to do all that we can to tackle that discrimination and raise awareness of the issues that the Scottish Gypsy Traveller community faces.

That discrimination can be seen in all facets of life. The Gypsy Traveller community faces vast health inequalities and is at a disadvantage from the start of life, with higher rates of infant mortality, maternal death and stillbirth than the rest of society. Towards the end of life, Gypsy Travellers face a social care crisis that would unnerve anyone else, and Gypsy Travellers are more likely to have a limiting, long-term health problem or a disability. The incidence of mental health issues is also high among members of the community, particularly young Gypsy Travellers, which is not helped by the pressures of their being part of a community that is strongly rejected and demonised by the rest of society.

Our education system has long failed young Gypsy Travellers and has limited their opportunities in life and their acceptance in settled communities. Gypsy Traveller children have the lowest attainment rates, with less than half of them leaving school with more than one qualification. The main reason why Gypsy Traveller children do not complete secondary school is bullying and discrimination. That is saddening and unacceptable. We need an education system that

is welcoming for all our children and that celebrates what their culture can bring to the classroom.

The traditional way of life for the Gypsy Traveller community is threatened daily due to discrimination by local government and local communities. On numerous occasions, they have been banned from their historical sites, with traditional stopping places blocked or barricaded, and have instead been forced to stay in car parks. The sites that are provided offer poor conditions, with no heating in the amenity blocks and limited or very poor accessibility.

The discrimination extends to representation in the media. A recent report found that 68 per cent of published articles about the community were negative. Words used in those articles included “illegal”, “crime”, “aggressive” and “disgusting”. Those are words of intolerance that are used to demonise other human beings and set them apart. When we do not speak out against that language but allow it to be used, we are complicit. It is our responsibility to eradicate that discrimination.

Despite the negativity that Gypsy Travellers face, theirs is a community with a rich and diverse cultural history in Scotland that stretches back for 1,000 years. Gypsy Travellers are part of the heterogeneous fabric of Scottish society. They are a diverse community that is made up of many distinct groups, each with different cultures and traditions. Some are settled, living in homes or on permanent sites; some travel in the summer months; others continue the nomadic tradition, travelling from site to site, continuing their traditions. As a community with distinctly oral histories, they pass their history down from generation to generation through all manner of art forms including storytelling, songs and ballads.

Gypsy Travellers have their own language, Cant. Although it is mostly shared only within the community, some of their words have become part of our collective language. Presiding Officer, the next time you are feeling peckish and use the word “scran”, remember that that word is borrowed from the Gypsy Traveller community.

The Scottish Gypsy Traveller community has some fantastic youth advocates, who are working to improve their communities and to promote their culture. I take this opportunity to praise the work of Davie and Charlotte Donaldson. Many people will know Davie Donaldson, who regularly promotes the life of his community and works to break down barriers and challenge discrimination. I also congratulate Charlotte on becoming an ambassador for one of Prince Charles’s youth charities. She is pushing for better representation of her community in Parliament. Perhaps she will speak in the chamber at some point in the future,

advocating for her community from her real, lived experience.

Once again, I thank the Scottish Government for today’s debate. Prior to speaking again at the end of the debate, I look forward to hearing from members across the chamber in what, I am sure, will be a constructive and consensual debate.

The Presiding Officer: I call John Finnie to open the debate for the Scottish Green Party.

15:00

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I join other members in thanking the Scottish Government for bringing the debate to the chamber, and the minister for her opening speech. Indeed, I thank both ministers who are present—Christina McKelvie and Kevin Stewart—for addressing an issue that is mentioned in the members’ briefing that has been provided by Amnesty International UK. That reminds me that I should refer members to my entry in the register of members’ interests, as I am a member of that organisation. The briefing says that, in 2013, it facilitated meetings with the United Nations special rapporteur Ms Rolnik, who concluded that the UK and Scottish Governments needed to

“Strengthen efforts to address stigma and discrimination in the Gypsy and Traveller communities”.

Ironically, the wee bit of card that the minister mentioned is very symbolic in the messages that it sends, which are, first and foremost, that people have listened and then responded. I congratulate the Scottish Government on its efforts. I do not sense any complacency from it—it seems to accept that there is a way to go yet—but I am disappointed that the Conservative Party, which I would have thought could quite reasonably assume that questions would be asked of it on the issue, has not come here with answers. However, let us try to be positive and hope that the Westminster Government will rethink its entire narrative on the Gypsy Traveller community—and most certainly its direction of travel, because it is highly discriminatory and unhelpful.

Other members have alluded to discrimination by the media. I recall an occasion on which I was approached by a journalist to comment on an incident—I will not bother repeating what it was about. I gave my quote, but the journalist was completely dissatisfied with it because it did not meet the narrative that was being followed, which was that the perpetrators of the crime were the people who were in the caravans, rather than their being the victims of the wrongdoing, which they turned out to be. Such an attitude is a big hurdle that we have to cross, but cross it we must.

I note that Amnesty also referred to Gypsy Travellers and wider Roma and Gypsy Traveller

groups in its response to the Scottish Government's consultation on hate crime. Let us be clear that much of what we are talking about in the debate involves crime and must be addressed as such.

Words can be very important. For that reason, I also thank COSLA for its briefing for members, which starts by mentioning the importance of having a joint national action plan. I have often spoken with great frustration about the apparent demarcation that exists regarding planning as a local issue and central Government's perhaps understandable unwillingness to get involved in that. It is therefore good to see that joint work is being done. The "shared commitment" and "collective effort" that are mentioned in COSLA's briefing will drive forward the many positive initiatives that it discusses.

It is also important to praise the other examples of good work that has been done, some of which have been mentioned by other speakers. From COSLA's briefing, we learn of the mobile education opportunities that are being delivered to young people who live by the roadside in Moray. The Gypsy Traveller lifestyle is a nomadic one and we must do everything possible to facilitate it. I am therefore delighted to learn of initiatives on the piloting of negotiated stopping places and the mapping of traditional stopping places. I have said often enough—we saw an example of it last summer—that it is amazing how readily history can be changed by someone with a JCB taking a puckle of stones and blocking off such a place. After that, someone gets in touch to highlight that people have stopped there for generation upon generation—for hundreds of years—for example while they are collecting whelks or mushrooms. Not all such issues can be sorted out by legislation; it is quite apparent that only discussion will move them forward.

It is appropriate to say that Highland Council has done very positive work in the significant upgrading at Newtonmore. That has been much welcomed by residents there, whom I had the pleasure of visiting a few months ago. It has also worked on the reinstatement at Kentallen, which was bustling with activity when I passed it on Friday. That is what we want to see. There were caravans everywhere and kids running about, which was great.

I will be parochial for a moment and address some comments about my area to the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning. Argyll Community Housing Association is the only registered social landlord in Scotland that has responsibility for providing Gypsy Traveller sites, so it is in a unique situation. If I said that only one housing association was providing homeless accommodation, people might think that that was

peculiar. I wonder whether the housing minister intends to raise the matter with the Scottish Housing Regulator or the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations. I know that our colleague Mike Russell is facilitating a meeting about the issue today in the county of Argyll.

As always, finance is a factor. On Friday, I had the great pleasure of opening a housing development in Connel, which is the result of investment of £4.9 million, with the Scottish Government providing £2.15 million, Argyll and Bute Council providing £1 million and ACHA providing just over £2 million. That is the kind of joint working that we want to see, but it seems not to happen with regard to site provision. It would be good if the minister could comment on that.

Kevin Stewart: I will intervene briefly to do so. I say to Mr Finnie that Mr Russell is regularly on at me about the situation in Argyll and Bute. Mr Finnie is right to point out that the situation there is somewhat different from the situation in the rest of the country. However, I expect the same co-operation between the council and the housing association when it comes to accommodation for Gypsy Travellers as happens in relation to the delivery of homes in other parts of Argyll and Bute. I hope that such co-operation becomes a reality. My door is always open if Mr Finnie wants to discuss the matter further.

John Finnie: I have been at the minister's door a few times and I have always had a courteous listening. In relation to the situation that I mentioned, I do not know whether a comparison can be drawn with the situation in Girvan in South Ayrshire. I am grateful for the offer to follow up the issue with the minister.

I will give an example of joint working. The minister, Mary Fee and other members will remember Mary MacDonald, who is one of the Travellers from Ledaig who came to the Parliament to give members some very welcome training. Mrs MacDonald has a profoundly disabled adult daughter, Margaret, and ACHA has been instrumental in involving her and her family in the provision of a house, which is very welcome.

It is important that we recognise differences between us, but we have far more in common when it comes to much of what we have been talking about. We all need to live somewhere, whatever we call home, and we all need education. The big difference between us and Gypsy Travellers is the nomadic lifestyle and the prejudice that has been played out for centuries and centuries, but I think that there is a lot of progress.

I do not know how much more time I have, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): You can have another couple of minutes, if you like.

John Finnie: That is very kind of you.

People will be aware of the abuse that the Roma community is putting up with across Europe, and the draconian laws that are being put in place at a time when we are seeing a rise in fascism. I would have thought that that would indicate to the UK Government a need to rein back on its approach rather than follow the approach that is being taken elsewhere.

Members talked about the young ambassadors, and it was great to hear about Davie Donaldson and his sister. A lot of people are engaged—that is not to take anything away from Davie and his sister—and there is a growing willingness on the part of young people to engage with Article 12 in Scotland, which is an organisation that empowers young people. I have said it before, but I make no apology for saying again that one of the most compelling things that I have heard is that a young woman who received a lot of abuse at high school has been empowered by Article 12 in Scotland and is going back into the school to deliver diversity training. I will not mention the place, but I see that the Minister for Older People and Equalities, Christina McKelvie, knows where it is. Such progress is very positive.

We must keep talking about the issue and encourage local authorities to ensure that their councillors understand not just the planning basis but the ethical basis on which they make decisions. We need more things like the wee card that Ms McKelvie mentioned, which is good. I remember taking a lot of evidence on mobile medical records. Anything that circumvents problems and makes life easier for folk is to be welcomed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Alex Cole-Hamilton. You have a generous six, seven or eight minutes.

15:09

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): You are always generous, Presiding Officer.

I am very grateful to the Government for bringing its motion to the Parliament today and for the publication of the joint action plan with COSLA. I, too, welcome my friend Peter Barrett to the gallery.

The last clause of the motion before us speaks to the history of Gypsies and Travellers in our country, and it is a proud history, which began in an atmosphere of co-existence and mutual respect. Their story in these islands is 1,000 years in the making, as we have already heard. They

first appear in recorded history in Scotland as early as 1505, during the reign of James IV, when the king paid tribute and offered a gift to the king—as he described it—of the Romanies. In 1530, a group of Romanies danced for King James V just across the road at Holyrood palace, and a Romany herbalist called Baptista cured him of an ailment. Romany migration to Scotland continued during the 16th century, and we gave safe harbour to several groups who were accepted here after being expelled from England.

However, the standing of Gypsy Travellers in Scotland has diminished over the centuries, to the point where they now represent an afterthought in public policy and are unfairly considered a nuisance by communities and their representatives. It is no overstatement to describe their treatment, as Mary Fee has already done, as the last form of acceptable racism in Scotland.

Shamus McPhee—who has made several presentations to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee, of which I am very proud to be deputy convener—is an activist and historian for Gypsy Travellers in Scotland. He summed up that reality eloquently when he said:

“Gypsy Travellers are largely absent from history or misrepresented and mythologised in our culture and folklore—often in the crudest and most damaging of ways. Their story is often untold or misunderstood, reinforcing their marginalisation in society with denial of identity, visibility and respect.”

The action plan speaks to much of the challenge that Shamus laid out, and I welcome it for that.

There are indeed large gaps in public knowledge regarding the cultural identity of Gypsy Traveller communities, which has served to deepen the prejudice and further ostracise them from wider society, due in part to a misrepresentation of their cultural practices. Again, that is why the action plan matters.

Improving the lives of Gypsy Travellers should matter to us all. They have ethnic minority status under UK law and are specifically mentioned in equalities legislation. As such, they have a right to be protected from all forms of racial aggravation.

Yet equality seems more out of reach for those communities than ever before. Indeed, Davie Donaldson, who has already been quoted several times in the debate and who is himself a Traveller and a passionate advocate for the rights of Gypsy Travellers, said of the general election that has just passed:

“This is the worst election I have ever seen in terms of rhetoric towards Gypsy/Traveller people. The division coming out is causing real real worry.”

I think that a big part of that is down to the fact that many Travellers, particularly those who lead a traditional, nomadic lifestyle, are disenfranchised

from our political system. It is not that they do not have the vote; it is that they are not necessarily registered to vote or are not there to exercise that right or to avail themselves of the normal aspects of our democracy, such as constituency surgeries and public meetings.

In Scottish politics over the past few decades, Gypsy Traveller communities have been considered problems in our constituencies rather than as stakeholders or voters. When we enfranchised 16-year-olds, there was a demonstrable positive shift in the language that was used about young people in public policy. In this chamber, we need to recognise Gypsy Traveller communities for the stakeholders that they are in our country. They are our constituents. I look forward to hearing the first voices of Gypsy Travellers represented in this chamber, but I feel that we might still be a considerable way from that happening.

We have not properly reflected the voices of Gypsy Travellers until now, and the result is that politicians have never felt the need to appeal for the votes of Gypsy Travellers. We can boil that down to the crudest thing that motivates us as politicians. We are also seldom visited by Gypsy Travellers in constituency surgeries. As such, the issues that those communities face go overlooked time and again, but those issues are manifold. There is a fundamental lack of awareness of the rights to which they are entitled, particularly with regard to housing and access to a home. According to a report that was published in March last year, only one in 10 Gypsy Travellers is aware of the level of site standard that they are entitled to; it is therefore small wonder that 11 of the 27 sites in Scotland fall short on issues of site safety, facilities and security. For example, the Collin site in Dumfries and Galloway missed the bar on seven out of eight standards.

Many issues that affect Gypsy Traveller communities are factors that we would not tolerate for our own constituents. We should all think of those communities as our constituents, even if they are nomadic and move around, because they are citizens of this country who have a fair right to representation. As we have heard many times in the debate, on many sites they face restricted access to modern toilet and kitchen facilities, which has underlying cleanliness and safety issues. In addition, many children's play areas are not deemed safe by the communities that use them, which in turn hinders child development.

It is not just about housing or the want of a home, though. The Equality Act 2010 protects by law the rights of citizens in Scotland in the workplace and the wider community, a fact that is widely ignored when it comes to Gypsy Travellers. Modern attitudes show the extent of the challenge

that prejudicial attitudes can have in terms of creating a level playing field in the workplace. For example, when asked, a full 35 per cent of people in Scotland said that a Gypsy Traveller would be "very" or "fairly" unsuitable as a primary school teacher. This is 2020. I cannot believe that that is an acceptable attitude in modern Scotland. As parliamentarians, we have a duty to challenge that attitude wherever we hear it; it is incumbent on all of us to end the discrimination that proves such a barrier in many aspects of Travellers' lives.

The absence of a fixed address can also cause, as we have heard, difficulties in enrolling children for school or registering with a GP. Those difficulties mean that access to adequate education or healthcare is still behind what it could or should be in such communities, which plays a part in the demonstrably poorer levels of educational attainment in those communities that we hear about. The list of difficulties goes on and on.

People should never have to feel shame about their cultural identity. However, for all the reasons that I have stated, and which members on all sides of the chamber have so eloquently presented, many people in Gypsy Traveller communities are afraid to identify with their cultures publicly for fear of a judgment that should be consigned to history. The joint plan is a good step towards that goal, and the Liberal Democrats will have no hesitation in supporting it at decision time tonight.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Speeches should be of around six minutes, please, but we have a little time in hand for interventions, if members would like to take those.

15:17

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): As has been the case with other members, it gives me great pleasure to speak in this afternoon's debate on Scotland's Gypsy Travellers. I welcome the publication by the Scottish Government and COSLA of their joint plan, which seeks to improve the living standards of Gypsy Traveller communities as well as highlight the contributions that they have made to our country, many of which have already been talked about in the debate. I take the opportunity to remind the chamber that I am a member of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee and convener of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on racial equality.

When we speak about Gypsy Travellers in Scotland, we are speaking about a diverse group of communities with different cultures, languages and traditions, whose recorded presence in Scotland, as Alex Cole-Hamilton told us, stretches

back nearly 1,000 years. However, despite the fact that we have lived alongside such communities in Scotland for so long, they face discrimination, prejudice and lower standards of living compared with others who live here in Scotland. In this chamber last year, many members lamented the fact that prejudice against Gypsy Travellers is arguably the final acceptable form of racism in Scotland today. We have heard that point echoed in other speeches this afternoon.

Just over three years ago, the Scottish Government commissioned research into prejudices across our society that found that roughly one in three of those who were surveyed—I know that some of these points have already been made in the debate, but I think that they are worth repeating—said that they would not be comfortable if a close relative was in a relationship with a Gypsy Traveller. Similar attitudes were displayed towards Travellers and Gypsies being primary school teachers. The survey consistently identified Gypsy Travellers as being among the people in Scottish society who faced the most prejudice.

When we examine the metrics that are used to measure a happy and fulfilled life, we find that Gypsy Travellers are worse off than any other community in Scotland—that point was well made by Mary Fee, who I know has done tremendous work in this area. The high levels of poverty that are experienced by Gypsy Travellers are linked to poor health and a lack of employment opportunities. There is no place in Scotland for the discrimination that our Gypsy Traveller communities face, which is why it is important that the joint plan that has been formulated is now actioned.

In her opening speech, Christina McKelvie set us the challenge of condemning the UK Government's actions, and I am happy to do that. People might think that Gypsy Traveller communities would be able to look to their Government, in Scotland and in the UK, for support, but as we have already heard, in the case of the UK Government, they would be wrong.

Last November, the UK Home Secretary commented on the Tory manifesto and how it sets out plans to give police more powers to

“arrest and seize the property and vehicles of trespassers who set up unauthorised encampments, in order to protect our communities.”

That might look like a legal measure, but we can all read between the lines—in the context, it is part of a long history of criminalisation of and discrimination against Travellers. The proposed laws would allow police to seize the homes of Gypsy Traveller people by force, and to destroy their property without compensation. I am sure that we are all aware that the people of Scotland

voted against that manifesto by a significant margin.

That the Scottish Government's approach is more compassionate than that of its Westminster counterpart is demonstrated by the plan that it has published with COSLA. It is a five-point plan that seeks to address issues that Gypsy Travellers face by educating them on their rights; protecting their accommodation spaces; tackling discrimination against their communities; strengthening their community development and engagement; and ensuring that their household income reaches its full potential.

The action plan has not been developed prescriptively; rather, the Government and COSLA have actively worked with the communities involved to develop it. We in the chamber must acknowledge the contributions of the community members and activists who have worked tirelessly in collaborating to develop the plan. Other members have mentioned a few names already.

The plan will have financial backing of £3 million. The vast majority of those funds will be used to upgrade and improve the living standards of people who are based on public sites. The rest of the funds will be invested in education, social services and general support for Gypsy Traveller communities.

The plan is set to be delivered over the next two years. To ensure accountability and updates on progress, biannual updates will be provided, which will seek to maintain grass-roots community engagement with the plan.

The publication of the plan is a positive step forward, and it is another great example of what the Scottish Government, COSLA and other public and third sector bodies have been doing to tackle the issue. Last June, we had a successful Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month. Last September, the Scottish Government announced a shared commitment to work with Police Scotland to challenge discrimination and promote equality for Gypsy Travellers. As Annie Wells has mentioned, debates were held in the chamber in which there was broad political consensus across all parties to work together to improve the lives of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers.

As I usually do in debates, I want to talk briefly about the local situation in my constituency or, more broadly, in North Lanarkshire. When I spoke in last year's debate on the issue, there was no provision for Traveller sites in North Lanarkshire, although I noted that the council had a housing needs assessment under way to determine the need for provision. Today, I read the council's strategic housing investment plan for 2020-21 to 2024-25. There are no planned housing investment projects for Gypsy Travellers and no

evidence that there is a need for a permanent site. I am a bit surprised about that, but I can ask the council for further clarification, because I think that that is disappointing.

However, it is positive that a strategic corporate Gypsy Traveller liaison group has been established to consider the accommodation needs and aspirations of Gypsy Travellers. It will help to ensure that services are supportive of the cultural needs and preferences of that population group and that there is alignment with the new national action plan for Gypsy Travellers. The group will continue to review the evidence and data to help to inform future provision of housing and other services.

Therefore, there is evidence that the national plan is being implemented locally in my area—albeit maybe not quite to the extent that I would like it to be—and I will write to the council to seek an update from the strategic group and to ask it to do more.

In essence, the debate is about an issue that we have all discussed previously in the chamber—that of building a better Scotland. Improving the lives of marginalised groups such as Gypsy Traveller communities is a commitment that the Parliament and the Scottish Government take seriously. The UK Government's dismissive, cold attitude is something that we should never seek to replicate up here.

I ask members to support the motion.

15:24

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I thank colleagues for their contributions thus far in the debate. It is a topic of great interest and passion to many; that is evident from the speeches that we have heard.

As a former member of this Parliament's Equalities and Human Rights Committee, I know that this Parliament—and many of its members right across the political spectrum—takes the issue seriously; and I do not doubt the genuine desire among members who have spoken today to improve outcomes for Gypsy Travellers right across Scotland.

I also welcome those who join us in the public gallery, and those who are watching the debate online or otherwise—Christina McKelvie is right that this is their Parliament. I get the impression that the issue of improving the lives of Gypsy Travellers is a long-standing one that has been debated many times both within and outwith the walls of this Parliament. I have participated in some of those debates, and, in the few years that I have sat in this chamber, the overall tone of the debate around the issue has improved vastly. I

also get the impression that, previously, there were accusations of lots of warm words, but not enough action, from politicians. That is why, as I listened to the minister today, I was pleased that it feels like much action has been taken—and positive action at that.

This is an important debate to have in general because, as others have said, the Gypsy Traveller community in Scotland is a vital part of our history and culture. As Alex Cole-Hamilton so eloquently illustrated in his speech, the historic nature of their involvement in Scottish society has often been overlooked. However, most people's views and opinions are formed on the basis of recent and modern, rather than ancient, history. The Gypsy Traveller community finds itself specifically at risk of abuse and aggression and such like, because of a basic and—perhaps—fundamental lack of understanding of its way of life today, not as it used to be. Herein lies the cause of how we got to where we are: generations of negativity, born—often—of a lack of willingness to engage with that community.

I am happy to put on record that there is no place whatever for racial or cultural discrimination anywhere in Scotland, towards any community—in politics, in the media or otherwise. However, that requires education and mutual respect. That involves all communities, including “settled communities”—I will use that phrase, although I am aware that many Travellers are in settled communities—coming together to find compromise where compromise is possible. There is also a need to foster improvement in relations and relationships between communities, which may—in some cases—require difficult decisions about putting the past behind us.

Members will have received from Amnesty International a very helpful briefing that puts forward propositions to ensure that this Parliament removes some of the barriers to healthcare, education and housing, and tackles the general discrimination that is faced in employment and in the workplace. The comments are interesting; I read them with great interest, and I thank Amnesty International for its input. One of the specific calls in its briefing is that legislation should allow for self-identification of communities and individuals. Although the minister touched briefly on that point at the beginning of the debate, I would be keen to hear more in her closing speech about what her interpretation of that request is, and whether the Government will take any specific action on it.

I think that we all know—this is a well-rehearsed point—the extent to which Gypsy Travellers face discrimination in public life and the media. To give the chamber a flavour of some of the findings that the Amnesty briefing presents, 48 per cent—nearly half—of all news stories about Gypsy

Travellers were negative, and just 25 per cent were positive.

Kevin Stewart: Will Jamie Greene give way?

Jamie Greene: I will give way in a second; I would like to paint a picture of the landscape first.

In 38 per cent of stories, a connection to criminality was made, and 32 per cent of stories contained specific reference to poor hygiene and dirt—those were the words that were analysed. In addition, on the 78 recorded occasions on which local authority politicians were asked to comment on Gypsy Travellers, just four comments were positive and 48 were negative.

Kevin Stewart: As Mr Finnie has already highlighted, many media outlets have an agenda when it comes to dealing with Gypsy Traveller issues. However, I point out that they get what they want from many elected members in terms of that negativity. Will Mr Greene join me in condemning those folks who—it sometimes seems—go out of their way to be negative towards Gypsy Traveller communities? I highlight, again, the current Scottish Office minister and some of the comments that he has made in the past.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Jamie Greene can have extra time.

Jamie Greene: I thank the minister for raising that issue again in the chamber. It has been raised in previous debates. The previous time I spoke—in Mary Fee's debate—I was happy to put on the record then, and I am equally happy to put on the record now, that I do not condone language that makes specific reference to the Gypsy Traveller community. I have always said that and I will say it today, tomorrow and as many times as the minister would like, if it fills him with any confidence that politicians have to set an example on this issue. We have to walk the walk and not just talk the talk. I am doing that today and I hope that other people will do the same.

I will continue my point about the media. As someone who spent many years in television before I came into Parliament, I know that this community has been used to provide entertainment, rather than education, to the masses. However, I also know that mass media has an important role to play to educate, as does our education system. We need diversity in the classroom, and the language that is used will influence young people. If, when young people go home, their parents use derogatory language—even though their teachers do not—those views will be passed on through the generations, just as is the case with sectarianism, racism or homophobia.

In the short time that I have, I thank COSLA for the role that it has played. Its briefing for MSPs was very helpful, and includes this sentence:

“All 32 COSLA Leaders unanimously endorse the joint action plan and committed to ensuring these activities deliver meaningful and lasting change for Gypsy/Traveller communities.”

It refers to all 32 council leaders. Our local authorities are made of varied shapes, colours and sizes of administration, so that is an important point. This must be a true cross-party effort, be it on housing, refurbishing and offering minimum standards on public sites or access to the services that we take for granted, such as water, power and sanitation—simple things that every one of us will go home to tonight and take for granted—and the same flexible learning opportunities and full and proper access to public services for health, social care and education.

It is not a good example when the first thing that pops up when we search for “Gypsy” on a council's website is “complaints and concerns”. That is not a positive reflection of the good work that I know that councils do. It shows that many people's first point of contact is negative. That has to change. Ignorance is not an excuse. We all have a role to play to support community cohesion.

I will vote for today's motion, because there is very little in there to disagree with. I hope that it is helpful if the Conservatives support the motion. I will not use the vote as a proxy vote to deal with legislative issues in another Parliament. It is right to support the Scottish National Party or indeed any party if it leads by example. I support, commend and thank it for the good work that it is doing. We should lead by example. I hope that my comments today will fill members with confidence that these benches are committed to supporting the Scottish Government in its endeavours.

15:33

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I welcome the Scottish Government's debate this afternoon, which has allowed us to discuss the issues that are faced by Scotland's Gypsy Traveller community. I also welcome the publication of the action plan and the recognition of the contributions that are made to our society by the Gypsy Traveller community.

During my time as a member of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to meet a number of Gypsy Travellers. Talking to members, both young and old, and hearing at first hand their stories and shared experiences was both fascinating and disconcerting.

Since the Gypsy Traveller community's arrival in Europe, they have often faced persecution, with negative and derogatory identities forced upon them by wider society. I was greatly saddened to see just how much of that prejudice still exists today. A video was posted on social media of one of the young Gypsy Travellers who attended one of our evidence sessions. The responses that the video attracted were shocking, so much so that one of the clerks commented:

“Over the last 12 months we've seen online comments on the high profile work we've undertaken on disabled and BSL people, asylum seekers and refugees, LGBTI people, bullied and harassed children in schools, gender equality on public boards and voting for prisoners. Yet the comments the Committee twitter feed has received on Gypsy Travellers in the last 24 hours are the most hostile comments I've seen on any subjects the Equalities Committee has examined.”

As I have said in the chamber previously, Scotland has one of the best human rights records in the world. From our work on LGBT+ and human rights to our measures to tackle child poverty and end violence and discrimination against women and girls, and our delivery of Scotland's commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we should rightly be very proud. That is why it is hugely disappointing to be standing here today discussing the significant barriers, prejudice and hostility that Gypsy Travellers continue to face daily in society.

There has been much talk in recent times about discrimination against Gypsy Travellers being the last form of acceptable racism. The continuing discrimination is deeply concerning, and there is clearly a long way to go to tackle those deep-seated prejudices. A multitude of misconceptions and prejudices must be addressed and positively challenged at every level across our communities.

The problems that our Gypsy Travellers face are long-standing and well documented. It is clear that there is a need for a comprehensive partnership approach to address the many challenges that are faced by Scotland's oldest indigenous minority. Far too frequently, far too many members of this marginalised community continue to face issues relating to access to accommodation—and its quality—and to health and education services, discrimination and instances of harassment and bullying.

The contribution of Gypsy Travellers to Scotland's heritage and culture is significant and should be valued and most definitely celebrated. Gypsy Travellers have a long history in Scotland, having contributed to Scotland's economic and cultural life since at least the 12th century. Their rich cultural heritage, traditions of storytelling, music, artistic endeavours, customs and languages continue to influence Scottish society today.

Cultural identification plays a crucial role in the differing social experiences of different groups of people in society. It is true that Gypsy Travellers have missed out on improvements that the majority of people and communities across Scotland enjoy and, indeed, take for granted. If we are to achieve true equality and social justice for everyone, we must recognise and respect the differences within the Gypsy Traveller community and ensure that services are provided, using a culturally appropriate method of service delivery. It is simply unacceptable for any community in Scotland to experience poorer outcomes in terms of living standards, education, health and employment, while facing extreme and persistent stereotyping. There is absolutely no place in Scotland for that type of discrimination.

That is why I welcome the actions and aims of the action plan. The investment of £3 million, which includes £500,000 to improve the delivery of flexible family learning and £400,000 to test innovative ways of offering health and social care services, is to be commended. The investment will support a range of actions that recognise the specific needs of the diverse Gypsy Traveller community, and it will make a valuable contribution to combating social exclusion within that group. However, even more than that, I believe that the promotion of greater awareness and understanding of Gypsy Traveller identity and cultural specificity—not only among those who provide front-line services but among the wider public—will go a long way towards helping to overcome the barriers that currently exist to accessing many vital services.

We have seen a cultural shift in the Travelling community that has resulted in more families taking the decision to stay in the same place for longer. In Fife, we have three Gypsy Traveller sites: Tarvit Mill, in Cupar, which has 20 pitches; Heatherywood, near Kirkcaldy, which has 18 pitches; and Thornton Wood, near Kelty, which has 12 pitches. I believe that, quite uniquely, there are three active tenants and residents associations on the sites. The TRAs are a valuable resource that provides members with a strong, organised and collective voice and which ensures regular communication between the Gypsy Traveller community and the local authority.

Over the past two years, Fife Council has invested £2 million to upgrade the sites. Each pitch has hardstanding for caravans, an amenity block with a toilet, shower and bath, a kitchen area, hot and cold water and storage. However, it is important to note that, despite the investment, a recent report to Fife Council's community and housing services committee showed that the satisfaction level among Gypsy Travellers in Fife had fallen below the Scottish average. Although that is obviously disappointing, it clearly illustrates

the need for greater engagement and just how important the actions and commitments in the plan are.

It is evident from the report that was presented to Fife Council that the challenges that our Gypsy Traveller communities face are often the result of a number of complicated factors and disadvantages, and that a co-ordinated, consistent and long-term initiative is very much needed. I was extremely pleased to hear that Fife Council's head of housing has taken personal responsibility and has committed to greatly improving the satisfaction level by setting an ambitious target for 2021-22. I believe that the action plan will be instrumental in helping to achieve that target.

Gypsy Travellers have played an invaluable role in Scotland's history, and they continue to have an important place in modern-day Scotland. We must all work together to ensure a fair and equitable society for each and every person who lives here. I very much welcome the action plan, commend everyone who has worked tirelessly to deliver it and look forward to seeing the positive impact that it will have at both a local and national level.

15:40

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I have twice been a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee and I have visited, spoken to and taken evidence from Gypsy Travellers. I congratulate everyone who has been involved in the action plan. In particular, I thank the minister for her dedication, Mary Fee for her absolute support and John Finnie and Angela Constance for their support, not just for the investigation and the project, but, most importantly, for the communities. It is a fantastic report and I am so pleased that it has come to this level.

I was deputy convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee, which conducted an inquiry that led to some of the action that has been taken and I am pleased about that. As has been said, members of the Gypsy Traveller community have been and continue to be marginalised and discriminated against in this country. We need to remember that, even though they are a recognised—that is an important word—distinct ethnic minority group, they are still discriminated against.

After all the years of reports and inquiries, the Scottish Government has got it right this time. It has taken positive steps not only in producing a collaborative approach—that is really important—in the plan that it has put forward, but also in engaging widely with the community. When producing these types of plans, it is important to get down to grassroots level and to the people that they will really affect. The report, and the work that

is being done, succeeds in reaching out to the community and I am sure that that will be part of its success.

I was deputy convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee in 2016. The committee produced reports of its inquiries: "Gypsy/Travellers and Care" and "Where Gypsy/Travellers Live". The work followed up on an earlier inquiry that explored those issues. I know that others have raised those issues. We found that people could not get access to doctors, nor was there transport to get to a doctor. There was no running water—living conditions were absolutely dire. Making sure that children could go to school and organising after-school activities was also very difficult. I am sure that the people who are in the gallery have probably experienced those conditions—perhaps some still do.

Apart from looking at those horrendous issues, our work showed us the extent to which Gypsy Travellers are discriminated against and how that impacts on their lives. We highlighted the findings of the United Nations special rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, who said that the United Kingdom's central Government and devolved Administrations should

"Strengthen efforts to address stigma and discrimination for the Gypsy and Traveller communities in relation to the wider spectrum of rights, starting with the recognition that cultural adequacy in housing is a pillar for inclusion, and that legislation and policy are not enough to overcome local obstacles".

The Scottish Government stated at that time that it would bring forward a strategy. In line with the view expressed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Equal Opportunities Committee believed that Gypsy Travellers were one of the most discriminated against groups in Scotland and that continuing work in this area is essential to improving their situation.

To be fair, the Scottish Government has indeed stayed true to its commitment to Gypsy Traveller communities across Scotland. Having set up the ministerial working group and engaged with the Gypsy Traveller communities on their needs, the Scottish Government and COSLA are taking forward an action plan and working together.

The Scottish Government action plan is excellent. As has been mentioned, "Improving the Lives of Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers" was developed in partnership with COSLA to deliver better outcomes in accommodation, health, education and incomes. In her opening remarks, the minister mentioned—we should keep mentioning it—the £3 million being invested, which is comprised of £2 million to improve living standards on public sites; £0.5 million for flexible

family learning; £400,000 to form new ways of providing health and social care services; and £100,000 to provide practical and financial support to the community. That is a great way forward, and I whole-heartedly support the vision in the action plan.

It is important not only that Gypsy Travellers are safe but that they have places to live and travel that are appropriate to their culture. As Mary Fee said, it is important that the community understands its rights and has a positive experience of accessing services, particularly in housing and health. That came out of the committee's inquiry and it has also come out of this process. We really need to look at opportunities to improve Gypsy Travellers' living standards and help them to feel safe, respected and valued members of our diverse population. For me, and for many others, the most important thing is that we encourage Gypsy Travellers to engage in and be informed about decisions that affect their lives. People should not be talked over and told what to do. We need to engage people, and find out what they want to do, rather than focus on what we want them to do.

A fantastic exhibition was hosted by the Scottish Parliament last year to mark Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month. Many members may have seen the exhibition, which was in association with Article 12 in Scotland—a young-person focused, non-governmental organisation that works through the medium of peer education to promote young people's rights as set out in the international human rights charters. The exhibition was produced by the Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project—that is a mouthful. Article 12's work is underpinned by the principle of free participation: the right to participate as equal citizens at all levels of society without fear or favour and a process that facilitates the participation of all young people on their own terms. The artwork on display, from silkscreen prints to photographic portraits, was fantastic. It was just a small selection of work by Gypsy Travellers and those who work with them.

Gypsy Travellers are entitled to the same rights as anyone else living in Scotland, and it is our duty as legislators and elected representatives of our constituencies across Scotland to ensure that those rights are upheld.

15:47

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am glad to speak in this debate on improving the lives of Scotland's Gypsy Traveller community. The last time the issue was raised in this Parliament, I noted that positive steps had been taken to acknowledge the contribution that Gypsy Travellers make to Scotland. Today, I commend

the Scottish Government and local authorities for continuing those positive steps with the publication of the joint Scottish Government and COSLA action plan, "Improving the Lives of Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers". It is crucial that we engage with all local authorities, because, ultimately, while the £3 million is welcome, it is the local authorities that are on the front line, and they need to be brought into this. We have to understand some of the difficulties that Gypsy Travellers face—I will come to that in a moment—so that we can deliver what needs to be delivered. Most members have spoken about that today.

The aims of the action plan—to deliver better outcomes in the key areas of accommodation, health, education and incomes—are welcome, and I am sure that we would all agree that the plan is a positive step forward. However, as other members have said, we must not rest on our laurels, and we must continue the good work at every level of government.

I also acknowledged last time the work of my colleague Mary Fee on this issue, and I do so again today. Following her members' business debate back in 2018 celebrating Scotland's Gypsy Traveller community, she has worked with others to set up the cross-party group on the Scottish Gypsy/Traveller community, which I am pleased to see continues to work to bring together key stakeholders to inform discussion here in Parliament. Work such as that is to be welcomed and I hope that it will continue to inform the debate and make the recommendations that are felt to be necessary for action.

David Torrance mentioned the Fife situation. In reflecting on that, I looked back at *The Courier* article that said that

"More than two thirds of Gypsy Travellers are not satisfied with Fife Council's management of their sites".

Fife Council taking that report to a committee was a really good step. As David Torrance said, the head of housing was quoted in *The Courier* as saying that he would take

"personal responsibility to really focus on this issue."

He also pointed out that Fife is

"unique in that we've got three active tenants and residents associations at these sites."

There is a lesson there for the Government, which is that in the local authority—or the health authority or whatever—someone at a senior level, who has the clout to get things done, should be responsible and be made responsible. That is why Fife Council's action is very positive, as David Torrance said. I also note that Mr Mills said that the transfer of the Gypsy Traveller sites on to Fife's housing revenue account was a major step forward. He saw that as the key step that would

allow Fife Council to start to invest the £800,000 per site that they are going to invest.

I was born and bred and live in Kelty, which is, as David Torrance said, one of the sites. I remember that it was 20-odd years ago at least, when the planning department went in to create that site. At the time, a hardworking member of the local community council was going around the shops in Kelty getting a petition signed to try to stop that site from being put together. I met him and asked him what his difficulty with the site was and why he was petitioning. He gave me a lot of the answers that we might expect—in fact some members have talked about that. That person is still an active member of the community and I have spoken to him, 20-odd years on. He is the first to say that there has been no difficulty. Myths were peddled about all the problems that were going to come to our village, but they never have—certainly not from the travelling site anyway. The point is that we must take communities with us. Often, when local authorities look to set up a site, we get that kind of reaction. We need to work on how best to demonstrate that that will not be the case.

When I was a councillor up there I also supported the development of a private site that is near the council site and that operates really well as more of a stopover site. When I speak to people who run that site, they say to me that a lot of Travellers just need a place to pitch down. It is not always the case that they want the type of sites that Fife Council have, rightly, invested in. We need to recognise that as well. It is about the local authorities—they are key to being able to deliver what it is that we all say that we want to see happening, and that is why COSLA's involvement must be welcomed.

It is estimated that there are between 15,000 and 20,000 Gypsy Travellers in Scotland, and the community has made a rich social and cultural contribution to our society. I know that first hand from the work that that community has done in my local village and further afield in encouraging young people in sport. The discipline and everything else that has come with that has been recognised locally. There is an enrichment of communities where those sites are in place and we should be proud of that and we should be able to tell people that that is the way forward.

I welcome the progress that has been made, but there is a lot more to be made. As I said, local authorities are key to that. We need to recognise that it is not always easy, so we need to provide support and back-up for the good practice that I have seen at first hand in the community of Kelty.

15:55

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): I spoke in the debate on this subject in June 2018. At that time, my colleague Angela Constance—who was Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities—commended the work of the ministerial working group and the work of the Gypsy Traveller youth assembly, for ensuring that those voices are heard; and the work of COSLA, for actively committing to transforming the life chances of Gypsy Travellers across the country. That followed publication of “A Fairer Scotland for All: Race Equality Action Plan 2017-21”, which serves to ensure that Scotland, as a progressive and inclusive nation, treats all our citizens equally, no matter their race or background.

It is clear that work has continued since then to make improvements, where possible. I was pleased to see that the joint Scottish Government and COSLA report highlights several areas in which improvements have been made, including the provision of £275,000 for improving the education of Gypsy Traveller children and young people, and support for flexible family learning through the tackling child poverty delivery plan. Access to health and social care services will benefit from £400,000 of investment from this year for three projects to test innovative ways to offer those services.

As we have heard from a number of members, there is, sadly, still a negative attitude to the Gypsy Traveller community in our society. That will take a long time to overcome—although it should not—and doing it will require all our communities to come together to tackle racism in all forms. In 2012, a witness at the Equal Opportunities Committee described discrimination towards Gypsy Travellers as

“the last bastion of respectable racism”—[*Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee*, 6 December 2012; c 777.]

I am of the opinion that no form of racism should ever be considered to be “respectable”. Time is most definitely up for that kind of behaviour. Attitudes to Gypsy Travellers need to be tackled; I believe that the action plan that has been laid out by the Government and our local authorities is a welcome step forward in ensuring that equality is afforded to every community in Scotland.

Falkirk Council's Travellers' site is located in my constituency and was, last year, one of only two sites in Scotland that met the minimum acceptable standards that had been laid down by the Government. It is clear that the work of local authorities is crucial to ensuring that all our communities are given the opportunity to flourish, which must include Gypsy Travellers.

The debate has reminded me that a visit to the site in my constituency is long overdue. I have visited it in the past and I look forward to visiting it again. Alex Cole-Hamilton made a valid point about encouraging Gypsy Travellers to engage more in the democratic process, which I have raised with people on a couple of occasions when I have visited the site.

We must ensure that the heritage of our communities is protected. Being from the Western Isles, I am more than aware of the decline of our culture, so I am determined to ensure that that does not continue. We must also recognise the many cultures that make Scotland so diverse. Some years ago, Parliament heard about the plight of—this is terminology that the Gypsy Traveller community uses itself—the Tinkers' Heart near Loch Fyne. The pattern of quartz stones laid out in a heart shape is thought to be more than 250 years old, and has been used by generations of Scottish Travellers as a wedding place and a site where children are blessed. It was in danger of being lost due to years of cattle grazing and disregard by a wealthy landowner. However, because of the determination of Jess Smith, whose petition was considered by the Public Petitions Committee, the Tinkers' Heart is now designated as a monument of national importance, and stands as a reminder of the Gypsy Traveller community's contribution to Scotland's rich cultural heritage.

The steps to recognise the Traveller communities as part of Scotland's cultural heritage and diversity is an important section of the path to equality. It is important to understand that Gypsy Travellers have, because they are citizens like the rest of us, rights and responsibilities. Access to health and education is a priority, and it is important that people from the Gypsy Traveller communities are afforded every opportunity to integrate with the communities in which they live, and that they have a chance to contribute to the already diverse landscape that we have across Scotland.

In the joint report, we have a way forward for delivering the change that is needed for our Gypsy Traveller communities. Through additional funding—including capital investment for more and better accommodation—ensuring that they are better represented at all levels, and providing access and opportunity to tackle poverty, we are much further forward now than we have ever been.

Scotland is already addressing the issue of inequality that we see across our communities, and we are becoming a more inclusive society that cares about our citizens and which ensures—where we have the powers to do so—that they have access to education, health and opportunity.

We still have a long way to go before we have solved all the problems, as is true for most communities in our society. However, we have a path to follow and I am glad that our Gypsy Traveller communities rightfully have access to that pathway through the report, which I am confident will begin to improve the lives of everyone. The taking of a proactive approach to others and engaging in a process to improve the lives of minority communities across Scotland can only be beneficial to the country as a whole.

We recognise that our Gypsy Traveller communities are as much a part of our society as other minority communities and we must, as a nation, ensure that we take all the necessary steps to improve their lives, as we do for all of our citizens.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Thank you. I call Alexander Stewart, to be followed by Maureen Watt.

16:01

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to participate in today's debate.

During the debate on the subject in June 2018, I applauded the Scottish Government for what it was trying to achieve to support Gypsy Travellers to receive the respect, opportunity and dignity that they rightly deserve. I was also encouraged by the fact that the Scottish Government had established a ministerial working group on Gypsy Travellers, the main aim of which was to address inequalities that the community experienced in, for example, housing, education, health services and employment. As I said at the time, by working together much can be achieved, so I am delighted to see the progress by that group, and to see the action plan.

I also welcome to the gallery Peter Barrett, who served with me on Perth and Kinross Council, and commend him for his efforts in COSLA to take the matter forward.

During her speech, the minister made a very positive contribution about what is taking place—I have already alluded to the COSLA initiatives that are key in that work. The action plan consists of words, but actions are now being taken, and we have heard that provision of more and better accommodation is part and parcel of those actions. It is also good to see that finances have been put towards those actions—the £2 million to £3 million that was referred to.

Access is vitally important, and we have also touched on some of the trust issues that have arisen with members of the Gypsy Traveller community in the past, when they might not have

been treated well by authorities—whether it was the council or the police—who decided how to manage their lifestyle, which brought them into conflict.

We have talked about income and living costs, poverty and the need for employment. Energy conservation was also touched on. They are vitally important for the Gypsy Traveller community in order to ensure that it gets benefits and can participate in processes.

It is key that we have the cross-portfolio approach that has been taken. I welcome the fact that ministers and cabinet secretaries have made a commitment to that, not only in the debate today, but in the chamber at other times. Kevin Stewart, the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning has taken that approach. The leadership that we have seen with local champions and local Gypsy Traveller liaison officers in councils are also welcome steps forward.

As a member of the Scottish Conservatives, I believe that all types of prejudice against Scotland's Gypsy Travellers must be stamped out, because any form of discrimination on the basis of race or culture is totally unacceptable. Elected members have an obligation to think about their deeds, actions and words.

I commend the work of Mary Fee on the matter—not only during my time in Parliament, but in the past. She has achieved what she has achieved by pushing the agenda and forcing it forward to become much more mainstream. That is vitally important.

I also commend Alex Cole-Hamilton for the comments in his speech, in which he identified some of the issues that we should be trying to tackle and move forward on.

My colleague Jamie Greene talked about positive experience. We need to embrace the positive experience of the Gypsy Traveller community because, as we have heard, there have, in the past, sometimes been negatives, when the community has been engaged. We need to look at that.

I very much welcome the fact that we have had events such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month and the exhibition in the Parliament that once again gave Gypsy Travellers an opportunity and a platform to show what they are achieving, and their history. It is vital that we look at their history—where they came from and how they evolved—and how they tackle that in today's normal lifestyle. That has caused some conflict.

In June every year across the United Kingdom, there are various opportunities and many activities to ensure that adults and children are encouraged by the community. Schools, libraries and

museums across the country are behind many initiatives that challenge stereotypes and make successful attempts at cohesion. We should celebrate that success and ensure that the approach will become the way forward.

We need to look at other things that take place. Gypsy Travellers have become actively involved in Holocaust memorial day. We must remember that they were persecuted, too. That shows us where there was prejudice in history.

It is vital that we commit to ensuring that there is equality of opportunity for all Scottish Gypsy Travellers, who often undoubtedly see themselves as a marginalised group. My colleague Annie Wells talked about the inequalities for Gypsy Travellers when they try to obtain health support, and about some of the other inequalities that they face. They have a lower life expectancy and difficulty in ensuring that they and their children are looked after. It is vital that we consider that.

However, education and employment are the biggest issues. There have been barriers in those areas in the past, and those barriers are being removed. I am delighted that some of the positives that are coming through from the action group will ensure that those two issues are tackled. We need to work together and ensure that alternatives can be provided to support Travellers and their children who continue to suffer, and to ensure that they get the opportunities that exist.

Travellers have their own fiercely protected hierarchies and family units, which are very much to be welcomed, because they talk about respect and recognition of elders and politeness. A good number of Travellers adapt to the business community, and many of them have been very successful in acting and music because their culture has endured. The spirit of ensuring that they become part of the community must be applauded.

In conclusion, it should be recognised that the Gypsy Traveller community makes a social and cultural contribution in Scotland. We must do all that we can to improve Gypsy Travellers' health and social outcomes, and to protect their rights and their way of life, because they add to our culture and diversity in Scotland. We should all be proud of what they have achieved and continue to achieve, and we should protect that.

16:08

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I, too, am pleased to take part in the debate. I have taken part in debates on Scotland's Gypsy Travellers several times in the past because, as a farmer's daughter, I often met Travellers as a young child. There was always a camp at some point during the summer in a small

wood opposite our farm. We could see that the Travellers had arrived when a small plume of smoke came up, and we always liked to go and see exactly what the yurt looked like. It is ironic that, these days, it is in to have a holiday in a yurt or a Gypsy caravan. I wonder whether some people see the irony in that.

I was always pleased when the Travellers visited our house, because my mum sent me to clear out all the old clothes that no longer fitted while she prepared food for them. My experience was, therefore, always positive.

I very much welcome the action plan from the Scottish Government, and I, too, thank Mary Fee, who has consistently and persistently fought for a better deal for Gypsy Travellers. I am glad that she sees the plan as a big step forward. I am pleased that the action plan is shared with COSLA, and I hope that plans will be made available to, and will be read by, all councillors in every council.

It is worth highlighting that the term “Gypsy Traveller” refers to distinct groups such as Roma, Romany Gypsies and Scottish and Irish Travellers who consider the travelling lifestyle to be a part of their ethnicity.

Coincidentally, I yesterday caught part of a Radio Scotland programme called “Lifestyle”, in which Davie Donaldson said that, as far as he knows, he is the only graduate to “come out” as a Traveller—those are his words, not mine. He said that there are, of course, other Travellers who graduated, but they did not say during their studies that they were from the Travelling community. That is a damning reflection on our society. He made a very interesting point when he said that travelling is not “other” or new age. Thousands of years ago, everyone was nomadic; it was the settled people who stopped that way of life. Travellers continue a connection with nature rather than a pursuit of wealth and of settled things.

The crux is that the Gypsy Traveller community travels. They move, and they move on. Some travel all year round, but many have homes, as did many in my old Grampian Regional Council ward of Northfield. Given that Gypsy Travellers are a distinct racial group in our society, is it not time that the discrimination stopped once and for all? The media especially have a duty to call it out rather than to fuel it. Mary Fee was understanding and generous when she said that there is a lack of understanding—I think that it is racism.

I welcome the plan, but that is not to say that nothing has happened until now. There has been a lot of work with local government on setting minimum standards for public sector sites. Councils have engaged with the negotiated stopping approach to managing roadside encampments. There has also been work with

Police Scotland, the NHS and wider community planning partners to deliver joined-up services and to foster regional collaboration to support Gypsy Travellers.

I am glad that the action plan focuses on five key actions, one of which is to continue to provide more and better accommodation. That means working with Gypsy Traveller communities themselves to better understand their accommodation needs and preferences in order to improve the quality of their lives. I note the emphasis on relieving fuel poverty among this group, which is really important.

Many members have talked about improving access to public services by producing clear, accessible and appropriate information on rights and entitlements. One of the best approaches that we have seen involves recruiting and supporting advocates on health, education and other services from within the community. That is done better in other countries, and I hope that we can learn from what they are doing.

I note an emphasis on exploring the barriers to the uptake of early learning and childcare, with a view to increasing that uptake. We all know how important that is in ensuring that Gypsy Traveller children do not start primary school at a disadvantage. Huge progress could be made by enhancing online learning, which would transform the Gypsy Traveller community’s access to learning resources.

Another key area is maximising family incomes, addressing financial exclusion and improving opportunities for quality employment. That means Social Security Scotland providing the best possible service to Gypsy Traveller communities, so that they have the same access to advice and guidance from Skills Development Scotland and to programmes including Scotland’s enterprising schools. Many Gypsy Travellers are nothing if not enterprising. I note that there is specific reference to ensuring access to free sanitary products and working with Gypsy Traveller communities—who, like the rest of us, are not exempt from having such needs—to develop a community larder project.

All those measures require us to achieve one or other of the action plan’s aims. For example, under the heading “Improve Gypsy/Traveller representation”, the plan seeks to

“Strengthen community development and engagement”,

improve Gypsy Travellers’ involvement in decision making and

“Support a national Gypsy/Traveller ‘movement for change”.

Perhaps, in her closing remarks, the minister could explain what is meant by that reference to a “movement for change”.

In closing my own speech, I come back to the need for action to tackle racism and discrimination, promote Gypsy Travellers’ rights and provide leadership to challenge those factors. I welcome Jamie Greene’s speech, and I hope that he speaks for all members of his party—in Scotland, at least. Our approach should be about training. I wonder whether councils would think about running training programmes with community councils, whose members are often asked to comment when a Gypsy Traveller group sets up on their patch.

We must recognise the value of Gypsy Traveller history and culture. Later today, we will recognise the achievements of showpeople, who also face discrimination despite their contribution to our culture. Last year, we celebrated the work of Hamish Henderson, who did so much to capture the songs and traditions of Gypsy Travellers, including those of Belle Stewart—who was famous for composing “The Berry Fields o Blair”—Jeannie Robertson and others. We must not lose such groups’ wonderful contributions to our great, diverse Scottish culture.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do not say this often, Mr Adam, but you can have extra time because I have some time in hand. If each closing speaker could use up two or three extra minutes, I would be happy to hand that time over to them. I see that no member seems to have a problem with that. Ask a politician whether they wish to speak for longer and the answer is always yes.

16:16

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer—I will not set my stopwatch, as I normally do.

I am pleased to speak in the debate, for a number of reasons. During my lifetime, there has been a positive change in society’s attitudes towards, and the language that is used in relation to, Gypsy Travellers and their community. However, there are still problems and prejudices out there. It is embarrassing that, in the 21st century, some people in our country still believe that Gypsy Travellers can be spoken of in a certain way. For me, it is even more embarrassing because my sister Jennifer married a man from a Traveller background. When such attitudes involve one of your own, you take them extremely personally. Once you are in the Adam family, we just do not let you go.

My brother-in-law Jason is self-employed, and I hear his worries about my talking publicly about his background, because it might affect his

business when people come to know about it. The employers on contracts that he is working on, which are worth thousands of pounds, might no longer trust him. However, what is embarrassing about that is the fact that we still have such attitudes in Scotland.

I also hear about how such attitudes affect Jason’s children, although not so much my niece, because she is too young. My nephew, who is clever and proud of his background, is very careful about mentioning it when he talks to other people. That is embarrassing because it does not sound typical of the Scotland that any of us here wants to live in. Although things have moved on, there is still an issue.

Jason and my sister Jennifer have been married for a long time now, but, until Jason became one of my own family, his background was never a major issue for me, because such matters do not affect our day-to-day lives. As the member of the Scottish Parliament who represents Paisley, it is not an issue that comes to my door every day. However, the publication of the action plan by the Scottish Government and COSLA shows that we have a way forward for improving the lives of Scotland’s Gypsy Travellers. The most important part of the whole debate is about changing lives for the better and ensuring that, regardless of their background, Scotland gives everyone the opportunity and ability to be all that they can be.

One issue, which the Scottish Government has mentioned, is that, as the action plan says,

“Gypsy/Travellers have often missed out on improvements that the majority of people and communities across Scotland have enjoyed.”

The action plan goes on to say:

“As well as seeing their traditional lifestyle eroded, our Gypsy/Traveller communities experience poorer outcomes in terms of living standards, education, health and employment”.

My brother-in-law Jason is self-employed now, but he left school at 12 and nobody bothered. Nobody chased him up. Nobody tried to see why that young man was no longer coming to school. The Scottish Government is trying to ensure that that can never happen to another child. Jason went out to work and, yes, things have worked out for the best for him, but he left school a generation ago. What happened to Jason is in the past, and we have to make sure that it never happens again in Scotland.

There is no place for the prejudice towards our Gypsy Traveller communities that was identified in the Scottish Government’s commissioned research “Scottish Social Attitudes 2015: attitudes to discrimination and positive action”, which was published in September 2016. The survey found that, although the level of prejudice has fallen

across a range of protected characteristics, there is still a relatively high level of prejudice against some groups, including Gypsy Travellers.

As I said, I am only too aware of that. My sister Jennifer, who is a councillor on Renfrewshire Council, wants to talk about that prejudice all the time, because we must make sure that people hear what is happening out there. However, Jason does not want to talk about that, because, as a self-employed man who is looking after his family and making sure that the family has a roof over its head and can move forward in life, he worries about what public knowledge of his background might do to his business.

It is just not right that a man who goes about his business like anyone else does—he pays his bills and his taxes, just like any other businessperson—sees his background as a problem. We should look at that background: Jason's mum, Bella, is an incredible woman who managed to bring up seven boys and run the family business on her own after her husband died in a horrific car accident. Today, the woman is 78 and she is still doing the school run for her great-grandchild while supporting other members of her family. That is an important part of the whole scenario. One of the things that my sister Jennifer most loves about her in-laws is the strong sense of family and the importance of protecting and looking after your own.

John Finnie: Did Mr Adam hear, on the radio on Friday, as I did, the item on research into Islamophobia and anti-Muslim discrimination in Merseyside, which found that attitudes changed markedly for the better as a result of a high-profile practising Muslim playing for Liverpool Football Club? Role models are important—Davie Donaldson has been mentioned—and it is their promotion that will change attitudes.

George Adam: The member is 100 per cent correct. Football is a perfect medium in which people can see role models, but, whether we are talking about professional football players or the people who make their communities better through involvement in the tenants' organisations and active community councils that Alex Rowley and David Torrance mentioned, role models change people's attitudes.

Let me go back to Jason and Bella. I think that Jason is a lucky man to have the family that he has. He inherited his mother's work ethic—she has never stopped. Their attitude is the polar opposite of what some people in society believe about people who come from a Gypsy Traveller background. Such stereotypes are not for me. God bless my father, who is no longer with us, but he, too, was self-employed and I would say that Jason probably had a more settled childhood than I did. I am not complaining: I am who I am, and I have

moved on. However, I would argue that Jason—ironically—had a more settled upbringing, because of the love in his family and the way in which his family stuck together through absolutely everything.

The Scottish Government's plan sets out five key areas of focus. I have mentioned some of them, as have other members: they include maximising household incomes, tackling racism and discrimination, and strengthening community development and engagement. Engagement is extremely important, because, if we are to change people's ideas, we have to engage with the community.

We all want Scotland to be a great country for everyone to live in, regardless of their background, where they come from, their personal beliefs and anything else. That is what I want, although I might be a bit biased on the issue that we are debating, because I have seen what has become of Jason and his family. My family has married into that culture, and we can see its advantages in the lives of those individuals.

In modern Scotland, we cannot allow prejudice to continue in any form. We must embrace the ethnicity and background of all Scots as we move on to create the type of Scotland that we all want to live in.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Mary Fee to close for Labour. You have up to 10 minutes.

16:25

Mary Fee: Thank you, Presiding Officer. It gives me real pleasure to speak again to close for Scottish Labour in this debate on improving the lives of Gypsy Travellers.

The debate has been informative and consensual—on some occasions, it was fairly convivial. It has been a debate in which all of us have made a commitment to improve the lives of a group of people who need our support, our backing and our understanding. We have heard that the debate is fundamentally about a human rights issue, and I whole-heartedly agree with that.

History and culture have been a running theme in the debate. We heard from John Finnie, who is a longstanding supporter of and advocate for Gypsy Traveller rights. He spoke of the Roma community across Europe and the significant issues that that community faces, given the changing political dynamic. Alex Cole-Hamilton also spoke of Roma history and recalled comments by Shamus McPhee, who said that Gypsy Travellers are "absent from history". David Torrance also spoke of heritage and culture and the importance of celebrating them.

Alex Rowley spoke of the importance of collaboration with local authorities, COSLA and key stakeholders in taking forward the improvements that we want to see. Fulton MacGregor rightly reminded us of some of the statistics in the social attitudes survey and spoke of the Conservative Government's criminalisation of Gypsy Travellers. I was particularly pleased to hear Jamie Greene's speech, in which he spoke of his respect for the Gypsy Traveller community and his commitment to call out discrimination against that community. That point was also made by Alexander Stewart, who also—importantly—reminded us of the persecution of the Roma and Gypsy Traveller community during the Holocaust. We need to keep reminding people of the appalling mass persecution of Gypsies and Roma during the Holocaust.

Maureen Watt spoke of her fond memories of being a child on a farm and the welcome that her family gave to Gypsy Travellers. I was struck by what she said about the difference between now and many years ago, when people used to celebrate and look forward to living in a Gypsy caravan or a yurt. Things have changed. We are back to celebrating those things, but only for particular groups of people. It is all right for us to go on holiday in a yurt, but it is not all right for Gypsy Travellers to remain in one.

George Adam spoke in very personal terms of the discrimination that Gypsy Travellers face every single day and of their perception of how they are viewed by other people.

As I said in my earlier speech, Gypsy Travellers have a long and vibrant history in Scotland. However, it is a history that has not always been easy for them. Like other minority groups, they have faced substantial barriers and discrimination in leading lives that the rest of us take for granted. That is why it is essential that we have had this debate on the action plan that has been agreed between the Scottish Government and COSLA. It has also been an opportunity for us to raise other issues, as I and others have done.

The action plan contains a series of very admirable and very achievable actions, but we have to remember that they will not fix or correct the errors of the past. Those errors cannot be fixed—we cannot wipe away what has happened to the Gypsy Traveller community over the past few years. What we can do is improve the situation and give a commitment that we will continue to improve it and will never again go back to the situation that existed.

As we go forward with the plan, it is important that we remember and celebrate the history and culture of Gypsy Travellers. We cannot forget the wealth of experience that they bring to our culture.

Kevin Stewart: I, too, pay tribute to Mary Fee for all her efforts on the issue.

We have talked a lot about the history and culture that Gypsy Traveller communities have brought to our country, but there is also the international aspect. I have referred to that previously in the chamber and I do not apologise for doing so again. In her speech, Ms Watt mentioned Jeannie Robertson, a north-east Traveller who was a major influence on Bob Dylan, one of the globe's greatest-ever artists, and who gave him what was required to build his career and songbook. Other artists in the United States and elsewhere have paid tribute to Jeannie Robertson and other Gypsy Travellers who have done so much to make our world as musical as it is.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There you go, Ms Fee—take it from there.

Mary Fee: I thank Mr Stewart for that intervention. There is little that I can add to what he said, apart from saying that I agree absolutely with all of it. Many Gypsy Travellers have influenced our music, our culture, our traditions and our storytelling, and we should take every opportunity to celebrate the experience and wealth of knowledge that they bring.

It was crucial that the action plan was developed with input from the Gypsy Traveller community. Although it will take every sector to work together to meet the aim of improving lives, that would be made more difficult without the co-operation of Gypsy Travellers. The action plan offers a list of the actions that the Scottish Government and COSLA have taken so far. I commend them for those actions, as it takes leadership at both national and local levels to advance the rights of Gypsy Travellers and end the discrimination that they have faced.

The action plan has five key areas of focus on delivering better outcomes for Gypsy Traveller communities: accommodation, access to public services, economic opportunities, racism and discrimination, and Gypsy Traveller representation. I believe that the most urgent and pressing matter is that of tackling the racism and discrimination that Gypsy Travellers face, as progress in the other areas will be more easy to achieve if the barriers of discrimination are removed. If those barriers are tackled, I believe that everyday life will be made easier for Gypsy Travellers and that other issues can be better tackled. I am not saying that the other four areas of focus are less important. However, housing and accommodation needs can be better met if the public have a greater understanding of the Gypsy Traveller community's needs. That should also make it easier for public services to deliver the actions that are outlined in the plan without the

fear of public and media outrage being targeted at Gypsy Travellers and their sites.

Training public sector staff, as action 9 pledges, is one of the key actions at the core of ensuring Gypsy Travellers' human rights. Ensuring that Gypsy Travellers have the same access to public services that each of us has and expects can be achieved only when those on the front line have the knowledge that enables them to understand and support the needs of the community.

On behalf of the cross-party group on Gypsy Travellers, as its convener, I offer the Scottish Government my support and my thanks for bringing the debate to the chamber today. I will always work constructively, as will the members of the cross-party group, with others in the chamber and many more outside it to improve the lives of Gypsy Travellers.

In closing for Scottish Labour, I add that today's debate is of significance for equalities and human rights—issues that brought me and, I am sure, many members across the chamber into politics. Tackling social injustice is part of what Labour stands for and we will support the Government at decision time to show that such injustices, long faced by the Gypsy Traveller community, are finally being tackled in a cross-party, co-operative manner.

16:34

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to close the debate on behalf of Scottish Conservative members. I echo Mary Fee's comment that it is good that we have had quite a consensual debate on what is an important subject. There really is an impact on people's lives if we get such things wrong.

Gypsy Travellers have faced a huge amount of difficulty over the years. The Scottish Borders, where I live, has a long history of promoting Gypsy Traveller culture. Just 20 miles east of where I live is the village of Kirk Yetholm, which has been described as the traditional headquarters of Scottish Gypsies.

I will build a little on some of the very good history that Alex Cole-Hamilton gave us to start with, and on some of the other history that we have heard today. In 1841, in an entry in the "New Statistical Account of Scotland", the Rev John Baird noted that Kirk Yetholm had the largest population of Gypsies in the country. The last Scottish Gypsy king—I apologise to the Gypsy community if I pronounce this wrongly—Charles Faa Blythe II, was crowned in Kirk Yetholm in 1898, and a coronation pageant was held in the village. It is important that we represent that cultural heritage and take seriously our duty to ensure that those communities are helped in a

way that recognises and supports their traditional way of life.

We have heard much today about the many and varied challenges facing Gypsy Travellers in Scotland. My colleague, Annie Wells, opened by presenting a summary of some of the worrying statistics. Like many others, she mentioned that the Scottish Human Rights Commission has described discrimination against Gypsy Travellers as the

"last bastion of acceptable racism".

As has been echoed again and again today, no racism is "acceptable". When it is directed against our Gypsy communities in particular, it drives that community's difficulty in accessing a range of services.

In relation to education, we have heard that half of all Gypsy Travellers over 16 have zero qualifications. I welcome the Government's recognition that that is a key area that needs to be addressed if Gypsy Travellers are to compete successfully in the world that we have built.

In relation to healthcare, evidence has shown that Gypsy Travellers will journey more than 300 miles to see a GP whom they trust. Sometimes, it is difficult for them to engage in our communities on an equal basis. The health cards that the minister highlighted in his speech are contributing to addressing some of the difficulties. I hope that we can make sure that all Gypsy Travellers get access to the health cards and understand how to use them correctly.

On employment, I have seen some of the unfair attitudes towards some of our Gypsy Travellers, which contribute to their having the lowest rate of economic activity in the UK. A lot can be done to ensure that employers welcome them into workplaces and do not reject them just on the basis that they belong to a Travelling community.

The projects that are being undertaken across the country—we have heard about quite a few of them today—are clearly important. Although more work needs to be done, it is good to hear that the Government is linking with the Gypsy Traveller liaison officers in local authorities and that progress on actions will be monitored through the action plan. That is important. It is easy to say that we are going to do something, put it out there and then just leave it and not track what is happening in response.

My colleague, Jamie Greene, spoke about the challenges of the discrimination that Gypsy Travellers face. Like others, he talked about the media's perception of Gypsy Travellers, which is broadly negative, with only 25 per cent of news stories featuring positive comments.

Christina McKelvie: I welcome the comments from Jamie Greene and other Conservative members, including Michelle Ballantyne, who is reinforcing those comments.

I wish Michelle Ballantyne well in her leadership campaign—it would be good to have another woman at the helm of a major party in the Parliament. If she becomes the new leader, will she take it upon herself to make sure that her party provides the effective discipline that we need to see, so that unfortunate or discriminatory comments are not made about the Gypsy Traveller community? I think that she is able for that, but I hope that she will confirm today that it is what she would do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It helps to have the minister as part of your leadership campaign, Ms Ballantyne—you have got it whether you like it or not. [*Laughter.*]

Michelle Ballantyne: We can put that up for debate and vote on it.

I say to the minister “Absolutely.” She has heard echoed by my colleagues who have spoken in the debate that we all agree that that is important. If we are going to change our culture and our society, we have to make sure that we speak positively and use the right language. However, we also have to be understanding of one another if we get it wrong and if we make mistakes. We need to talk constructively to one another and not give people a really hard time about the way that they constructed a sentence or said something without giving them a chance to explain what they meant. If we do not do that, the headlines will go bad again, which will fall back on the people who are being talked about—it will simply compound those negative headlines. We need to get that right across the board—we should all take that on board.

One of the big things that compounds some of those stories is the fact that most people’s experience of the Gypsy Traveller community comes solely through its representation in the media. Very few people in Scotland get the opportunity to interact with Gypsy Travellers, and I echo Mr Greene’s clear message that we in Scotland must work together if we are to tackle the challenge through positive language and support.

The press has a responsibility not to play out stereotypes and, instead, to seek to broaden the understanding of Gypsy Traveller culture. It is very easy, when a few people complain, to have a big article that suggests that everybody has a problem. As with most issues of discrimination, those prejudiced attitudes stem from misinformation and a lack of understanding. It is absolutely our duty as politicians who have a public platform—as it is the duty of anyone else in

the public eye—to make sure that we all combat that together. To that end, the focus of the work done by Mary Fee, Angela Constance and, indeed, the minister is extremely welcome and clearly has the backing of all members in the chamber.

It is not helpful to criminalise people or talk about them in that way. Communities work and operate better and have better cohesiveness when we work collaboratively, rather than using the stick of enforcement when we do not need to. We need to work with Travelling communities to identify where they can go, rather than constantly saying where they cannot go, and to ensure that appropriate facilities are available when they get there. Alex Rowley spoke well of his own experiences of the issue. He acknowledged that COSLA’s involvement is essential, because this comes down to local government.

Alex Cole-Hamilton highlighted the issues with many of the sites that our Travelling communities are directed to, which are not currently safe or appropriate. Clearly, that is an issue that needs to be addressed. In the Scottish Borders, we have created a space—which the council leases—on Tweedside caravan park in Innerleithen. We provide 10 caravan pitches, with amenities, for the exclusive use of Gypsy Travellers, who have their own facilities; indeed, one pitch has been fully enabled for a disabled occupant. We need to make sure that such facilities are available everywhere, because we do not have enough of them. We must also take into account the fact that the Travelling community does not always want to be told where to go. We have to find a balance: we must provide pitches without being dictatorial about how the community should behave, or where Gypsy Travellers should stop and for how long.

Alexander Stewart talked meaningfully about the oppression that is faced by Gypsy Travellers; his point was echoed by other speakers. He also praised the celebration of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month, and it is vital that we encourage communities to engage with and understand Gypsy Traveller culture. Quite a few speakers, including the minister, mentioned how much Gypsy Travellers have contributed to our society over the years. Most people do not realise that, because where some of our culture’s words, music and so on come from has not been made explicit.

I particularly welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment to supporting—again, excuse my pronunciation—the *Dikh he na Bister*, which means “look and don’t forget” and is the annual Roma genocide memorial event. It is incredibly important that we do not let that slip away, and that we make sure that we understand

how much the Roma community suffered during the Holocaust.

I will pick up a few points in the extra time that the Presiding Officer has given me. The Scottish Government's publication "Improving the Lives of Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers" refers mainly to Gypsy Travellers, but it also explicitly mentions the Roma people. The relationship between the terms can become confusing, especially as the European Union and other European bodies lump all the groups together under the name "Roma", but we should not be bogged down by taxonomy and should instead seek to understand the different challenges that face those quite distinct groups. Those communities and their cultures have developed separately, and we should take care not to conflate them, as was mentioned earlier.

In 2019, a report by the Women and Equalities Committee at Westminster made it clear that the Roma people face markedly different issues from those that are faced by Gypsy Travellers. They are often more settled and have moved into settled homes, but they have difficulty in navigating and understanding their rights as tenants. It is important that we equip them so that they can ensure that their tenancies are robust. We must also equip them to know their rights and understand their landlords' obligations, so that they can ensure that their homes are well heated and safe for their families. I believe that the Scottish Government is engaging on some of those issues, and I would welcome that engagement being underpinned, as it would have a massive knock-on effect for successive generations.

There is a lot of work that we can still do. I am encouraged that Social Security Scotland is replicating some of the work that was done with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that Gypsy Traveller groups have input into a lot of the conversations. I hope that the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People will ensure that there is permanent representation of Gypsy Travellers on Social Security Scotland's experience panels, so that they have consistent input on the community's needs.

I welcome the publication of the action plan and the work that has been done on it, and I welcome the fact that it will be revisited along the way. These groups have been neglected and discriminated against for far too long. It is right that we now have meaningful support from the Government. A change in public attitudes would go a long way towards levelling the playing field for Gypsy Travellers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Surprise, surprise! The politicians have used up all the spare time. Minister, you have until 5 o'clock.

16:47

Christina McKelvie: I thank members from across the chamber for their very thoughtful and insightful contributions to this afternoon's debate. It has been a consensual and positive debate, on the whole, which shows that, as a Parliament and as a country, we are committed to working together to improve the lives of Gypsy Travellers. Many members have spoken passionately about Gypsy Travellers they have met or worked with in their constituencies or as members of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee or the cross-party group.

Sitting further back in the public gallery is a smashing teacher fae Lanark called Laura Bernstein. When she came in, she gave me a wee wave, so she is getting a mention for it. Laura works for the South Lanarkshire Gypsy Traveller education group. George Adam spoke about his brother-in-law, who left school at 12. Laura has had great success in South Lanarkshire, where the aim is now that all Gypsy Traveller children in that area will attend school to high school level. That is the success of working together and, hopefully, it gives a wee bit of hope.

After the debate, we will have a members' business debate on a motion lodged by my friend and colleague Richard Lyle about the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, whose members will join us in the public gallery. I have been a very proud member of the guild for many years, as is Mary Fee. Our memberships get us a free shot on the waltzer, and we believe the faster, the better. [*Laughter.*] The guild is celebrating its 130th anniversary—it is incredibly important for showpeople today that we point that out. Like Roma people, showpeople have their own cultural tradition and identity, which is distinct from that of Gypsy Travellers, who are the focus of today's debate. I could not go on with my comments without mentioning that or mentioning Philip Paris, who will be the new president of the guild—the first Scottish president for the past 60 years or so. We will be delighted to see the guild members in the public gallery this evening.

I encourage all members to make a concerted effort to meet Gypsy Travellers who live in their constituencies, to hear directly about their lives, their priorities and their needs. We should not forget that we have been elected to serve all our constituents and communities, including Gypsy Travellers. Colleagues across almost every portfolio in Government contributed to the action plan, of which I am very proud. I make particular mention of Angela Constance, who, as the then Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, set up the joint ministerial working group to which we brought the plan. Praise is due to her for that.

I will touch on some of the points that have been raised. Annie Wells, Fulton MacGregor and Michelle Ballantyne raised issues on data and how we measure impacts. Members can see from the action plan that we are talking about a small number of very impactful actions that can be measured. We will meet every six months to mark progress, so please do not be worried about that. We can certainly update members on progress.

Jamie Greene raised issues related to the current law and hate crime. He will know that we are reviewing hate crime, and we have proposed that Gypsy Travellers be covered by the statutory aggravation on race. When the legislation comes to Parliament, I hope that he will see that.

Many members, including Mary Fee, Alex Cole-Hamilton, Annie Wells, John Finnie, David Torrance, Michelle Ballantyne and Maureen Watt, raised issues related to the media. We are working with the Gypsy Traveller community to design our one Scotland campaign, which will raise awareness and send a strong and determined message to counter discrimination, hate speech and hate crime. I hope that that campaign will do some of the work that we need to do to change attitudes.

David Torrance highlighted issues related to social media and social media comments. Mary Fee's point about the issue being urgent is important and was well made and well heard today.

Alex Rowley talked about the need to take communities with us and how we can use that to dispel the myths around Gypsy Travellers and the communities in which we all live.

There were lots of issues about the provision of sites. We realise that decisions about the provision of Gypsy Traveller sites are best made at a local level by those with local knowledge and local accountability, alongside Gypsy Traveller communities. In 2018, the Scottish Government updated its housing need and demand assessment guidance, which now includes information on Gypsy Travellers. In September 2019—just a few short months ago—the Government published updated local housing strategy guidance that reaffirms the need for local authorities to have a full understanding of the requirements of Gypsy Travellers in their local areas and a strategy for meeting the identified needs.

Fulton MacGregor talked about a liaison group in North Lanarkshire. That is a good start, but I fail to see any reason why it could not use the new guidance to identify that there is a local need. I know that Councillor Junaid Ashraf has been a positive influence in all that work. Anything that we can do through the plan to support that work and

to get a better outcome for residents in North Lanarkshire will be very welcome indeed.

However, we recognise that we still do not have a good enough understanding of the needs of the Gypsy Traveller community. Therefore, we will work with them to gain a better understanding of their accommodation needs and preferences, which will inform future provision. That will include work with communities as part of our housing 2040 strategy to shape culturally appropriate accommodation for the future. I hope that that puts a smile on John Finnie's face—I see that it does. I hope, too, that David Torrance will be reassured that the TRAs that he spoke about will take part in that work on future provision. I am happy to look at how we work with community councils through COSLA and its leaders, local champions, the women's voices project and other partners, as Maureen Watt suggested.

John Finnie and other members raised issues related to traditional stopping places. The Scottish Government recognises the right of Gypsy Traveller communities to a Travelling lifestyle, as part of their way of life, their tradition and their history. However, we know that that is becoming increasingly difficult and that many stopping places are no longer accessible. We are looking for solutions, and I have a few examples. We have provided COSLA with funding to carry out research with the community to explore what is needed to enable Gypsy Travellers to exercise their right to travel in Scotland. We are also working with the digital team that sits in the Scottish Government planning department to explore how traditional stopping places can be mapped and identified. Michelle Ballantyne referred to that in her closing remarks.

John Finnie: In the constituency case that I dealt with, the landowner identified problems not with the Gypsy Traveller community who had used the land but with others who had left the litter. That is an example of the perception being that Gypsy Travellers caused the problem when, in reality, it had been caused by the previous occupants.

Christina McKelvie: That is often the case. I have some more good news for Mr Finnie. The post that we have funded through COSLA is also supporting several local authorities to pilot negotiated stopping schemes, which will offer greater flexibility and support for families who wish to camp on the roadside and who are constantly on the move. That approach has been highly successful in parts of England. It has reduced tensions with the settled community, saved on clear-up costs and reduced the negative perceptions that Gypsy Travellers face. I hope that that will put another smile on Mr Finnie's face—I like putting a smile on Mr Finnie's face, obviously.

Everyone in Scotland has a right to expect accommodation of a good standard, and that includes our Gypsy Traveller communities. In 2015, the Scottish Government published the minimum standards that must be met by June 2018 for Gypsy Traveller sites provided by local authorities and registered social landlords. Angus MacDonald and Alex Cole-Hamilton used some numbers that are very much out of date. Just about all of those sites are close to meeting the standards and we are working with them to help them to achieve that. Any sites that are not currently achieving the national standards are working to put plans in place to improve. It is vital that those sites work with residents in doing that.

Like Alex Rowley, I pay tribute to John Mills of Fife Council, who has been a great inspiration. I reassure Alex Rowley that we see the transfer of housing revenue accounts as a positive way to invest capital funds in the upgrade or provision of more Gypsy Traveller sites. Most important, it will allow Gypsy Travellers to be treated with the same rights as any other council resident. We want good-quality accommodation for all, which is why we want to raise the minimum standards.

A couple of members touched on fuel poverty. Alongside my colleague Kevin Stewart, we are working very hard to reduce that. Some of our programmes to improve living standards and reduce living costs such as the cost of heating have been designed for people who live in houses, and they do not meet the needs of Gypsy Travellers. Therefore, we are going to make sure that our work to eliminate fuel poverty will also benefit Gypsy Travellers. I hope that that answers one of the questions from Maureen Watt.

John Finnie mentioned the work that Article 12 is doing around education and the young woman who went back to school to do that training—we will do much more of that. The additional funding that we have provided to the Scottish Traveller education programme will support education partners to understand the needs of Gypsy Traveller children, young people and their families so that we can provide the right approaches and support.

Many members raised the issue of healthcare, and there has been some progress since 2012: for example, the committee's inquiry into Gypsy Traveller health and the NHS e-learning cultural awareness training and its outreach work to take health services into the Gypsy Traveller community. One of the best interventions is the wee NHS GP registration card—let me hold it up again—which is fantastic in ensuring that Gypsy Travellers can access healthcare, which they have the right to do. We have much more to do around mental health, life expectancy and dealing with stark health inequalities, but we are working

incredibly hard to address those issues with partners across the board.

Many members have spoken about Gypsy Traveller history and culture. For the past two years, we have provided financial and practical support to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month, and we will continue to provide that financial support.

David Torrance, Jamie Greene, Fulton MacGregor, Sandra White, John Finnie, Alexander Stewart, Alex Cole-Hamilton and Mary Fee all spoke eloquently about the effects of discrimination and words of intolerance. We all know where those things lead. That is why, this year, we sponsored a group of young people to travel to Auschwitz for the commemoration of the Roma Holocaust. In partnership with Romano Lav, we brought 94-year old Raymond Gurême, a Roma gypsy survivor of the Holocaust, to Scotland to inspire our young activists and remind us what happens when ordinary people do nothing.

Alex Cole-Hamilton reminded us that the contribution of Gypsy Travellers to our culture and society stretches back 1,000 years. Maureen Watt talked about her fond memories of the Gypsy Travellers who lived near her farm. Alexander Stewart and Sandra White talked about the exhibition that was here last year, and Angus MacDonald told us about the work to preserve the Tinkers' Heart and how it is being used to raise the profile of Gypsy Traveller culture. In June this year, to mark Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month, the First Minister will host a reception in the great hall of Edinburgh castle—members had better get their dancing shoes on. That will give our Gypsy Travellers the respect they rightfully deserve and will be a celebration of all the ways in which Gypsy Travellers have influenced Scottish culture. There may even be some songs that have been inspired by Jeannie Robertson—who knows? Maybe there will be some lore about the King of Yetholm as well.

I, too, pay tribute to Davie Donaldson, and I really look forward to seeing Charlotte Donaldson in the chamber. Imagine if Davie's tweet after the election had been about it being a great election for him and his family.

There is much more that I want to say. Angus MacDonald's linking of this work to a race equality action plan is a point well made. George Adam said that, when the people who are being discriminated against are your family, you stand up for them in any way you can, and he paid tribute to his own family. Sandra White reminded us of reports from the Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee. Mary Fee said that the voices of Gypsy Travellers need to be heard. I hope that, through us, they have been heard today.

Cross-party support is essential in all of this, and I look forward to working with members from across the chamber to make a real difference to the Gypsy Traveller community, and at a much faster pace. I am grateful for the cross-party support in this place. I am also grateful for the cross-party challenges that members bring me in this place. Alex Cole-Hamilton said something that really struck home for me. He said that, in the 16th century, Scotland was a safe harbour. I want this nation to be a safe place. Mary Fee said that she is looking for real and lasting change. Hopefully, we are on our way.

Business Motion

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item is consideration of business motion S5M-20449, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to Thursday's business.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 16 January 2020—

after

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Disclosure (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Disclosure (Scotland) Bill

insert

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Direct Payments to Farmers (Legislative Continuity) 2020 Bill.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There is one question to be put today. The question is, that motion S5M-20404, in the name of Christina McKelvie, on improving the lives of Gypsy Travellers, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the joint Scottish Government and COSLA action plan, Improving the Lives of Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers, which aims to deliver better outcomes in the key areas of accommodation, health and education, and incomes; recognises the vital role of local government to transform the life chances of Gypsy/Travellers across the country; commends the Gypsy/Traveller community for the role that it has played in developing the plan, and supports its continued involvement to shape and deliver the actions at the national and local level; welcomes the contribution that Gypsy/Traveller communities have made to Scottish history and continue to make to its culture and heritage, and agrees to actively challenge any form of prejudice or discrimination towards Gypsy/Travellers and work together within a human rights framework to accelerate improvements for this community.

Showmen's Guild of Great Britain

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-20270, in the name of Richard Lyle, on the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament joins the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in celebrating its 130th anniversary; understands that the Guild was founded as the United Kingdom Van Dwellers Protection Association in 1889 Salford; believes that its formation was a key moment in the recognition of showmen having a lifestyle that is a culture rather than an occupation, leading to the idea of travelling showmen being recognised as a cultural group; understands that the principal objective of the Guild has remained the same since its inception, which is to protect the interests of its members, travelling showmen who gain their livelihoods by attending funfairs; notes that it does so both through its code of rules for members and by using the legal and constitutional processes that exist; congratulates Philip Paris, who has become the first Scot to be named as the President of the Guild since Jack Cullis in the 1950s, and thanks showmen across Scotland, including in the Uddingston and Bellshill constituency, and the rest of the UK, on their contribution to, and the significant and important part that they play, in public life.

17:03

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): First, I thank the many members who signed the motion. Once again, a motion about showmen has gained support from members within a day. As an organisation, the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is more than 130 years old, and the guild has a proud history. I welcome to the Scottish Parliament the following chairs and vice-chairs from all the sections in Great Britain. In the gallery today are: President Philip Paris and the president's wife, Haley Paris; the senior vice-president, John Thurston; the junior vice-president, Keith Carroll; the sergeant at arms, Gordon Cook; past president John Culine; John Flack from the London section; William Percival from the Notts and Derby section; Tommy Charles from the western section; Arthur Newsome from the northern section; Albert Hill from the Lancashire section; Alex James Colquhoun of the Scottish section; and Gary Leach of the Yorkshire section.

The guild was founded in Salford in 1889 as the United Kingdom Van Dwellers Protection Association.

That was a key moment in the recognition of showmen having a lifestyle that is a culture rather than an occupation. Its formation was a key moment in the recognition of showmen as a cultural group, protecting the interests of its

members, the travelling showmen who gained their livelihoods by attending funfairs.

I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am the convener of the cross-party group on the Scottish Showmen's Guild.

To explain how I gained such a cherished position I have to take us back to when this Parliament was first founded and to when I was first elected in 2011. In the early days of the Parliament, the Scottish section of the guild had many meetings with Scottish Government ministers and officials on many issues that showpeople faced. Most of those meetings were on public entertainment licence conditions, which were introduced in the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. That act was not widely used at first in Scotland but, as time went on, it became a bone of contention, which many showmen faced when they tried to apply for licences for funfairs in towns and villages.

In discussions with previous ministers it was felt that a cross-party group for showmen should be set up. Over the first years of the Parliament, Philip Paris, who was the vice-chair of the Scottish section at that time, from 1994 till 2001, and then the chairman of the section from 2001 to 2011, along with others, tried without success to establish a cross-party group in the Parliament. That was a fact that had to be addressed.

In 2011, that desire became a reality due to the work and the determination of Philip Paris who, along with others, approached my friend and colleague Christina McKelvie MSP to take forward the setting up of a cross-party group for showmen. Christina, in her usual way, knew what had to be done to make that happen and approached me as a new member to take that forward as I had previous council experience and had a major theme park in my constituency. I pay tribute to her drive and commitment to see the cross-party group set up.

I well remember the day that Christina introduced me to Philip Paris and his committee, and I was struck by his passion and commitment to the ideals of showmen. The information that he gave me helped in our desire to resolve showmen's issues.

It has been a pleasure to have worked with Philip Paris and the other Scottish Showmen's Guild chairmen over the years: George Henry Codona, who is in the public gallery; Alex James Colquhoun; and Billy Hammond. We made a commitment to establish a cross-party group and I now pay tribute to the help that the group has been given by the following people as both deputy conveners and members over the last nine years: Jackson Carlaw, Mary Fee, Andy Wightman,

David Torrance, John Mason, Annabelle Ewing, Clare Adamson, Clare Haughey, Christina McKelvie, Maureen Watt, Maurice Corry, Anne McTaggart, Chic Brodie, Claire Baker, Jamie McGrigor, Siobhan McMahon, Ivan McKee and, of course, Annie Wells.

The help and support that each and every past and present MSP has given the cross-party group is appreciated by showmen and myself.

Over the past nine years, the CPG has discussed many issues with Government officials, ministers and other agencies. Over the past years we have held other various meetings with cabinet secretaries and ministers and I wish to thank in particular Michael Matheson, Annabelle Ewing and Ash Denham for their advice, support and help in getting the showmen's case taken forward in the Parliament.

I thank the Minister for Community Safety, Ash Denham, for taking my breath away when she told me that the Government would be neutral on my proposing my members' bill to right the wrong with regard to funfair licensing. We have seen several successes, which include showmen being, for the first time, able to record their ethnic background as showmen and show-women in the proposed 2021 census. I wish to record my personal thanks to the census team at National Records of Scotland for all their help in ensuring that showpeople are finally recognised. That will open up other records to showpeople.

That process was in fact started when the then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Michael Russell, and later Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, first met the education liaison officer for the Showmen's Guild, Christine Stirling and the Deputy First Minister gave her his support in processing help for showmen's children's needs to be recognised in local schools.

In the recently passed Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, the Government acceded to showmen's requests to be exempt from low-emission zones. I thank the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, Michael Matheson, for listening to my submission on behalf of the Scottish Showmen's Guild and I thank Alex James Colquhoun and Philip Paris for raising the issue in our CPG.

My member's bill is presently being drafted to resolve the 38-year wrong regarding civic government licensing. In fact, my proposed bill has had the second highest level of support of MSPs in the Parliament's history; hopefully it will pass all stages when it is finally debated in Parliament in the coming months—I am sure that it will. The help that this Government has given me and showmen in the past nine years has been tremendous and I

thank each and every member of this Government for that.

Tonight, I want to place on record the achievements of Philip Paris, the president of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain. As I have said, Philip has been a member of the Showmen's Guild since he was 18 and was first elected to the committee in 1984. He was vice-chairman from 1994 until 2001 and the Scottish chairman from 2001 until 2011.

Philip can trace his family links back to Napoli in Italy. His ancestors were ice-cream merchants who worked as porters on the North Eastern Railway. Some were lion tamers and horse dealers, and his family members fought with distinction in the first world war.

He was elected as junior vice-president of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain in 2013, then elected as senior vice-president and chair of safety for the guild in 2016. In 2019, Philip was elected as the national president of the guild. Philip is one of only three presidents from Scotland in the guild's 130-year history, the others being the late T E Brownie, who was president from 1938 to 1941, and the late Jack Cullis, who was president from 1956 to 1958.

Philip continues to operate a ride in various fairgrounds in Scotland. Only last week, I met him and his wife at the Irn-Bru funfair in the Scottish Event Campus, where he was operating his teacup ride. The funfair celebrated its 100th anniversary in Glasgow this year, and I thank the staff of the SEC for inviting my wife—who is also in the gallery—to the opening of the funfair prior to Christmas.

Over the years, I have gotten to know that Philip Paris has all the qualities of an excellent showman. He cares about his heritage and what needs to be done to enrich showpeople's quality of life, and he is not short in telling us what needs to be done. When Philip talks, we listen. I personally pay tribute to his commitment to showpeople throughout Great Britain and to the fact that he is the third Scot in the history of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain to be its president.

Later on tonight, the guild is holding a reception in the garden lobby, which I am very pleased to have sponsored. I take the opportunity again to invite each and every member here to attend and pay tribute to the work done in every part of Great Britain by showmen—and, of course, showwomen—and to pay tribute to and celebrate the guild's new president, Philip Paris. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before we move on, I request that our guests in the gallery do not show any appreciation—or otherwise—of future speeches. We now move to the open debate.

17:13

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in this members' business debate on the Showmen's Guild, and I commend Richard Lyle for securing it. He has been a true champion of the guild, which is well known throughout Parliament and beyond. I, too, welcome to the gallery so many distinguished members of the Showmen's Guild. They are all very welcome indeed.

I also congratulate Philip Paris on becoming only the third Scot to be named as president of the Showmen's Guild, which is a great accolade for him. In respect of the Scottish section—it is the largest section by area—Philip has been very involved in ensuring that the Showmen's Guild has been put on the map in Scotland throughout civic society and all matters politic. That has reaped a number of benefits that are down to the efforts of people such as Philip and his colleagues in the Scottish section.

One of the achievements has been the re-establishment of the annual Showmen's Guild luncheon, which is held in Glasgow, usually in November. I have had the honour of attending that event on a number of occasions. I am not touting for an invitation to this year's event, but I will look out for it, for it is a great opportunity to meet and hear from travelling show families from across Scotland and beyond, and to learn more about their important traditions and culture. I remember a conversation that I had at one of the luncheons with a travelling showman's family. I will always remember their talking about how, when the spring came, they would be ready to go on the road again after their more sedentary lives through the winter months. That has always struck me as being an interesting way to live one's life.

In this, the year of the 130th anniversary of the guild, it is fitting that we debate its important role. It is, in effect, the trade body for travelling showmen, the key function of which is the protection and promotion of the interests of its members. A priority is to safeguard the annual calendar of fairs, participation in which enables them to earn a living. That is an important element of the entrepreneurial approach of the travelling showmen families.

I understand that there are about 400 member businesses in the Scottish section of the guild, which equates to the involvement of around 2,000 individual showpeople. As we know, the jurisdiction of the Scottish section of the guild stretches from John O'Groats to south of the border.

A key focus is on the safety of equipment. The guild ensures that all equipment is inspected annually, with a view to issuing of safety

certificates by independent inspection bodies that are approved by the Showmen's Guild and the Health and Safety Executive.

Richard Lyle rightly referred to the member's bill on licensing of funfairs that he has been determined to see being introduced in Parliament. I had some involvement in that on the dark side—the ministerial side. However, I was happy to add my signature, as MSP for the Cowdenbeath constituency, in support of Mr Lyle's bill, which would seek to introduce a new licensing system for travelling funfairs in Scotland so that greater proportionality and consistency would be secured in the applicable licensing scheme. It is fair to acknowledge that there is, at the present time, a lot of red tape, and that the charges vary widely across Scotland's 32 local authorities.

To be fair, I say that although the Scottish Government has sought to make incremental improvements, including by way of guidance that was issued in 2017, there remains frustration on the part of many travelling show families that some local authorities do not pay much heed to the guidance.

In conclusion, I congratulate the Showmen's Guild on its 130th anniversary. Travelling showmen and their families are an important part of Scotland's history and culture. They enhance our lives in Scotland, and their contribution is welcomed.

17:18

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I, too, congratulate Richard Lyle on having secured this members' debate and, on behalf of my party, I congratulate the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain on its 130th anniversary and welcome its members to the gallery. The anniversary is a tremendous achievement and is testament to the fact that funfairs continue to appeal, despite the backdrop of theme parks, Xboxes and smart televisions.

My parents first took me to the funfair at the Meadows, here in Edinburgh, as a child, and I quickly became hooked. I discovered that the shows were a wonderful assault on the senses. I loved the sights, the thrill of the rides, the smell of frying onions and the candy floss. I easily blew my pocket money on the dodgems, waltzers, jets, ghost trains, hooplas and arcades. I still have that sense of excitement when I see that the shows have arrived, and I am pleased to report that my daughters have inherited my enthusiasm for the funfair, which ensures that family visits to the shows continue.

The motion refers to

"showmen having a lifestyle that is a culture rather than an occupation".

That became clear in my research on the history of the Showmen's Guild for the debate. I discovered that being a showman is very much a family affair. Other members have already mentioned Philip Paris, who is a Scottish showman and president of the guild. I gave up counting the generations of his family that have been in the business. It is not unusual for five, six or even seven generations of a family to be travelling showmen. It truly is a family business, and the expectation is that the whole family—from the small children to the women, men, brothers, sisters and uncles—will contribute to the life of the fair. It is acknowledged that combining domestic life with the accountancy, admin and safety work that is required is a tough life.

Showmen are not considered to be an ethnic group. Most frequently, they identify as travelling businessmen and women who feel that they are part of a society. A number of families now live on permanent showmen's yards but, for some, up to eight months of the year can be spent on the road, living out of a touring caravan and setting up shop at fairs at which their families have traditionally held pitches.

The lives of showmen have changed over the years, and are less fragmented than they once were. However, it is inevitable that, for family life to continue while they are on the road, the classroom experience of the children of some travelling showmen is intermittent. In recognition of that, each section of the guild has an education liaison officer, who liaises with the local education authority, the National Association of Teachers of Travellers and their partners. Education is valued, because much of the showman's business cannot be conducted without it, but Travellers' educational outcomes are still among the worst in Scottish education. That is a challenge for everyone in and outwith Parliament.

An action plan that was published in 2019 by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities aims to improve the lives of Travellers. It includes plans to develop partnerships with young people and their families to improve the understanding of the barriers to taking part in learning, and to develop strategies that will help to address those barriers and improve outcomes.

The guild is primarily a business-focused association that is run by showmen on behalf of showmen, and it is right that the safety of members' rides is a top priority for it. Following a number of high-profile accidents in theme parks across the United Kingdom, when fun days out turned to tragedy, it is imperative that members of the public are confident that they are attending safe funfairs. I welcome and applaud the guild's attention to safety, which ensures that annual

inspections of members' equipment are carried out by independent engineers and stop orders are immediately applied to rides that fail a safety test.

It is clear that showmen are determined to hold on tightly to the life that they have been taught to live by generations of family before them. I commend the work of the guild and its members, and I hope that it will continue to work with key stakeholders, including local authorities, education authorities, the police and local communities, to ensure the long-term future of that way of life.

I congratulate the guild on its anniversary and commend it to members.

17:23

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I congratulate Richard Lyle on securing this debate on the 130th anniversary of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and I welcome the president of the guild, Philip Paris, members of the guild and distinguished guests to the public gallery.

There were several attempts to establish an organisation to represent the interests of showmen, such as in Yorkshire in 1870, but they were short lived and the organisations disappeared within a few years of being founded. It was not until 1889 that the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain was founded as the United Kingdom Van Dwellers Protection Association.

The formation of the guild was a turning point in the history of showmen. It identified their lifestyle as a culture rather than an occupation, and it led to and promoted the idea of travelling showmen and their families being a cultural group.

The people whom the guild represents earn their livelihoods by running entertainment at funfairs and they come from a wide variety of historical backgrounds. Some members can trace their roots back to strolling players and entertainers, but most are descendants of people who were attracted into fairgrounds during the period of great expansion that followed the introduction of steam-powered rides in the 19th century and the introduction of bank holidays under the Bank Holidays Act 1871. They have their own traditions and customs and, in some cases, their own language. They identify separately from any other travelling groups, and their roots, cultures, traditions and identities are separate and distinct.

The first meeting of the showmen took place in the Black Lion hotel in Salford to discuss how they might oppose a bill that threatened their lifestyle and culture. They enlisted the support of members of both houses of Parliament and of civil liberty groups to fight the bill. The campaign lasted five

years but resulted in victory when George Smith's bill was rejected by Parliament in 1893.

In 1911 the association decided to drop its lengthy title in favour of the Showmen's Guild and its president, Pat Collins, transformed the guild into a strong, influential national body. In 1917 the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain was recognised as the trade association for travelling funfairs and acquired the right to represent those businesses at local and national levels.

The present day Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is divided into 10 sections, has a code of rules and has around 4,700 members. It still exists to promote and protect the showmen's way of life and to preserve the unique cultural heritage of travelling fairs and circuses.

We must look at the Scottish section of the guild and how it has engaged with this Parliament through the Scottish showmen's guild cross-party working group. As a member of the group for the past eight years, I have seen the dedication and commitment of its members in raising issues that confront showmen across Scotland each day and how they work tirelessly to bring about changes to resolve national and local issues.

I would also like to thank Richard Lyle, the chair of the cross-party group, for all his hard work and commitment over the years. His persistence will result in a member's bill being brought to Parliament to tackle the problem of requiring a public entertainment licence to operate fairground equipment, and of the wide-ranging charges for that licence across 32 local authorities.

On such a historic occasion as an anniversary celebrating an impressive 130 years, it seems proper to note the relationship that Kirkcaldy in particular has with the showmen. Kirkcaldy's links market is an important event in the showmen's diary, taking place on the town's esplanade from the third Wednesday of April every year. It has a history stretching back to 1305 and has entertained the residents of the Lang Toun and surrounding areas for centuries. The links market can boast of being the longest street fair in Europe, and the length of time for which our community in Kirkcaldy has benefited from the showmen's involvement demonstrates that they are an integral part of the town and should be celebrated accordingly.

Although this is the 130th anniversary of the showmen's guild, showmen have been entertaining at the links market for over 700 years. That centuries-old tie to our community has become an important part of the town's heritage and gives me great confidence that the work of the showmen's guild will continue to bring the links market to Kirkcaldy for years to come. It also

undoubtedly continues to raise the national profile of the Lang Toun every year.

The Burntisland fair also takes place within my constituency and is another of the most important events in the showmen's calendar. Burntisland links becomes home to the showmen for 13 weeks in summer, and that dates back to the 1500s.

Beryl Gamble from Glasgow illustrates how showmen and women have become an important part of local communities. Beryl has been visiting Burntisland since she was two years old, and can recall when her grandfather drove a steam engine along the town's Cromwell Road, lost control, and knocked over the town's iconic fountain. She says: "Burntisland has always been part and parcel of my life. I went to school here. I still see pensioners up and down the town whom I went to school with. My son runs Novelli's ice cream shop. It's just home to me."

I congratulate Philip Paris on becoming the first Scot in over 60 years to serve as president of the guild, and I thank the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and all its sections for their hard work in protecting and promoting the interests of its members. I thank them also for the excitement, fun and enjoyment that the links market brought me as a child and teenager, which has carried on into my adult years and has filled my life with some wonderful memories.

17:28

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank Richard Lyle for securing this debate on the 130th anniversary of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I also congratulate Philip Paris on becoming the first Scottish president of the guild since the 1950s. I offer a very warm welcome to the showmen in the gallery. I hope that they enjoy the celebration of their history and culture in Parliament.

It is an honour to take part as deputy convener of the cross-party group on the Scottish Showmen's Guild; I appreciate the opportunity to praise the contribution of the showmen in Scottish society.

Today we celebrate 130 years of the showmen's guild, a group that seeks to defend and promote the interests of its members. The guild has a rich tradition that many people are completely unaware of. The second world war saw it working with the Government to ensure that morale was kept high among those at home, whose loved ones had been sent away to fight. The showmen dedicated their lives to giving people joy and putting smiles on their faces. In 1940, T E Browne, the then Scottish chairman of the guild, introduced the Spitfire fund—a charitable programme that saw the showmen raise £5,000 in four months to

purchase a Spitfire for the nation. The showmen still carry out such fundraising, and it is fantastic that their commitment to charitable causes continues to this day.

Showmen should also be celebrated for their contribution to the Scottish economy and our culture. The guild's Scottish section is the largest in the UK, and the entertainment that its members bring to our streets and fairs provides fantastic memories for each and every one of us. For so many communities, shows are the highlight of the summer and are often annual events that people look forward to. As we have just heard from David Torrance—who takes every opportunity proudly to tell his colleagues about it—in Scotland the season opens with the Kirkcaldy links market, which is the longest street fair in Europe, extending for one mile down the esplanade.

Shows bring joy to many children and families during the summer months here in Scotland, and I am sure that we all have fond memories of visiting them as children. I can remember the thrill of walking into the showground, knowing that what lay ahead would be full of joy, laughter and most likely the type of sweets that could be got only at the fair. As a child, I enjoyed many a summer in St Andrews. The highlight of my holiday was always the Lammas market, with the carousel—or galloper—being my personal favourite. Not many people in the chamber will be able to see the little badge that I am wearing, which shows the carousel and which was very kindly given to me by a showman who is sitting in the public gallery. I assure him that I take every opportunity to wear my galloper badge proudly.

It is important to point out that we need to give the showmen more support. So many fairs can no longer take place due to the exorbitant and hugely varying charges that some local authorities impose. They are often inconsistent, extortionate and, quite frankly, unfair. Indeed, my local authority in Renfrewshire charges one of the highest rates in Scotland. We need to ensure that fairs can still take place in every area and for every community. That is why I was happy to support Richard Lyle and the guild in introducing a member's bill to introduce parity and equality in charging—and, as Mr Lyle has said, to right a wrong.

We also need to tackle the discrimination and prejudice to which showpeople are subject. As elected representatives we have a responsibility to call out racism and discrimination and to help to break down the barriers that the showpeople's community faces.

I again congratulate the Showmen's Guild on its 130th anniversary. I hope that we can continue to enjoy fairs in Scotland for many years to come.

17:33

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I, too, thank Richard Lyle for bringing the debate to the chamber, for all his work in convening the cross-party group on showmen, of which I am a member, and for raising the issues that showpeople in Scotland face as they try to go about their daily business. I hope that he achieves progress on his member's bill, because it is only fair that showpeople be able to operate on a level playing field throughout the whole of Scotland.

We spent this afternoon debating the positive contribution of Gypsy Travellers to Scottish society, while recognising the very great barriers and discrimination that they face, and the action that we must take to ensure that their lives are made better. I agree with Mary Fee that showpeople also face much discrimination, rather than recognition of the positive contribution that they make.

I said in the earlier debate that, as a farmer's daughter, I welcomed the visit of Gypsy Travellers to our house. As a farmer's daughter, I also recognise the huge contribution of showpeople to rural life. Anyone who has a relative who is involved in agricultural shows, Highland games, fairs or festivals will know that the event would not be complete without the funfairs—or showies, as we call them in the north-east. I am sure that many townfolk would not go to an agricultural show if their children did not badger them about going to the showies.

I therefore welcome to the gallery all the men and women who are involved in the Scottish Showmen's Guild, who are resplendent in their chains of office. This is an opportunity for me and many other members to thank them for their contribution. I congratulate Philip Paris on becoming only the third Scot in the guild's long history to become president.

God forbid that I ever begin to sound like Stewart Stevenson in talking about the wide range of accomplishments of my forebears—*[Laughter.]*—however, during the guild's last visit to Parliament, it transpired in conversation that some older guild members knew of my granny's cousin, Phyllis Allan, who worked in circuses in the UK and abroad, first with her palomino horses and then with her famous poodles. I remember meeting her—just once, I think—and she was very glamorous. That was a very long time ago, and it just shows the pull of funfairs.

I want to recognise the huge amount of work that goes on in providing the entertainment that showpeople contribute. Moving large pieces of equipment around the country, constructing them safely and securely and keeping them running is a massive and impressive operation. Guild members

must all be skilled mechanical engineers, motor mechanics, electricians and all manner of other trades.

Increasingly, showpeople are involved in Christmas markets. The First Minister much enjoyed her visit to the Aberdeen Christmas market, when she went on one of the gentler rides, as well as the skating rink.

Showpeople work long and unsocial hours in all weathers to provide us with entertainment, and we thank them for that.

I cannot finish without mentioning the permanent feature on Aberdeen beach. Codona's amusement park has for generations provided entertainment for Aberdonians and visitors alike. I salute the Codona family.

17:37

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): I welcome the debate and thank Richard Lyle for bringing it to Parliament. The last debate that we had on the topic was in 2014, on the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain's 125th anniversary. I welcome members of the guild from across the UK to Parliament.

As members are aware, I have a long-standing interest in matters of land and place. It was when I was researching Scotland's common lands, parish commonties and the common-good lands of the royal burghs that I first became fully aware of the long and fascinating history of showpeople in Scotland.

One of my first encounters with travelling people was my meeting with Jimmy Stringfellow. I was researching the exact location of the famous Falkirk tryst, the ancient cattle market—which, of course, has never been in Falkirk; it took place in Stenhousemuir, but that is another story. Associated with the drovers' market was a fair. While a fair was being dismantled, I visited and met Jimmy Stringfellow in his caravan, and we talked about the lives of the showpeople. He impressed on me—as he did later, when I visited him in Govan—the close association of Scotland's showpeople with Scotland's history and the provision of entertainment and amusement for ordinary folk, wherever they live. Showpeople have always travelled and made their way across Scotland and beyond to make a living by bringing fun, excitement and joy to families, wherever they go.

David Torrance talked about the Links market in Kirkcaldy, which is the world's oldest and longest-running street fair—it has been going since the early 14th century. It is no coincidence that that fair is run by the guild. It is the start of the fair

season, as we have heard, and it takes place on ancient common land.

It is also no coincidence that the charters of Scotland's royal burghs usually make direct legal reference to the right to hold fairs. Those remain live legal documents today. One of my on-going interests is work with the Showmen's Guild to see whether legal arguments might be developed on the back of those charters to provide greater security and to uphold the rights of showpeople to hold fairs in places including Ayr. Unfortunately, due to the regulatory environment and the increasing commercialisation that we see—for example, here in Edinburgh, where public spaces and public events are increasingly run by large corporate event organisers—the opportunity for showpeople to continue their trade has become a little bit precarious.

I also welcome Richard Lyle's member's bill, which I was pleased to support. I hope that he makes progress with it. I was reminded of these matters as I was reading the wonderful little book "Showfolk: An Oral History of a Fairground Dynasty", by Frank Bruce. In it, Gordon Codona is talking in an interview about the 1930s—he thought that it might be about 1934. He talked about how his father

"spent a lot of time running about all over the country seeing—but it was quite a job; he had to go and visit people that owned a piece of land, see the man that owned it, or if it was the local authority he had to go and see them. And there were various other parts—once you'd done that you had to find out if there was any other requirements needed. Licences, for example at that time was important in Glasgow; you couldn't open—or in Scotland—you couldn't open a fair without a licence. In England you could go and get a bit of land and put your—see the landlord, whoever—and start to operate. You couldn't do that in Scotland. You had to get a bit of land and apply to the Sheriff's Court to get the licence, which—that meant seeing people and stating your case and so on. That was my father's main job at that particular time."

So, has much changed? I read the *Official Report* of the members' debate that took place in 2014. We heard then, for example, from Siobhan McMahon, who quoted a newspaper article that quoted a chairman of the guild, who said:

"there is more red tape and it is more expensive to run shows in Scotland than any other country in Europe. It's become more and more difficult to get a licence every year." —[*Official Report*, 19 June 2014, c. 32502]

I also learned of Christina McKelvie's excitement at the waltzers. It was a great wee debate. Derek Mackay, who was the Minister for Local Government and Planning at the time, said that he was going to establish a working group to look at how the regulations might be modernised. I hope that today's debate is part of a process in which, over the next year and a bit, we finally put to rest the problems that have arisen around regulations.

I thank again Richard Lyle, and I congratulate the Showmen's Guild on its 130th anniversary.

17:42

The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham): In closing the debate, I thank first my parliamentary colleague Richard Lyle for successfully securing the motion and for the detailed and informative speech that he gave. As members will no doubt know, Richard has a long-standing interest in funfairs. He is also the convener of the Scottish Parliament's cross-party group on the Scottish Showmen's Guild. I also thank all the members across the chamber who have contributed to tonight's interesting and informative debate.

The motion celebrates the 130th anniversary of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I offer my congratulations to the Showmen's Guild on reaching that milestone. I know that some members of the guild are present in the public gallery. I very much look forward to meeting them at the reception that is due to take place shortly after the debate, in the Parliament's garden lobby.

I am sure that we can all remember the excitement when we were children and the fair—or perhaps we called it "the shows" or "the carnival"—arrived in our town or village. Local fairs across Scotland can bring communities together and present a day of exhilarating family fun. Fairground rides, shows that are delivered by entertainers, the food and the music provide an array of activity, culture and talent that add up to a very special atmosphere at the funfair, even on the all too common days when the Scottish weather might not be quite, shall we say, at its best.

The role of the Showmen's Guild is key in all that. The principal objective of the Showmen's Guild, which has remained the same since the guild's inception as the Van Dwellers Association in 1889, is

"to protect the interests of its members – travelling showmen who gain their livelihoods by attending funfairs."

It is the oldest and largest organisation that represents the industry and its community. It is divided into 10 sections across the UK and has over 4,000 members. However, I understand that the total number of people involved in the business is much higher than that. The Scottish section of the Showmen's Guild represents nearly 400 members, each being a small business in their own right. I understand that the Scottish section of the guild is also the largest by area, with its head office in Glasgow.

Funfairs operate all year round in Scotland and most of those fairs are operated by members of the Showmen's Guild. Perhaps the most well-

known is the annual Kirkcaldy links market that David Torrance mentioned, the history of which dates back over 700 years to the year 1304. It is Europe's longest street fair and the oldest in Scotland. The six-day event is held every April along the Kirkcaldy seafront and with its mix of rides, amusements and attractions it draws tens of thousands of visitors to the town.

The Showmen's Guild and its membership have made a significant contribution to our society over many years. I am aware that during the members' business debate in 2014 on the Showmen's Guild's 125th anniversary, Richard Lyle highlighted that more than 3,000 showmen volunteered to fight on behalf of Great Britain during the first and second world wars. Further, Mary Fee mentioned in her speech that during the second world war, the Showmen's Guild managed to raise £5,000 to pay for a Spitfire for the Royal Air Force. The Spitfire was named "Fun of the Fair" in honour of the guild. Mary Fee also mentioned that the showmen who did not join the forces contributed to the war effort by taking fairs up and down the country as part of the stay at home holidays campaign to raise the morale of local communities.

I place on record my personal thanks to the guild for its work and its dedicated approach and commitment to supporting its members to ensure that travelling funfairs are run safely—a point made by a number of members in their speeches, including Annabelle Ewing and Jeremy Balfour—with effective safety precautions and procedures applied across the country being an extremely important part of that. The guild's willingness to engage and work with the Health and Safety Executive is also an important element of how the guild goes about its work.

The sense of everyone being in it together as a family is a defining feature of the travelling showpeople community. Indeed, many people in the community boast of a family history in the business that goes back generations, some of which was mentioned in the debate.

I take this opportunity to offer my congratulations to Philip Paris on his election last year as president of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. He is only the third Scot to be named as president of the guild and the first since the 1950s. I understand that Philip has been a member of the Showmen's Guild from the age of 18 and has served on the committee since 1984, rising through various positions, including vice chairman and Scottish chairman. His length of service over decades deserves a special mention and it demonstrates Philip's passion for and commitment to the guild.

The Parliament can be assured that the Scottish Government remains fully supportive of funfairs

and recognises the contribution that they make to community life. The Showmen's Guild has enriched our society by contributing, evolving and changing its practices, with the guild acting as a very supportive umbrella body that looks after its members' interests and regulates how they operate. The guild continues to support and deliver great events right across the country, enriching our culture and history. I wish the Showmen's Guild every success and I look forward to meeting guild members at the parliamentary reception this evening.

Correction

John Swinney has identified an error in his contribution and provided the following correction.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):

At col 5, paragraph 3—

Original text—

The most recent data on Edinburgh city secondary schools that I have available to me show that the number of secondary schools in Edinburgh that are operating at more than 100 per cent capacity has fallen by one secondary school.

Corrected text—

The most recent data on Edinburgh city secondary schools that I have available to me show that the number of secondary schools in Edinburgh that are operating at 100 per cent capacity or more of capacity was four, the same as 2017-18.

Meeting closed at 17:48.

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

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba