



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 13 January 2015

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

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

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

Good afternoon, everyone. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our leader is Ani Lhamo, from Kagyu Samye Ling monastery and Tibetan centre in Eskdalemuir.

Ani Lhamo (Kagyu Samye Ling Monastery and Tibetan Centre, Eskdalemuir): Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me to talk to you today. As you may be able to hear, I am Scottish and, although I might not look it, I feel thoroughly Scottish. However, I have been a nun within the Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism for more than 25 years. Throughout that time, I have lived according to Buddhist principles and observed the discipline of a nun, which involves wearing robes and shaving the head. I have travelled freely around Scotland and, in all those years as a nun, I have never been treated badly because of my appearance or beliefs.

That has made me think about the fact that today in Scotland we have a wonderful prevailing atmosphere of tolerance and understanding. My own experience is proof of that, which makes me feel proud to belong to a country where the general policy and the way of life of the people are based on tolerance, understanding and acceptance of others.

From a Buddhist perspective, tolerance is extremely important. It means to accept that other people hold different views from ourselves, to be willing to allow others to be different in their views and actions, and to have an attitude of loving kindness towards those who are different from us.

That seems to be an important aspect of modern life. Disturbances, wars and political upheavals around the world are caused by a lack of tolerance. Lack of tolerance causes the breakdown of relations between individuals and groups and, on a national level, it separates countries and even causes conflict and wars.

We are all human beings. Some of us look different, but we all breathe the same air and the only way that we will survive in the long run is through learning to live alongside one another. If we want to achieve domestic harmony, good relations between ethnic and religious groups and peace between the different countries and races,

we have no choice but to learn to accept one another.

I hope that Scotland will always maintain its adherence to the principles of tolerance and compassion and as an example of how we could put that into practice, I would like to end with some guidance that the Buddha gave about how to deal with difficult people and situations. He said that when we meet those things, rather than reacting negatively, we should think:

“If a person foolishly does me wrong, I will return to him the protection of my boundless love. The more evil that comes from him the more good will go from me.”

Thank you.

Business Motion

14:04

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-12046, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a variation and a suspension to standing orders to allow a debate on a Scottish statutory instrument this afternoon.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purpose of the debate on motion S4M-11985 on the Public Services Reform (Inspection and Monitoring of Prisons) (Scotland) Order 2014 [draft] on Tuesday 13 January 2015, in Rule 10.6.5 of Standing Orders—

(a) delete

one speaker

and insert

two speakers

(b) the third sentence be suspended.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:05

Severe Weather (Power Supplies)

1. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on efforts to restore power supplies affected by severe weather. (S4T-00896)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The weekend saw Scotland endure some of the worst weather for many years, with four exceptional weather events on four consecutive days. The front-line workforce in the power supply companies managed to battle through very difficult conditions, stay safe and restore customer supplies into the bargain. On behalf of the Scottish Government, I express our sincere thanks to those front-line workers, to those from other distribution network operators who provided additional resources and to those in the contracting community who travelled long distances and endured long and hard working conditions and hours to assist in the restoration effort.

On 8 January, the total number of homes that were affected by the weather was 111,000. A total of 918 homes were without power for over 48 hours. However, I am pleased to say that the last few customers who were off the electricity supply following the weekend storms have now been reconnected.

Mike MacKenzie: What multi-agency support was provided for households that were affected by power outages over a sustained period of time?

John Swinney: Over the course of the weekend, I convened a number of meetings of the Government's resilience operation, supported by the transport minister, Mr Mackay, and the environment minister, Dr McLeod. I worked with agencies such as the Met Office, the transport companies First ScotRail and Network Rail, the power utility companies SSE and Scottish Power, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Transport Scotland and a variety of other organisations, including our local resilience networks.

Given that a number of customers were off supply for a significant period of time, one of the things that we concentrated on most directly was the availability of integrated welfare support to members of the public who were off supply. I compliment the power companies, local authorities and various other bodies at the local level for working constructively together. On one occasion, facilities were made available on a Caledonian

MacBrayne vessel that was berthed at Harris to provide support to individuals who were without power on that island. That shows just some of the imagination that went into trying to support people in a very difficult set of circumstances.

Mike MacKenzie: I note that the cabinet secretary thanked all those involved, but will he extend a particular thanks to the crews, engineers and men who climbed up the poles who worked tirelessly in very difficult weather conditions to restore power to the homes throughout Scotland that were affected?

John Swinney: I have written today to the chief executives of Scottish Power and SSE to ask them to convey to their staff, as I have done publicly, our enormous debt of gratitude to individuals who endured truly shocking conditions in trying to restore power supplies. I have seen in the media a number of members of the public expressing their appreciation, having lost their power supply and having lived through the conditions that they did over the past few days, of the determination of the power supply workers to restore supplies. I am very happy to put that comment on the record on behalf of the Scottish Government, and I have asked the power companies to convey our thanks directly to the staff who have been involved.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am sure that all members will want to associate themselves with the tributes that have been paid to the engineers and others who have worked very hard to help those in need.

In view of the increasing incidence of extreme weather, does the cabinet secretary think that it is time for a review of the transmission infrastructure more generally to ensure that it has the appropriate resilience to deal with such events?

John Swinney: Those questions are consistently assessed by the distribution companies and lessons are learned from our experiences.

When we look at the scale of the disruption experienced and the recovery operation, we can draw two conclusions. First, the scale of the incidents with which we have been wrestling is exceptional in terms of the intensity of the wind strength, its impact and the damage caused. Secondly, in terms of resilience, the power companies are able to mobilise significant resources to address the issues.

A point that struck me in preparing for what happened—we were involved in discussions with power companies long before any of the damage happened—was the degree to which the power companies were following the Met Office's forecasts and putting in place resources in different parts of the country where they did not already have such resources, to ensure that they

were ready for the damage when it came. That is an example of the significant approach to resilience that is taken by the power companies.

Storms (Transport Disruption)

2. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it has taken to resolve transport disruption caused by recent storms. (S4T-00886)

The Minister for Transport and Islands (Derek Mackay): Last Thursday evening, Transport Scotland and partner organisations activated the multi-agency response team to oversee the direction of resources on the trunk road network.

As members have just heard, the Deputy First Minister and I chaired regular resilience meetings to maintain contact with our key partners throughout the period of disruption and recovery.

ScotRail and Network Rail planned to operate a curtailed timetable last Friday and widely publicised the likelihood of disruption in advance. However, the storm had a greater impact on services than anticipated and a suspension of all rail services was deemed necessary.

During the recovery, Network Rail had 400 staff available to repair overhead cables and to remove obstacles from rail lines, including more than 500 trees. The scale of the storms brought travel disruption, with the cancellation of ferries and the temporary closure of some road bridges due to the high winds. There were fallen trees and debris on the roads and rail lines right across the country. I also thank all front-line staff who helped with the clearance efforts, sometimes during very difficult conditions and at all hours of the day and the night.

Similar arrangements are in place for the various Met Office amber and yellow warnings for snow that are valid across much of Scotland from this afternoon.

David Stewart: The recent storms were unusual—they were a one in 10-year event. Will the minister review whether the road network has sufficient variable message signs covering hotspots, particularly in more rural and remote areas? Is he confident that the messages conveyed are accurate? Could better use be made of virtual snow gates, which are flashing signs that warn if the road ahead is adversely affected by snow, wind or rain, and that drivers should turn around at that location?

Derek Mackay: Over the past number of years, we have made considerable progress in our resilience and response efforts. We have been able to deploy staff and teams where they are

required, and advance planning is important in that regard.

On the use of VMS, I will look again at how we use such signage to give accurate, up-to-date information in addition to the other sources that we have, including radio, websites and Twitter. Of course, drivers will see live, real-time signage, and we will ensure that that is as helpful as it can be during such incidents. I add, though, that some signage was affected by power outages and so on. We cannot avoid that, but mobile units may be even more helpful in such situations.

We will take every action possible to get information to drivers and travellers so that they can travel as safely as is possible.

David Stewart: Will the minister in future review the design of new road constructions, such as the dualling of the A9? Is there a need to have greater provision to cope with flooding, particularly by building super-large storm drains, such as those that are developed across the United States?

Derek Mackay: We want new roads to be constructed to the highest standard and designed for the conditions that prevail in Scotland. We must bear in mind that we are talking about particular disruption over the past few days, as a result of high winds, followed by rain and more high winds—and now snow and ice. I am happy to look at further evidence; we will explore any engineering solutions that can cope with the changing Scottish weather.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): The minister will be aware that on Sunday 11 January a convoy was transporting nuclear weapons on the M74 and M8, in terrible weather conditions. What advice, if any, was the minister or the Scottish Government given about the safety of the population of greater Glasgow, which the convoy passed through, during the period of disruption as a result of the severe weather?

Derek Mackay: Just as warnings were given across the country, various information was put out about checking sources of information. There was a clear message to drivers to drive with caution and to the conditions, and there were some restrictions on bridges, for example for high-sided vehicles.

First Milk (Assistance for Dairy Farmers)

3. Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to assist dairy farmers contracted to First Milk who have been notified over the weekend of a further reduction in price and the postponement of payments due. (S4T-00893)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment (Richard Lochhead): It is

understandable that many farmers are disappointed and anxious following the recent announcement by First Milk. I spoke to the company's chairman, Sir Jim Paice, last week, and he confirmed that the company has taken a decision to protect its long-term viability, against a backdrop of continuing uncertainty and volatility in the global dairy sector.

I will conduct a number of meetings in the coming days, including one with the National Farmers Union Scotland and other industry representatives tomorrow, to hear at first hand about the impact. I hope to meet First Milk next week to get a further update.

The Government will continue to make every effort to support our farmers in difficult times. We are taking forward a number of workstreams through our recent dairy review, ambition 2025. In particular, we encourage farmers to contact the recently launched dairy hub, which is a free service that offers advice and support on a range of issues.

We are also looking for retailers in Scotland and throughout these islands to support local producers and pay a fair price for dairy produce.

Michael Russell: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for the concern that he has shown. He will be aware that there are 51 dairy farmers in Argyll and Bute who are members of and suppliers to First Milk. They feel badly let down by the company, which from 1 February will pay 18p per litre—12.5p per litre less than it was paying on 1 June, 5.5p less than the nearest payment for other suppliers, and at least 7p less than the lowest cost of production.

In addition, First Milk's capital retention and delayed payment schedule are causing insecurity, worry and hardship. In Kintyre, the problem is added to by the question mark over the creamery and the lack of uptake by First Milk of investment that has been offered.

Will the cabinet secretary agree to meet a delegation of dairy farmers from Kintyre and Bute, to hear at first hand about the issues and hardships that members of First Milk face? Will he also intervene urgently to ask the banks not to take precipitate action, particularly in relation to member suppliers to First Milk, until the matter is resolved?

Richard Lochhead: Michael Russell has rightly highlighted the fragility of many businesses in his constituency. The problems that he described will be replicated in other island and rural communities in Scotland, given the importance of the dairy sector in such communities. I will be happy to meet him and a delegation from his constituency in the near future; no doubt we can arrange that shortly.

Michael Russell also made a good point about contacting the banks. I often meet the banks to discuss issues that our rural industries face and I would be happy to arrange such a meeting in the near future to follow up the points that he has made.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): I call Alex Fergusson.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Forgive me. I should have called Mike Russell again.

Michael Russell: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I thought it was something that I had said.

A key issue that First Milk has made much of is the downgrading of world demand for milk. Another important issue, which I know the cabinet secretary is aware of because of his passionate advocacy of Scottish food, is the extraordinarily low price of milk in supermarkets. When supermarkets are selling milk at less than the cost of water, something is wrong. The message needs to go from this chamber—from the cabinet secretary, who has greatly supported Scottish food—to supermarkets and the public that the price of milk must be realistic if it is to support the dairy industry in Scotland. What actions might the cabinet secretary take, and what actions might the Government take in its food policy, to ensure that there is realism about the price of milk? A pint of milk cannot be produced for less than a pint of mineral water.

Richard Lochhead: A range of factors are affecting the price of milk at the moment, including the decline in demand from China and the Russian food import ban, which means that there is more dairy produce in Europe to be sold. The increase in the supply of dairy produce in Europe has meant that the price has gone down. There is also the fact, which Mike Russell rightly highlighted, that milk has been devalued, given the amount of effort that is put into producing liquid milk, which we all require in order to live our daily lives and buy as consumers, and is now being sold at the rate of four pints for 89p in some key supermarkets. It is a pity to see such a good product being devalued. That highlights the need to add value to the product in Scotland to ensure that we have better food security in the future. In the meantime, I will take Mike Russell's suggestion to our retailers, who must ensure that they do not devalue the product but pay their suppliers a decent price for it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I now call Alex Fergusson.

Alex Fergusson: I have great sympathy with Mike Russell's constituents given the fragility of

the situation, and I assure the chamber that that fragility is not confined to Argyll and Bute—the whole of the south-west of Scotland is affected. It is worth noting that, if the worst happened and First Milk collapsed, there would be a further 800 million litres of milk looking for a home across the United Kingdom. The principal reason for the disastrous fall in the price of milk that has been mentioned is the massive surplus of liquid milk on world markets at the moment, and that is outwith any individual dairy farmer's control. What steps have been taken, are being taken and will—I hope—continue to be taken by the Government to encourage investment in further milk-processing facilities to reduce the surplus of liquid milk?

Richard Lochhead: Despite the very serious challenges that we are discussing, the longer-term outlook for dairy produce across the world is quite optimistic, with demand expected to rise dramatically. That should open up opportunities for Scottish dairy producers if we can add value to liquid milk and capture the niche markets around the world, as we have for beef, lamb, whisky and other products. That was the core purpose of the dairy review that we carried out. The plan is now being put into practice and we have a dairy growth board. A dairy hub is also being set up to give advice to dairy farmers.

The matter is certainly on our agenda. I recognise the concerns that Alex Fergusson expresses, given that the majority of dairy farmers in Scotland are based in south-west Scotland. We are paying close attention to what is happening with First Milk and to the fortunes of his constituents.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Looking to the longer term, we want to build on what the cabinet secretary has spoken of this afternoon in support of dairy farmers. Can he reassure the chamber about the initiatives that the Scottish Government and Scotland Food and Drink are taking to support niche markets for dairy products such as Lanarkshire blue cheese and the Loch Arthur cheeses, which are made in my region? What is the Government doing to help the development of new products for the home and export markets? If he is not doing so already, will he consider featuring Scottish dairy products and producers in the 2015 year of food and drink?

Richard Lochhead: As I said, there are many opportunities to increase our dairy exports around the world. I remember leading a food and drink mission to Dubai and other markets, following which new markets have opened up for cheese exports from Scotland. It is something that we are targeting. However, as the issue that we are speaking about today highlights, there must be a lot more of that activity in the future.

Claudia Beamish has mentioned some fine cheeses. We have a lot of fantastic dairy products in Scotland, and 2015 is the year of food and drink. That gives us an ideal platform for getting the message across to the Scottish public and the wider markets beyond Scotland. We should be exporting to those markets and allowing people to enjoy our fantastic produce.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will remember that I discussed the issue of milk prices, particularly in the context of the impact on farmers in my constituency, before the Christmas recess. Can he tell us more about what we might be able to do in the longer term to support the milk-processing industry in Scotland, given the crucial role that it will have in the future? Can we learn lessons from what has happened in Denmark and Ireland, which have managed to grow their processing industries, particularly given that this year is our year of food and drink?

Richard Lochhead: We always hope to support as much vertical integration as possible in the dairy sector supply chain to capture the value of our dairy produce and to share the benefits of that across primary production and processing.

As far as the relationship between the different parts of the supply chain is concerned, the United Kingdom Government recently set up the Groceries Code Adjudicator, after many years of lobbying by many parties in the Scottish Parliament. There might be a case for the adjudicator to shine more light on contracts across the supply chain. I refer to contracts not just between the primary producers and the processors but between the processors and the retailers. We must continue to shine a light on the supply chain to ensure that everyone is getting a fair share of every pound that is spent on dairy produce.

Protecting Public Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-12034, in the name of Keith Brown, on protecting public services.

14:26

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Keith Brown): This debate gives us the opportunity to reflect on the importance of our public services and the vital role that they play through the spectrum of people who teach, treat and serve our communities everywhere in so many different ways. In that context, I mention the continuing progress of Pauline Cafferkey, who I am sure members will be very happy to hear is no longer in a critical condition. She is someone who treats many people here and abroad.

We heard in the chamber last week that, as the economy recovers, growth must be balanced and sustainable. The Scottish Government is clear about its responsibility for setting the vision of a fair, equitable and sustainable Scotland. At the heart of that vision is the importance of high-quality public services and their power to enhance quality of life and improve economic opportunities for all. I believe that the people of Scotland also place a high value on our public services and increasingly recognise that the role that they play is crucial in reducing inequalities, which is a shared value that is essential in ensuring that we have a sustainable economic recovery that all can benefit from.

The United Kingdom Government's austerity has not just slowed economic recovery; it continues to undermine it. It is an asymmetrical austerity, whereby those who are least able to are those who are shouldering the greatest burden, and with an absence of fairness we cannot have true prosperity.

The five years of austerity that Westminster has already imposed have resulted in real-terms cuts, and there is more—much more—to come. We have challenged that wrong-headed approach on many occasions in the Parliament and beyond, and we will continue to do so, but we face the unwelcome prospect of austerity lasting for a decade or more, regardless of which Westminster party forms a Government in May. Despite Westminster's cuts, ours is a different approach, and we will continue to invest and to prioritise our work to protect and enhance public services as far as we are able to using the powers that are available to this Parliament.

At this difficult time for people, we are protecting household budgets through the provision of

services and policies that make up the social wage, which are sometimes characterised in debate as universal services. We remain committed to freezing the council tax, to continuing the abolition of prescription charges, to maintaining free higher education, free eye examinations and concessionary travel, and to ensuring free personal care for the elderly.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention on that point?

Keith Brown: I will come back to Neil Findlay shortly.

That commitment underpins the Scottish Government's commitment to fairness, prevention and value for money. I cite the example of the national concessionary travel scheme for older and disabled people, which has important health and social benefits. There is evidence that it promotes socialising and leisure, especially among older people on low incomes. Another measure that is worth noting in that context is the recent announcement to expand the provision of free school meals to every child in primaries 1 to 3, which will save families of every eligible child at least £330 a year.

It would be interesting to know whether Neil Findlay agrees with Jim Murphy that Iain Gray was completely wrong in relation to free school meals or whether he agrees with Jim Murphy's assertion that Iain Gray was completely right. Perhaps he can elucidate what Jim Murphy believed when he had his meltdown on Sunday. Did he believe in universal services? What is the position of Labour's cuts commission now?

Neil Findlay: One of the best ways to keep money in people's pockets is to keep them in employment. How many jobs have gone in local government under the regime of the cabinet secretary's party?

Keith Brown: Unlike many Labour local authorities, this Government has continued its approach of no compulsory redundancies, which has protected workforces. The crucial point of course is that that provided security for employees—I speak as a former local government employee—and their families during a time of recession because they knew that their jobs would be safe. That is an important point that is part of what we term the social wage for public sector employees.

We have also taken a very distinctive approach to reform. Along with that and guided by the findings of the Christie commission, the Scottish Government is pursuing an ambitious programme of public service reform focused on improving outcomes for people. A clear strategic direction for service transformation is now well established, built around four pillars: working in partnership;

engaging and developing the people who deliver our services; continually improving performance; and making a decisive shift to prevention. A wide range of reform is already being delivered nationally and locally, and a shared ambition has been established across the public service landscape to build upon those foundations and increase the pace and scale of positive change.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): In terms of preventative spend, what evidence does the cabinet secretary have that the £500 million has had an impact on outcomes?

Keith Brown: There is evidence from the change funds that are being established and the benefits in terms of more efficient public services. However, there is also other evidence. For example, if the member cares to look at the user survey on concessionary travel, he will see that it itemises some of the benefits—that is preventative spend.

Gavin Brown rose—

Keith Brown: Perhaps the member does not believe that providing free bus travel for our pensioners and disabled people prevents further problems or, indeed, that free prescriptions do so.

Gavin Brown: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention on that point?

Keith Brown: No. I have just answered the point.

I can assure the member that free bus travel and free prescriptions provide long-term benefits in bearing down on public expenditure. Such benefits are also provided by the £500 million that John Swinney has found, and we should not forget that he has done that at a time of huge constraint on public finances. We have taken the tough decision to address reform that was never taken by previous Administrations in this place or in Westminster.

We have invested a great deal of time and effort in a wide-ranging programme of public service reform, from establishing single police and fire services, to college mergers and the establishment of the early years collaborative. The successful transition to single police and fire services is an example of the decisive action being taken in Scotland to protect the resources available to us and ensure continued front-line presence and delivery. Events such as the Clutha bar tragedy and the more recent George Square crash remind us how important front-line services are.

To come back to Gavin Brown's point, great progress has already been made towards delivering the projected savings by Police Scotland of £1.1 billion by 2026, with approximately £880 million of sustainable and

recurring savings secured. We will spend £100 million this year mitigating the coalition's welfare cuts in Scotland, increase the number of free childcare to 30 hours for all three and four-year-olds by 2020, make real-terms increases in national health service spending in each year of the next session of Parliament and make payment of the living wage a central priority of all Scottish Government contracts.

In education, we have continued to invest in Scotland's schools for the future, despite the cuts to our capital budget. The total investment for the programme between the Scottish Government and local authorities is £1.8 billion. On 2 January, we announced more than £2 million of funding for an extra 250 places for people to start teacher training next year. We recognise that the future of the profession is important and we are investing in it. In the NHS, only last week the First Minister announced further spending to fund specialist nurses. Those nurses will have a direct impact on people in real need.

Scotland's public service workers who teach, treat, protect and serve our communities are among the greatest assets that we have. I thank them for their passion, their commitment and their hard work. As was mentioned at topical question time, some of our emergency workers face absolutely horrendous situations on many occasions—indeed, we expect it of them. One recent dramatic situation in my constituency involved the death of a child, and I mentioned earlier the Clutha and George Square tragedies. The emergency workers involved in such situations are also people, and they are affected by some of the work that we ask them to do on our behalf.

That is also one of the reasons why we want to thank them for their passion and their hard work, and why the Scottish Government is committed to a distinctive pay policy that is fair and supports those on the lowest incomes.

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Is the cabinet secretary heading in the direction of commending those not employed in the public sector who do valuable work daily in delivering public services? Where is the fair deal for them in terms of jobs and wages?

Keith Brown: I am coming on to the point about jobs and wages, but of course we are responsible for not only those whom we directly employ but workers in other public bodies. Duncan McNeil has quite rightly made a point about many of those who are not directly employed, many of whom are volunteers. My colleague Richard Lochhead has been very careful to make sure that we thank them for their efforts—the people working in the seas around Scotland, for example.

We are also clear that we should have fair pay. We should support those on the lowest incomes and protect public sector jobs and services while also delivering value for money for the people of Scotland. We are clear that senior pay packages should be in step with the salaries, terms and conditions that are offered to other staff. We also remain committed to a policy of no compulsory redundancies and have extended that until 2016.

It is also worth while to point out that, in the NHS, we have implemented the agenda for change wage increase for nurses. That has not happened in England and, believe it or not, it has not happened in Wales either. We have stayed with the agenda for change recommendation and, although it is a small increase of 1 per cent, we have paid it where others have not.

We want to support the public sector workforce and we want every individual, no matter what their role or the area that they work in, to feel utterly empowered to formulate the responses that are required to deliver the services that meet the needs and expectations of society.

Neil Findlay: Will the minister take an intervention?

Keith Brown: No. I will make some more progress.

A culture where people feel that they can deliver reform and improvement at the local level is an essential element of Scotland's approach to service transformation.

The recent announcement by the Conservative Party on limiting public sector strikes is just one example of the different types of relationship with the workforce that ministers north and south of the border are seeking to forge. With that, we have the Tories mimicking the 1970s Labour habit of introducing 40 per cent rules to try to rig ballots. That backfired on the Labour Party when it ushered in 18 years of Tory government. Perhaps that explains why the Tories are so keen on it. However, what cannot be explained is why Labour argued vehemently in the Smith commission to keep trade union law in the hands of the Tories rather than in the hands of the people of Scotland.

Much more is being done, with the programme for government showing our ambition and passion to deliver an alternative plan in a different way. We recognise the full range of strengths, abilities and capacities that are found in all sectors, which is key. Public sector, third sector—to return to Duncan McNeil's point—and private organisations must work closely in partnership with communities and one another to design and deliver excellent public services that meet the needs of local people. Through community planning partnerships and single outcome agreements, we are seeking

to support public and third sector partners to come together and share budgets to achieve outcomes.

If we are to tackle inequalities, power must be balanced—and we have to do that. As well as the idea that five families in the UK have the same combined wealth as the poorest 12 million people, we are now told by Oxfam that three families in Scotland have the same wealth as the poorest 20 per cent of people, and that is in a country that is the 14th richest in the world. Not only is that level of inequality morally wrong; it prevents us from achieving our economic ambitions.

If we are to tackle those inequalities, we need power to be much more balanced between the individual, communities and professionals, and people have to be seen as citizens, neighbours and co-producers of services. The third sector, with its connections, its reach to community networks and organisations and its capacity to mobilise volunteers and external investment, is a critical partner in working directly with individuals, families and communities to co-produce approaches that build on the assets in every community that support resilience and wellbeing.

With that way of working, we can enable greater levels of participation in the democratic process, which also help to unlock the potential that is found in every community. That is the distinctive Scottish approach to public service design and delivery, and it is key to tackling inequalities and delivering the better outcomes that we all seek.

I mentioned asymmetric austerity. If it was the case that everyone faced the cuts that we face equally and shared the pain and the grief together, I am not saying that it would be right—we have a fundamental difference on the approach that is being taken—but it would be easier to accept. However, that is not the case. The need for a strategic approach to service renewal has been internationally recognised, with a Carnegie Trust review of international evidence identifying Scotland as unique in supporting its systemwide rethink of public services with coherent, cross-cutting programmes of improvement.

We are in as good a position as we can be, with the limitations that we have, to get into that service renewal framework, given that we are dealing with policies that are not of our making. As I said, Scotland is the 14th richest country in the world, yet 1 million people in Scotland are in poverty, including 220,000 children, half of whom live in a household where at least one adult works.

Let us be clear that continuing cuts are going to be extremely severe—a figure of £15 billion has been mentioned—so it is more important than ever that we have an alternative approach. There is an “austerity alternative” that would support up to 30,000 jobs. The Scottish Government, for our

part, would seek to invest in Scotland's economy £1.2 billion of additional resources in 2017-18 and £2.4 billion more in additional resources in 2018-19, as outlined in the “Outlook for Scotland's Public Finances” report.

It would be great to add to that investment the savings that we could make if we were to abolish Trident, which is a policy that Neil Findlay has failed to support in the Parliament on previous occasions. Abolishing Trident would produce in excess of £200 million more every year for the lifetime of the expenditure on those weapons.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary should draw to a close, please.

Keith Brown: The economic impact of that spend would depend on the specific programmes that were allocated to us. It is estimated, based on the input-output tables, that if a £2.4 billion increase in spending was distributed across public services, capital investment and social transfers in proportion to the current share of Scottish public spending in those areas, it could boost the amount of gross value added by approximately £1.5 billion and support up to 30,000 jobs a year.

We have a clear choice: we can stick with the Westminster parties' consensus on cuts, or we can invest in Scotland's public services to support economic growth, create jobs and tackle inequality.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that strong public services are the bedrock of a fair and prosperous society; pays tribute to Scotland's public service workers who teach, treat, protect and serve communities and welcomes continued support for public services in Scotland, including an increase in funding for all NHS boards; expresses concern at the impact that the UK Government's austerity agenda will have on the delivery of public services; notes that, even excluding cuts planned for welfare across the UK, Scotland faces real-terms cuts to come that are estimated at £15 billion; further notes an assessment by the Office for Budget Responsibility that UK Government cuts will reduce government spending as a proportion of income to its lowest level since the 1930s; recognises that real-terms cuts in spending on services such as police, local government, infrastructure and education will total almost £1,800 per person while, at the same time, the UK Government proposes to spend over £100 billion on new nuclear weapons; further recognises that there is an alternative to the UK Government's austerity agenda, and calls on all parties to work together to secure economic growth, tackle inequality and protect Scotland's public services.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are quite tight for time today. I call Mary Fee, who has up to 10 minutes.

14:40

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to open on behalf of Scottish Labour this very

important debate on public services. Our public services care for, protect and educate us, and the world-class workforce that endures long, tiring hours and environments that, in some circumstances, we cannot begin to imagine deserves our respect and encouragement and our moral and financial support.

The Scottish Government motion once again lays the blame at Westminster's door without taking any responsibility for its own actions. Although our amendment recognises the difficult financial circumstances, it also acknowledges the pooling and sharing of resources across the UK and highlights the benefit that the Barnett formula brings.

Local government finance is broken; our NHS is at breaking point, with accident and emergency departments in crisis; and our education system, from childcare to college, needs leadership and prioritisation. Meanwhile, the SNP is withholding crucial funds from Scottish councils, the NHS and our children's future.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Mary Fee: I will happily take an intervention from Stewart Stevenson if he can explain to me why the Government is sitting with a £440 million underspend when our NHS is in crisis.

Stewart Stevenson: Of course, Mary Fee knows perfectly well that we are not doing that. More fundamentally, her party's amendment deletes from the Government's motion the reference to expenditure on Trident. Does that mean that she is in favour of investing huge sums of money in Trident instead of investing for the benefit of the people of Scotland and elsewhere in the UK?

Mary Fee: As I suspected, I got no answer from Stewart Stevenson. It is disappointing that members on the Government's benches would rather play political ping-pong than debate this very important issue.

The sum of £440 million is no drop in the ocean for public services—

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Mary Fee: No, I am sorry—I need to make some progress.

John Swinney: Will the member give way on that point?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is not giving way.

Mary Fee: That figure for the budget underspend represents 1.3 per cent of the overall budget and includes £165 million from the schools budget. On top of that, one of Scotland's main industries is struggling, with jobs at risk, incomes reducing and families worried.

I briefly mentioned schools, hospitals and councils—

John Swinney: Will the member give way?

Mary Fee: If Mr Swinney lets me make some progress, I will come back to him.

Those are the issues on which I wish to focus in opening for Scottish Labour.

Teacher numbers are at a 10-year low, and more than 4,000 teachers have been removed from Scottish classrooms at a time when pupil numbers are rising.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mary Fee: No, I need to make some progress—I am sorry.

That has led to larger class sizes, and the SNP has failed to keep its promise. Parents and pupils deserve and want better than that, but the Scottish Government responds by holding back money from the education budget.

John Swinney: Will the member give way?

Mary Fee: The percentage of pupils in classes of 18 or fewer has fallen from 21.6 per cent in 2010 to just 12.9 per cent last year. That distressing statistic shows that the SNP has no plan to protect public services. Teachers know that the Scottish Government cannot be trusted to assist the education of young children. Children in the most deprived areas are struggling in comparison with those in the most affluent areas, and the attainment gap is substantial, especially for looked-after children.

Scottish Labour supports the role that further education can play in our communities and in growing our economy. It is one of our most precious public services and offers a lifeline to many across Scotland. The opportunity for an education should be available to all, no matter the background of the prospective student. Vocational courses enhance the employability of people in our workforce and those who are unemployed alike and are intrinsic to boosting our economy. Colleges have been under attack by the Government. Student numbers have sharply decreased, learning hours have had a £10 million cut and the further education budget has been

squeezed and cut by tens of millions of pounds in real terms.

In its motion, the SNP talks about securing economic growth, but it needs to reassess its stance on college education and reverse its previous cuts. This would be a great opportunity for the new education secretary to re-establish trust in our college system and place faith in the hard-working lecturers who remain in their jobs.

This year's general election will be unlike any seen on these islands. However, the choice for Scots could not be clearer: do they want a Labour Government that is committed to investing in the NHS, or more of the same attacks on the UK's most sacred institution? I, for one, look forward to Prime Minister Ed Miliband implementing Labour's time to care fund, which will see an additional £250 million added to the Scottish budget through the Barnett formula. The mansion tax, the tax on tobacco companies and clamping down on tax avoidance schemes will raise around £2.5 billion. Scottish Labour has rightly pledged to use part of the resulting boost to our budget to fund an additional 1,000 nurses. Again, the choice could not be clearer: a Labour Government that will create resources and use those that are available for the NHS, or the Tories or the SNP.

In the referendum campaign, we constantly heard that the Scottish Government was underfunded and that the NHS would be privatised in the event of a no vote. As we knew at the time and have clarified in the past week, the only crisis in the NHS is one of the Government's making. Accident and emergency departments are close to breaking point. As Scottish Labour showed at the weekend, since 2012 waiting times have not been met for 12,510 patients. There were 12,510 occasions when patients did not receive their legal right to be treated within 12 weeks. How many of those patients could have received their legal right with additional allocations from the budget underspend? How many nurses, doctors and other crucial hospital staff would the budget underspend have paid for? Those are serious questions, to which patients and their families deserve to know the answers. For the Scottish Government to use the NHS as a primary example of how it protects public services is nothing but a slap in the face for the 12,510 patients denied the legal right that the Government itself brought in. It giveth and it taketh away.

Shona Robison: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Mary Fee: No. This is far too important a debate to play political ping-pong—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Mary Fee: Throughout the debate, my colleagues on the Labour benches will pick up on

matters relating to the NHS. Our focus will remain the same: patients deserve better. [*Interruption.*] It is an example of the Government's attitude to our public services that it would rather sneer and jeer than listen. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Mary Fee: An ageing and growing population, increasing operational costs and heavily centralised commitments, such as the underfunded council tax freeze, are placing an unbearable burden on local authorities, which are screaming out for financial assistance.

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Mary Fee: I am not taking any interventions. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Allow the member to be heard.

Mary Fee: The pressure forced on councils is resulting in increasingly difficult decisions that disproportionately impact on the poorest in our society. Under the SNP, local government has taken the largest share of budget cuts. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation warns us that local government spending is set to fall by 24 per cent in real terms this year.

Every single local authority has faced real-term cuts between 2007 and now. The Scottish Government talks about protecting public services, but that smacks of total desperation and shows how hypocritical the SNP Government is, because those real-term cuts are taking place against a backdrop of increased costs of 10 per cent since 2007, and councils are resorting to increasing the charges for services. The Scottish Government controls 82 per cent of our local authority budgets and it has simply passed the Tory cuts down to our councils.

In her speech to the SNP October conference, Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister, said that she knew that there were Westminster MPs in all UK parties who were itching to abolish Barnett. However, the only party itching to abolish Barnett is the SNP, and its plan for full fiscal autonomy would devastate our public services.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could you draw to a close, please?

Mary Fee: Last week, Jackie Baillie rightly stated that

"there is no greater danger to our economy just now than the falling price of oil",

because we rely on the revenues from the oil industry

"to run our public services."—[*Official Report*, 8 January 2015; c 56.]

An oil price of \$50 a barrel means an 85 per cent cut in revenues compared with what the Scottish Government predicted in its white paper, yet it continues to base its economic estimates on a higher price.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must draw to a close, please.

Mary Fee: Our schools, our NHS, our councils, our justice system and our communities are not safe in the SNP's hands. Public service workers are the backbone that ensures that we are cared for, educated and kept safe.

I move amendment S4M-12034.2, to leave out from "including an increase" to end and insert:

"... believes that the Scottish Government's budget underspend of £444 million restricts the potential for Scotland's public services to invest in hospitals, schools and in local communities; notes that the Barnett formula benefits Scotland's budget; further believes that redistributive policies such as a mansion tax and a 50p top rate of tax will allow further investment in Scotland's public services, and calls on all parties to work together to tackle inequality, support economic growth and proudly protect Scotland's public services."

14:51

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): I start by publicly congratulating—because it is the first time that I have had the chance to do so—Keith Brown on his promotion to the Cabinet and Mary Fee on her promotion to Labour's top team.

The Government motion starts well. A couple of lines in, we were perfectly happy with it. However, very quickly, it turns into a rather predictable, hackneyed complaint, which blames everybody else for issues rather than the Government. It ends with the age-old approach of saying that

"there is an alternative to the ... austerity agenda".

The Scottish Government claims that there is an alternative, but it will not say what that is. I have lost track of the number of times that we have asked it in the chamber what its alternative is and—more crucially—how that would be funded.

It is all well and good for Keith Brown to stand up and glibly quote from a pre-referendum document on the outlook for Scotland's public finances that was designed purely to attract votes and say rather nonchalantly, "We could just spend a couple of extra billion pounds in 2015-16, a few billion more in 2016-17 and a few billion more in 2017-18, and everything would be all right." However, nobody in the Scottish Government has at any point explained where those extra billions would come from.

If it were as easy as putting it in a document to make that spending happen, I suspect that every political party would be saying it and that

everybody would want us to do it. However, if a Government is to do that spending, it has to increase borrowing, cut spending somewhere else or increase taxation, and we have a right to know which one of those options would be chosen.

Keith Brown: To give just one example—apart from the ones that I mentioned—what about the housing benefit overspend of, I think, £1.4 billion a year, which relates to overpayments and fraud? That amount has grown in recent years. Surely if the member's Government got a grip of that, we could have more money for public spending in Scotland.

Gavin Brown: So Keith Brown wants to cut the housing benefit budget in some way to pay for the spending that he describes. I have not seen that on any SNP manifesto.

Every Government—including the Scottish Government, I have to say—does all that it can to cut fraud. I know that John Swinney has put a lot of effort into making sure that that is the case with the land and buildings transaction tax and the landfill tax. Every Government attempts to do that, but I think that most Governments accept that they cannot eliminate fraud entirely.

I did not think that the figures from the document that Keith Brown mentioned were credible when published, and that was at a point in history when oil was trading at \$110 a barrel. The figures did not really work then. When the price dropped to \$80 a barrel, the figures became even less credible. Then the price dropped from \$70 to \$60 to \$50, and it is now heading towards \$45, so the figures are a fantasy.

The outlook for Scotland's public finances is a historical document. I believed that it was fantasy at the time, and subsequent events have proven that it is genuine fantasy now. The Government can say that there is an alternative but, until it outlines what the alternative is, it completely lacks any credibility.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Gavin Brown: Mr Swinney looked as though he was about to stand up.

John Swinney: No.

Gavin Brown: In that case, I give way to Mark McDonald.

Mark McDonald: What is the figure for uncollected revenue through unpaid taxation, which of course would be money available to the Exchequer to spend on essential services?

Gavin Brown: As the member will know if he has paid attention to the past five budgets and autumn statements, increased resources have been put into Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to cut tax evasion and ensure that we

collect the maximum possible amount. The results have been encouraging, as has been said to the Finance Committee in evidence. The UK Government has its critics, but to suggest that it has not been trying to ensure the maximum tax take lacks credibility.

I move on to the point that I made in my intervention on Keith Brown. The Scottish Government needs to start talking about the powers that it has and to take action where it can do so. Three years ago, during the spending review process, everyone in the Parliament agreed that preventative spending is one of the most important things that we can do. At the time, the Scottish Government put £500 million into three change funds over a three-year period to get what it described as a “decisive shift” or “step change” that would improve outcomes and get far better results for people across Scotland.

After three years, how are we doing? Rather helpfully, the Finance Committee yesterday produced its report on the budget, which contains a pretty damaging critique of almost everything that the Government has done on preventative spend in the past three years. We quote Audit Scotland, which said that the approach is

“unlikely to deliver ... radical change in the design and delivery of public services”.

The Local Government and Regeneration Committee’s view is that

“the pace of transformation of service delivery across the public services in Scotland is concerning”.

John Swinney: Will Mr Brown give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the member is in his last minute.

Gavin Brown: The Finance Committee, without any member disagreeing, said:

“there is little evidence of the essential shift in resources taking place to support a preventative approach.”

I am happy to give way if there is time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, you are not. You are in your last minute.

Gavin Brown: My apologies to the cabinet secretary. I was certainly willing to give way.

On the children and young people’s fund, the committee said, without any member from across the parties disagreeing, that it

“remains concerned that despite an investment ... little evidence has been provided of any shift in”

the funding models.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Draw to a close, please.

Gavin Brown: This is a serious issue. We are talking about £500 million. If the Scottish

Government is concerned about public services, it should look at that issue with a fine-toothed comb to ensure that we get it right.

I move amendment S4M-12034.3, to leave out from “and welcomes” to end and insert:

“; believes that a decisive shift toward preventative spending is important to protect public services and to improve outcomes across Scotland; notes the issues raised in the Finance Committee report on the Draft Budget 2015-16 regarding the lack of progress on preventative spending, and calls on the Scottish Government to respond formally in early course to the concerns around preventative spending in that report.”

14:58

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Like Gavin Brown, I belatedly congratulate Keith Brown on his promotion. I also welcome the Labour front-bench members to their new positions.

I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. I put on record the gratitude and respect of me and the Scottish Liberal Democrats for the vital contribution that is made by all those who work in the public sector in Scotland. I need no persuading that making that contribution has been more difficult in recent times, in the face of the need to bring the country’s finances back under control and tackle the legacy of debt. That has presented enormous challenges and continues to create pressures, not least for those who work to deliver our public services. However, meeting those challenges is made no easier by the SNP Government’s obsession with independence, which leads it to characterise support for Scotland remaining a part of the UK as somehow anti-public service.

We have heard it implied again today that an independent Scotland would—miraculously—be immune from the need to rein in public spending, although the Government’s fiscal commission has advised that matching the UK’s deficit reduction path would be required. World oil prices have fallen to half the level that they were at when the Government’s white paper was published, which leaves an even bigger black hole at the heart of the SNP’s assertions and which would almost inevitably require deeper cuts in public services.

Another tragedy of the SNP’s self-delusion, through which everything that is difficult is always somebody else’s fault, is that it ignores the reality of what is happening now in our public services and removes the responsibility to do anything to improve the situation. What has been happening on the SNP’s watch? The Royal College of Nursing recently reported that staff at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde had expressed concerns that they had too few staff and too little equipment to look after patients properly.

NHS Grampian, too, has been in crisis because of a lack of funding—a situation to which ministers belatedly woke up earlier this week, having taken their eye off the ball for years. The damage caused by that inaction is real. It has affected staff, patients and the wider community in the north-east as well as in the islands that I represent, where my constituents rely heavily on specialist services and treatment that NHS Grampian provides.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Would Mr McArthur care to comment on the Arbuthnott formula, which was in place for many years and led to the underfunding of NHS Grampian? Will he pay tribute to the likes of the late Brian Adam, who had that system abolished—the Labour-Liberal coalition would not abolish it—in favour of the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee? Will Mr McArthur welcome the position that was announced yesterday?

Liam McArthur: It is funny how there has been a revelation for the SNP with a general election pending. I have been told for years about the underfunding of NHS Grampian and have witnessed the crisis that has unfolded. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Liam McArthur: In our schools, teachers have been put under enormous strain. No one could argue that last year's roll-out of the new exams under the curriculum for excellence was textbook. The Educational Institute of Scotland repeatedly warned of the effect that the additional workload and the uncertainty were having on teachers as well as pupils and their parents.

Meanwhile, last week we had confirmation that the Government has again failed to honour its commitments on primary school class sizes and teacher numbers. Those failures make life much more difficult for people who work in that key public sector and people who rely on it.

The Scottish Government already has a full range of powers over education and health policy and budgets. SNP ministers cannot duck the consequences of the decisions that they have chosen to make. They might wish to say that a big boy did it and ran away, but blaming Mr Salmond does not absolve them of the responsibility to face up to the choices that any and every Government has to make.

For example, it is perfectly legitimate for ministers to boast about the continued freeze on council tax, but only if, at the same time, they accept the effect that it has on councils' ability to meet the demands that are made of them for a wide range of services and if ministers acknowledge that the freeze, which everybody knows benefits most the people who live in the largest houses—it is an asymmetric benefit, if you

will—means that less money is available for other priorities, including measures that are targeted at the people who are most in need.

The other nonsense that the SNP trots out is that it has no truck with the private sector helping to deliver public services. For sound, pragmatic reasons, that has never been the case, despite protestations over the past eight years. In that time, ministers have been so happy for Kilmarnock prison to be run by a private operator that they have subsequently offered the same private operator—Serco—a contract to run lifeline ferry services to Orkney and Shetland.

Our health services have long involved private operators as partners that carry out specific operations and treatments, as well as helping to achieve Government targets on, for example, dental provision. The truth is that the SNP has presided over annual increases in the amount of public money that is spent on private providers in the health service—that is now to the tune of more than £400 million.

For all the talk today and in the motion about the UK Government's austerity agenda, the fact remains that Barnett consequential from protected health and education spending have allowed the Scottish Government to plough spending increases into key public services if it wishes. A further £238 million will come to Scotland courtesy of the autumn statement. If we add to that the significant underspend that Mr Swinney has admitted to running up, the assertions from the SNP are even more nonsensical.

Moreover, the economic course that the coalition Government has taken has put the UK's finances back on track. Liberal Democrats have anchored the economic policy in the centre ground. From that security for the future, we can build quality public services that are affordable and sustainable into the long term. We should contrast that with the prospectus that is offered by the nationalists, who still appear intent on pursuing independence by the back door.

The SNP took its eye off the ball in the pursuit of independence—an obsession that remains for many of its members—so we will not take lectures from it on public services. The Liberal Democrats have helped to protect those services in Scotland by balancing spending and borrowing to allow continued movement from economic rescue to recovery. That is the best and most robust foundation on which to build a strong economy and a fairer society that can deliver high-quality public services and opportunity for all.

I move amendment S4M-12034.1, to leave out from "including an increase" to end and insert:

“; notes the recent concern expressed by health

professionals regarding pressure on the NHS, particularly accident and emergency services and the lack of sufficient resources to ensure parity between the treatment of physical and mental ill-health; further notes that some NHS boards have still to reach parity through the NHS Scotland Resource Allocation Committee formula and that Aberdeen and Edinburgh City councils are still receiving under the 85% floor for revenue allocations; understands that the Scottish Government will benefit from additional funding of £238 million through to 2015-16 as a result of spending decisions taken by the UK Government in the Autumn Statement 2014; notes that the Scottish Government's Fiscal Commission Working Group advised it to match the trajectory of UK deficit reduction even beyond the 2015 general election; further notes the Scottish Government's continuing underspend on day-to-day services, and believes that the best platform to achieve a strong economy and a fair society best able to deliver high quality public services and opportunity for everyone is from an economy anchored in the centre ground, with spending and borrowing balanced to allow continued movement from economic rescue to recovery."

15:04

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): We should take a step back and look at the reality of what is going on at this moment in time. Let us quote some of the bodies that the Tory-Liberal coalition often speak about in this chamber. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has described the planned cuts as

"Spending cuts on a colossal scale ... taking total government spending to its lowest level as a proportion of national income since before the last war."

The Office for Budget Responsibility notes that, under the coalition Government's plans, total public spending would fall to 35.2 per cent of GDP by 2019-20, and would

"probably be the lowest in around 80 years."

Basically, it is back to the 1930s, folks.

Further, economist James Meadway says:

"On the fundamental issue of austerity, there is remarkably little to choose between Conservative and Labour."

Those are the realities, and it is likely that, today, Labour will enter the lobbies with the Tories at Westminster to support £30 billion-worth of austerity cuts. That might be the Westminster way, but it is not the way that I want to go and I do not think that is the way that the people of Scotland want to go.

At the same time as we are seeing cuts to public services that amount to about £1,800 per head of the population, we see this continued nonsense of talking about replacing the current weapons of mass destruction system with another one. One of the things that amazes me about that situation is that, again, there is little between Tory, Labour and Liberal on that front. They all seem happy to throw tens of billions of pounds at such abhorrent weapons, which, hopefully, will never be used, and

seem perfectly at ease with the idea that the cuts that are required to pay for these weapons of mass destruction will fall on the poorest members of society.

When he was shadow defence secretary, the current Scottish Labour leader, Jim Murphy, told BBC Radio Scotland's "Good Morning Scotland":

"We're in favour of the UK retaining a nuclear capability".

He also said that Labour's anti-nuclear stance in the 1980s

"was a flirtation with surrealism".

I will tell you what I think is a flirtation with surrealism: spending money on weapons of mass destruction at the same time as Westminster is cutting public services in a way that is having a major effect on the poorest in our society. That is a flirtation with surrealism as far as I am concerned, and it is something that I want to see changed dramatically.

We have heard a lot of nonsense about what this SNP Government is doing. Of course, this SNP Government has to cut its cloth according to the money that it gets. That money comes from the Treasury, and has undergone cut after cut after cut. At the same time as that has happened, we have seen on the part of the SNP Government clever ways of dealing with the situation, ensuring that public services are protected to the utmost, and I believe that the people of Scotland recognise that the protection of services such as the National Health Service is something that the SNP Government has done particularly well.

In his speech, Mr—gosh, I have forgotten his name. The representative from Orkney—Mr McArthur.

Liam McArthur: I even let him intervene!

Kevin Stewart: The speech was easily forgotten, because it was the usual nonsense.

Mr McArthur failed to take account of the years in which his party was in power in this place. At that time, they had a dud formula—the Arbutnott formula—that dealt with NHS spending. My colleague Brian Adam campaigned long and hard against that, and it was this SNP Government that eventually got rid of Arbutnott and replaced it with a fairer formula, in the form of NRAC, largely due to lobbying from the likes of Brian Adam and other colleagues. Beyond that, we have seen from this Government a move to create parity more quickly.

Gavin Brown: Will the member give way?

Kevin Stewart: I am in my last minute.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

Kevin Stewart: I thank the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport for the announcement that she made yesterday, which will see £15.2 million extra coming to NHS Grampian—an uplift to NHS Grampian’s £49.1 million budget for next year. The share of the NHS budget to Grampian has risen from 9.1 per cent when this Government came to power to 9.7 per cent today. Staffing levels have increased by 4.4 per cent and there are 29.6 per cent more medical consultants in NHS Grampian now than there were when this Government took power. That is good news as far as I am concerned.

I will continue to lobby for the north-east, as ministers well know, but we have to look at what this Government has achieved despite Westminster cuts.

15:10

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): In debating the protection of public services we always inevitably end up confronting the question of what is most important to us. For the Labour Party, Nye Bevan’s dictum that

“the language of priorities is the religion of socialism”

is never far from our minds, nor indeed is the Labour Party’s proudest achievement—the creation of the NHS, which is the legacy of that same Nye Bevan’s politics and priorities. Colleagues will have plenty to say about the NHS.

However, we are Scottish, too, and are thus mindful of what is perhaps Scotland as a nation’s greatest public sector legacy—our education system. Our oldest university recently celebrated its 600th anniversary. Next year, it will be 400 years since the school establishment act, which was the foundation of the system of a school in every parish—the idea of universal education, which underpins our education system to this day.

The Government motion calls public services

“the bedrock of a fair and prosperous society.”

That is true of no service more than education. In the aftermath of what happened in France and the current debate around liberty, rights and how they play against security, it is worth remembering that Lincoln’s colleague Edward Everett said:

“Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army.”

So, it is a idea worth protecting and it is up there with the health service as a public sector priority. The Government motion is explicit in identifying education as one of the key services that we must protect, but it also portrays the Scottish Government as a protector of public services. Indeed, the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure,

Investment and Cities waxed lyrical in such self-praise in his opening remarks.

We are entitled to ask what priority the Government has given to education and to what extent it has met the standards that it set for itself.

Mark McDonald: On the subject of priorities, this afternoon the Labour Party will march through the lobby with the Tories not just to back the Tory budget but to lock the UK into austerity for many years to come. What does that say about Labour’s priority for public spending and what does it say to the people of Scotland about the message that the Labour Party is sending to them?

Iain Gray: Our priorities are to protect the public services, have stable finances and allocate them in the place that is most important to our political priorities. That is the point that Nye Bevan was making back in the 1950s and it is the point that all serious politicians have to make today.

That requires a degree of honesty and we can ask ourselves whether that degree of honesty has been forthcoming from the Scottish Government. This is the Scottish Government that promised Scottish parents that it would maintain teacher numbers at the levels that it inherited in 2007 so that class sizes would decline. In 2011, it promised to continue with reductions in class sizes and to improve pupil teacher ratios. The truth is that there are now more than 4,000 fewer teachers in our schools than there were in 2007 and pupil teacher ratios are higher than they were eight years ago—and they are rising. Classroom assistant numbers have been cut; additional support provision has been cut; and preschool teacher numbers have been cut. Numeracy levels are falling and the attainment gap between children from poorer families and the better-off remains persistent and significant.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I have listened to what Iain Gray has said. Will he explain, given what he has said, why when the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities gave evidence to the Education and Culture Committee on next year’s budget it said that the budget looked okay and it did not look for any more money? I understand that COSLA is dominated by Labour councils. Will he also comment on the fact that only two councils actually gave evidence—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Right, that is long enough.

Iain Gray: I do not mind taking an intervention, but that was a speech—and people complain when we do not take interventions.

Whatever COSLA might have said, I can tell Joan McAlpine what the EIS said. The EIS is in absolutely no doubt that when the Deputy First Minister presented the budget just before

Christmas, he abandoned his commitments on teacher numbers and class sizes when he replaced them with broader educational outcomes.

There may be nothing wrong with the idea of broader educational outcomes, agreed with teachers and parents—that is what Mr Swinney said that he was going to pursue. However, my question is this: after eight years, three education secretaries and two First Ministers, does he not think that someone should have got round to working out what our educational outcomes for schools are before now?

We want our schools to be the best in the world and we want to see the attainment gap, which leaves too many pupils behind, addressed at last. That will not happen until our schools are given real, not just rhetorical, protection. The truth is that schools have probably suffered less than colleges. Further education budgets were slashed in 2012-13, this year's budget maintains the financial squeeze, 1,500 posts have gone from our colleges and 140,000 fewer students are able to study in them.

It is hard to see where the protection of schools and colleges has been and harder still when we find out in the latest outturn figures that there has been a £165 million underspend in the education budget. Yes, we need to protect public services such as education from Tory plans, but we also need to protect them from this Scottish Government, with its false promises, wrong priorities and empty rhetoric.

15:17

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in this debate for a number of reasons, not least because it illustrates that we have a tale of two Governments.

We see the Government in London slash and burn public services. It wishes to conquer and destroy the welfare state, the NHS and the entire commitment to collective good that we have all grown up with. Like its mentor Margaret Thatcher, it is ideologically opposed to the principle of public service. Its recent proposal to remove the right to strike from public service workers demonstrates that contempt for all kinds of collective action—although if it gets its way there will be no public sector workers left at all.

As has been mentioned, the Office for Budget Responsibility, which the coalition Government itself set up, predicts that total public spending will fall to 35.2 per cent of gross domestic product by 2019-20, which will

“probably be the lowest in around 80 years”,

according to the OBR.

The UK Government pursues its social vandalism, known as austerity, even though all the facts show that it has failed. By the end of 2015, the UK economy is forecast to be almost 4 per cent smaller than was predicted in 2010, when the Chancellor first entered office. By contrast, the Government in Scotland has maintained superior public services in the most difficult of circumstances. Between 2010-11 and 2015-16 the Scottish Government's discretionary budget has been cut in real terms by around 10 per cent and independent analysis suggests that that could reach almost 20 per cent by 2018-19.

Of course, cuts to UK spending have a further knock-on effect on Scotland's devolved budget if we try to mitigate the effects of policies such as welfare cuts.

Iain Gray: If the Scottish Government has protected public services to a greater degree than the UK Government has done in the rest of the UK, can Joan McAlpine explain why Scotland is investing almost half as much in science education in schools as the rest of the UK is?

Joan McAlpine: The record of Scotland's schools speaks for itself. The fact that we have delivered free education while students in England and Wales have to pay £9,000 a year in tuition fees and that younger students are being deprived of the education maintenance allowance shows how far ahead we are in terms of provision of and commitment to public services.

I was talking about the further knock-on effects on Scotland's devolved budget if we try to mitigate policies such as welfare cuts, as we must do for decency's sake. Offsetting the bedroom tax, establishing a Scottish welfare fund and topping up council tax benefits are all essential and they all take money out of public service budgets. Westminster's mess must be cleared up, but there is a cost, and this year that cost is £104 million.

There is worse to come. The OBR has forecast that 60 per cent of the UK Government's cuts have still to take effect. Given that background, it is nothing short of a miracle that Scotland's public services still perform well. The health resource budget, for example, has grown by 4.6 per cent in real terms despite the overall 10 per cent cut in Scotland's resource budget.

I have already mentioned free tuition.

Gavin Brown: Has the health budget grown by more in England or in Scotland?

Joan McAlpine: Scotland's spending per head on health is far greater than that in England, as Gavin Brown well knows.

As I was saying, the health resource budget in Scotland has grown by 4.6 per cent in real terms despite the overall 10 per cent cut in Scotland's

resource budget that has been inflicted by Gavin Brown's Government colleagues in London.

In criminal justice, we have delivered 1,000 extra officers while the number of officers in England and Wales will drop by more than 15,000.

In the coming year, we will support the provision of 600 hours of childcare to more than 120,000 three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds. The roll-out of free school meals, of course, shows that the commitment to universalism and the social wage remains despite the mounting pressures that are being placed on us.

What is perhaps most remarkable about this tale of two Governments is that, despite all those pressures, the Scottish Government continues to look ahead and to develop and enhance public services that are fit for the 21st century, even if the UK wants to roll them back to the first half of the 20th century.

In health, for example, we should all welcome the commitment to the 2020 vision for health and social care, which enshrines the prevention agenda that was set out by the Christie commission. Under the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014, which comes into force in April this year, new partnerships between the NHS and local authorities will have the responsibility for planning and delivering health and social care services in their areas. That will meet the needs of vulnerable people in their communities and take pressure off our NHS. I welcome the additional £100 million that has been allocated to aid integration in 2015-16.

Also in health, further important preventative work is being funded and taken forward in the detect cancer early programme, for example. I was very pleased to see that the draft budget proposes that that line should increase in cash terms from £8.5 million in 2014-15 to £9.3 million in 2015-16.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should draw to a close, please.

Joan McAlpine: I started by talking about a tale of two Governments, but perhaps I should have talked about a tale of two Parliaments, because it appears that, whichever unionist party holds power on the banks of the Thames, the outcomes will be equally dismal. In December, Ed Balls and Ed Miliband both promised to meet the Tory cuts; in fact, last week it seemed that they were vying with the Tories to show that they would be tougher on public services.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Joan McAlpine: All the while, they have promised to equal Tory spending and renew Trident at a cost of £100 billion, which will, of

course, detract from huge swathes of public services in the UK.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is excellent. Many thanks.

15:23

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): The UK coalition Government is involved in an ideologically driven attack on the very services that civilise our society. Those services mean that, irrespective of our wealth, we all get our bins emptied, our children receive an education and our elderly are looked after. We access a whole host of other services.

We see Cameron, Clegg and Osborne driving further privatisation and closing libraries, youth services and sports and leisure facilities. Housing budgets are being slashed and social care is in crisis. Those are services that Cameron, Clegg and Osborne do not want and can flog off to their City friends, or which they do not use so, to them, there is no value in them. They must be surplus to requirements. That is the attitude of the coalition. For the sake of people who rely on those services, let us hope that the coalition is booted out of government in May and replaced by a Labour Government.

Keith Brown: Does Neil Findlay agree that the privatisation of those public services is a bad thing, as he has just said, or does he agree with the right-hand man of the Labour leader in Scotland, John McTernan, who said:

"Privatisation is good for the NHS"?

Neil Findlay: I will listen to the Labour leader in Scotland, thanks very much.

It is not just in England that we see cuts to services—far from it. I often wonder what planet SNP back benchers live on. Here in Scotland, local government is at breaking point and the NHS is under strain like never before in its history. Council services are no longer being cut—some services are disappearing altogether. However, today, the cabinet secretary has come to the chamber with all the gall and brass neck that we associate with this Government to move a motion paying tribute to those

"who teach, treat, protect and serve"

our communities. There is no recognition, self-awareness or even a mention that any of the policies that are being pursued by this Scottish Government are impacting badly on our people and our communities.

Who exactly is the cabinet secretary paying tribute to in his motion? Is he paying tribute to the classroom assistants who I worked beside in his constituency, some of whom were like mothers to the vulnerable children in my classes but who

have lost their jobs? Is he paying tribute to the community wardens who keep our streets clean and safe but who have been paid off? Is he paying tribute to the social care staff who work for private contractors demanding 15-minute care visits, some of whom work for as little as £5.13 an hour on a zero-hours contract?

Is the cabinet secretary paying tribute to the police support staff, thousands of whom his Government has got rid of? Is he paying tribute to the ambulance staff who still cannot get proper breaks or the fire control room staff whose jobs have been centralised and cut, or the thousands of college lecturers and support staff who have gone following Mike Russell's disastrous spell in charge of our colleges? Perhaps he is paying tribute to the 40,000 council staff who have lost their jobs across a range of sectors; perhaps he is paying tribute to the public sector workers who he says that he is protecting so well, but who will be on strike in this very building next Thursday because of John Swinney's pay policy.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Neil Findlay: No thanks.

I am sick to the back teeth of this Government's hypocrisy and of hearing it at times of bad weather or following an emergency or an accident praise public sector workers for their effort and commitment in one breath and then, in the next, pass budgets that mean that more of those very same workers will lose their jobs or have their pay reduced or frozen, or that our services are cut.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Neil Findlay: No thanks.

The Government claims that the council tax freeze has been fully funded in each year of its term in office. That is an out and out lie. Look at the West Lothian Council from 2003 to 2011. I was a proud council member at that time. In 2006, we won UK council of the year because we were a well-run and efficient council providing good-quality, valued public services. It is still is a well-run council.

Despite Government claims to have fully funded the council tax freeze, West Lothian Council has been forced since 2007 to cut its budget by £58 million and it will need to cut its budget by another £30 million over the next three years. Those eye-watering cuts are even greater than those that were passed on by Osborne and Eric Pickles to local government in England.

As John Stevenson of Unison put it a few days ago:

"40,000 jobs have been lost across Scottish councils. If that had been any other employer, politicians would have been queuing up to demand action and a rescue plan."

He is absolutely right. Rather than engage in such rank hypocrisy, the cabinet secretary should be apologising for his Government's actions in slashing our services while sitting on a £444 million underspend. What hypocrisy.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Neil Findlay: No thanks.

We cannot go on like this. What the Government is telling public sector workers is immoral. We need to fund our services. We need a mansion tax, a bankers' bonus tax and a 50p tax rate; we need our local government services to be fully funded. We need a Labour Government.

15:28

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Neil Findlay has just lectured us on hypocrisy. Like Alice in Wonderland, I try to believe six impossible things before breakfast. One of those impossible things was not that Neil Findlay would be capable of making such a speech on the very day that his party will march through the lobby with the Tories at Westminster and condemn the UK to further austerity, whatever colour of Tory Government is elected in May. It is crucial, were there to be a Labour Government, that it is not a majority Government but one with an SNP conscience attached to it, to ensure that the public sector and the services of Scotland are protected.

Indeed, today we see the real progressives in the Westminster Parliament—the SNP, Plaid Cymru and the Greens—opposing the Tories, while the Labour Party backs up the Tories. We will take no lectures on hypocrisy from Labour, which talks left in the Scottish Parliament but votes right at Westminster.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Will Mark McDonald give way?

Mark McDonald: I may give way to Mr Macintosh a little later.

There is an opportunity for us to consider how we protect public services, but it is galling to hear Labour Party members throw around comments about an underspend that they know full well is allocated against financial transactions and managed expenditure and therefore cannot be used in the ways that they suggest it can be used, with the exception of the £145 million that Mr Swinney announced in Parliament in June that he would carry forward and use in the financial year to fund welfare mitigation measures and economic support, for example. We have seen Mr Swinney take action on the underspend that he is able to carry forward and utilise.

It is equally galling to be lectured about hypocrisy by Labour members, given that when

the SNP inherited office in 2007 we had to negotiate furiously with the Treasury to secure the £1 billion for Scottish expenditure that the previous Labour-Lib Dem Executive had left in a Treasury bank account, and which could have been lost to Scotland's public services because of the then Executive's inability to manage its budgets appropriately. We will take no lectures—

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Will Mark McDonald give way?

Mark McDonald: We will certainly take no lectures from Jackie Baillie on these issues.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way—

Mark McDonald: No. As I said, I will give way to Mr Macintosh if he wants to come in later. I will use the rest of my time to talk about other issues.

The Labour Party lectures us on teacher numbers, too; Labour says that we are renegeing on our commitment on teacher numbers. We have said repeatedly in the Scottish Parliament that we want to ensure that the teacher to pupil ratio is maintained.

It is interesting to note that the calls on teacher numbers are coming from Labour councils and the Labour leader of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I was on the Local Government and Regeneration Committee when the Labour leader of COSLA told the committee that he wants councils to be given greater flexibility on teacher numbers. Labour-led local authorities said that, too. Before Labour members come to Parliament and start lecturing the Scottish Government on teacher numbers, they might want to get their little provincial houses in order in the councils that they run; they might want to tell their councillors that they are the ones who need to get their acts together when it comes to teacher numbers.

Ken Macintosh: Will Mr McDonald, instead of quoting other people, remind members what the SNP promised on teacher numbers at the last election?

Mark McDonald: As Mr Macintosh well knows, the SNP inherited office in 2007 and Labour wrecked the economy in 2008, forcing us into a situation in which we had to manage our budgets in the face of austerity, which began under Alistair Darling and has been continued by George Osborne. He should check the record on that before coming to the chamber and pretending that the world was not changed as a result of Labour's economic mismanagement.

During Gavin Brown's speech I asked him what progress had been made on collection of unpaid taxes. His response was evasive. That is because the figure has remained stubbornly at around £30 billion and has not shifted dramatically in any way, shape or form. The UK Government is not

pursuing corporations that are not paying their fair share of tax with the zeal with which it pursues people who are at the margins of society—vulnerable citizens and voiceless individuals, who are unable to lobby and put forward their arguments in the way that people from the wealthiest strata of society can do when they meet members of the UK Cabinet in certain gentlemen's clubs. If those voiceless individuals had the same networks and opportunities, they might get the feather duster treatment that the wealthiest people in society appear to be getting. So much for those with the broadest shoulders bearing the burden. It tends to be the weakest in society—those who are less able to put their case or to stand up to the UK Government's relentless assault on their incomes—who bear the brunt. That is a disgrace.

We know that that is what we get from the Tories—we do not need to be lectured on that, because we know that that is what happens when the Tories are in government—but the biggest regret that people will have is that, up here in Scotland, we are being sold the message that the Labour Party is somehow an alternative to that. It is not; it is simply a repainting of the same tired old approach. That is all that is being offered by the Labour Party in Scotland, so it should just be honest about it.

15:35

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): It should come as no great surprise that David Cameron's coalition Government policy is austerity for all, but especially for women. It is certainly no surprise that Labour supports that policy, even in the corridors of power at Westminster today. The public schoolboy network that spawns Tory MPs like a mother frog blessing her tadpoles with some automatic right to power does not really get women. However, I remind the Prime Minister and his acolytes that women make up a little more than half of the voting public, even in wealthy Tory seats in the home counties. I am not naive; I do not think for a moment that my drawing attention to that obvious reality will make the slightest difference to the policies of the current Westminster Government. That is why we need more SNP MPs to shift the balance. Nevertheless, it is worth looking a bit more closely at just how misogynistic the actions are.

The "family-oriented" Westminster Government is taking at least £360 a year off new mothers in real terms through the combination of a freeze in statutory maternity pay and the removal of the health-in-pregnancy grant.

Let us move along the age range a wee bit. Westminster's welfare cuts threaten to put another 10,000 of Scotland's children into poverty—

100,000 across the UK—and the reductions in benefits will take away over £6 billion from Scottish households. If that figure is hard to grasp, let me mention that £6 billion would fund the NHS for the whole of Scotland for a full six months.

Mr Findlay would not answer the cabinet secretary's question on Mr McTernan's views on the health service, but maybe the Labour Party will answer this. On 1 August 2014, in an article in *The Times*, Mr McTernan said:

"Privatisation: what is it good for? Everything. That's what I feel like shouting at the TV and radio when I hear Andy Burnham, the shadow health secretary, pontificating about the supposedly dire effects of competition in the NHS."

That is how the Labour Party in Scotland views the NHS—as an opportunity to make money.

Maybe we women need to go back to our caves and stop challenging the menfolk when they go out to slaughter the bison. I do not think so, although it sometimes feels as though that is what Westminster would like us to do. The bedroom tax, the disability living allowance, the introduction of universal benefits and the personal independence payment—those policies are not only fundamentally wrong but discriminate specifically against women. Why? It is because it is mostly women who manage the care of disabled children or parents and who are the food bank users—whose number has increased 400 per cent—who have to somehow keep the household ticking over and put food on the table.

Women in Scotland are still, on average, paid less than men for the same jobs, and the benefit cap that was introduced by Mr Cameron and supported by Labour MPs is a clear attack on single women with children, as such households make up 60 per cent of those who are affected.

There has also been a reduction in child benefit, which is another attack on women. It was the one benefit that they could bank themselves, but it has gone. The proportion of childcare costs that is covered by working tax credits has been reduced, there has been an increase in the taper rate for tax credits, and the baby element of the child tax credits has been removed. In addition, there is a requirement for lone parents on income support with a youngest child aged five or six to move to jobseekers allowance. Finally, under the new universal credit system, a single monthly payment will be made to one person in a couple household, with a single earnings disregard that may weaken the incentive for the second earner—the woman, in the main—to work. Again, that removes women from the direct-payment package. The First Minister has made it clear many times that Westminster's benefit reform programme impacts unfairly on some of the most vulnerable members

of our society—in particular women, mothers and their children.

Speaking of this Government's agenda for change, there is another elephant in the room, which we have heard much about today: Trident. Westminster has given us the news—which is backed by Labour at Westminster and obviously by Labour here, too, as Labour members would not answer the question that was put to them earlier—that it intends to spend about £100 billion on replacing the existing Trident system. How is that for prioritisation? I say that it should be bairns, not bombs.

Of course, Labour's record on prioritising is doubtful anyway. In Scotland, it was Labour that enthusiastically rolled out the private finance initiative, which means that we are now tied into private sector deals that strip about £2.4 billion out of our budget every year. The Scottish Government does what it can to mitigate the effects, but until we have full fiscal control of welfare, we will continue to be limited in how much we can deliver.

Members have already heard some of the figures that show that commitment. I would like to go back in history a wee bit. Remember Paul Sinclair? I am sure that some Labour members do. A number of years ago, he wrote an article in the *Daily Record* when the then finance minister Angus MacKay was justifying the fact that the Scottish Executive

"couldn't cope with the amount of extra cash".

As a result, £718 million was sent back to the Treasury by the last Labour Government in Scotland, so let us have no talk of underspends, because that is an embarrassing fact.

I am not the first to say that Scottish politics will never be the same again following the referendum, but I reiterate it. We will indeed hold feet to the fire when it comes to securing our legitimate right to control our own budgetary policies. We will need to move on from a Dickensian view of the role of women. Protecting our public services is the way to do that.

15:41

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Many of us will be pleased that the Scottish Government is holding a debate on protecting public services, because teachers, hospital staff and public servants across Scotland are struggling with the impact of budgetary and political decisions that have already been taken, and the forthcoming general election throws into stark relief the very future of the public services that we expect and rely on.

Tory plans to reduce public spending to levels that have not been seen since the 1930s finally give the game away about the whole austerity agenda. An economic crisis that was created by private spending and borrowing has been successfully used as cover for an attack on public spending and borrowing. Welfare—the largest part of which goes to pensioners—is portrayed as being wasted on work-shy benefits scroungers, and new laws are being mooted to prevent public sector workers from even withdrawing their labour. The Tories hide behind the argument of balancing the books, but their agenda goes way beyond that. Those of us who believe in the value of good shared common services—those of us who believe that they provide the backbone of a good society and the

“bedrock of a fair and prosperous society”,

as the motion puts it—have a battle on our hands at the next election. It is one that we have to win.

Even beyond the political threat that is posed by the Tories, there are growing pressures on our public services that we also have to deal with; I refer to new demands such as the demographic changes in our society. Healthier lives and medical advances, for example, mean that ever more of us are living with dementia or cancer, so we must respond to that demand. I do not underestimate the difficulty of getting that right. Just this week, the limitations of the approach of the well-intentioned English cancer drugs fund was revealed. It has an overspend that means that availability of cancer drugs will be cut back.

As well as growing demands, we have higher expectations. An example of that is the expectations that people have with regard to single-patient wards. The Scottish Government might try to adjust the targets, but as it has discovered, if more and more people are waiting for longer than four hours in accident and emergency, it is not good enough to say that the situation is better than it was 15 years ago.

It is good that we are holding the debate and it is good that we are resisting the Tory approach, but that should not blind us to the challenges that we face. We should not pretend that the Tory assault on the public sector allows us to evade or escape from our own responsibilities. The Government in Edinburgh has already taken a series of decisions. Choices are being made, and it is not enough simply to bemoan how difficult those choices may be. Joan McAlpine mentioned that universities have been offered some protection, but that is because colleges have been abandoned and 140,000 Scots have been denied a learning opportunity because of that decision.

Just this weekend, we heard from the health secretary that revenue has been protected for

some but not all health boards, and that capital spending has been cut. I believe that that is confirmation that the Scottish Government is cutting NHS spending in Scotland in real terms.

Shona Robison: No—that is not correct. Real-terms spending on the NHS has gone up by 4.6 per cent since 2010. All boards will get an uplift through the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee; £380 million is being provided in 2015-16. All boards are getting more money. A record £12 billion is being provided, which is £3 billion more than Mr Macintosh’s party spent on the NHS when it was in government.

Ken Macintosh: The minister again refers to revenue. I point members to the Auditor General for Scotland’s report, in which she reveals real NHS spending.

We also know that the Scottish Government has asked our councils to bear the brunt of the cuts, so we have more than 4,000 fewer teachers. I noted that Neil Findlay was uncharacteristically generous to the Scottish Government earlier when he said that there have been 40,000 public sector job losses in local government, although the Scottish Government’s own statistics reveal that there have been 70,000 job losses over the past eight years.

Care visits are restricted to 15 minutes from carers who earn barely the minimum wage, let alone the living wage, public sector wages have been frozen and pensions have been restricted. Those are all decisions that have been taken here in Edinburgh by the Scottish Government—not by the Tories.

SNP back benchers and ministers will protest that they have no choice and that they operate within a fixed budget, but of course that is not exactly true. We know that they have a choice because, for example, after much pressure from Scottish Labour, SNP ministers finally used their powers to mitigate the bedroom tax. In fact, Scottish ministers are the first to point out that funding decisions that have been taken by the UK Government do not apply here and do not have to be repeated here.

It is also not strictly the case that we have a fixed budget. We have tax-raising powers in the Scottish Parliament and always have had since our inception in 1999. That is where we get to the real difference between Scottish Labour and the SNP, because Labour would keep the public finances under control but would find the additional money that is needed to fund public services by restoring the top rate of income tax to 50p for people who earn more than £150,000 a year.

Mark McDonald: Ken Macintosh appears to be suggesting that more money should be spent in every portfolio. Can he advise whether he

envisages the rate of taxation that he would levy being sufficient to fund the increases that he is calling for? Does he not accept that when we have a fixed budget that is being reduced, we must ensure that we manage finances across all portfolios appropriately?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Mr Macintosh, you must begin to conclude, please.

Ken Macintosh: I am just in the middle of outlining exactly where we would raise our money: by restoring the top rate of taxation and introducing a mansion tax that would fund 1,000 extra nurses. Those are choices that the Scottish Labour Party is willing to state publicly, but despite repeated offers to them, we cannot get one SNP member or minister to state that they would do likewise. They are not prepared to put their money where their mouth is.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid you need to close, please.

Ken Macintosh: They are not prepared to fund the choices that we wish to see. If the Scottish Government continues to be unwilling to talk about tax rises or where it will find the money, and continues to say that we should swap the pooling and sharing of resources for our oil revenues, I do not believe that it will get the confidence of the Scottish people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I must indicate to members that interventions have to be taken from their speech time, which is six minutes.

15:47

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): The theme of the debate is protecting public services. A key aspect of any debate on protecting public services is first to identify what valued public services we wish to see protected and flourish. On the SNP benches—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, Mr Doris. Can you move your microphone up slightly?

Bob Doris: Absolutely.

The Scottish Government has a clear vision for protecting our public services, whether it is the restoration of free university education, which was rejected by the Labour Party; universal free school meals, on which the Labour Party seems not to have a position or seems to change it from day to day; the abolition of prescription charges, which the Labour Party fought tooth and nail to oppose; expanding the concessionary travel scheme, which the Labour Party sought to reduce significantly; providing more money for free personal care; an additional 1,000 police officers on the beat; or whether—we should listen to this one carefully, but Jim Murphy especially should

listen—it is 1,700 more nurses in the NHS under this SNP Government than under the last Labour Scottish Executive.

The SNP and the Scottish Government have laid out clearly our vision for what protecting public services actually means in practice.

Duncan McNeil: Will Bob Doris take an intervention?

Bob Doris: Perhaps I will, if there is time later.

However, what we do not know, of course, is where Labour's cuts commission is these days. If members remember, it said that everything was on the table and nothing was off it. However, Labour has been silent on the commission. Perhaps if Mr Murphy ever finds himself in this place—I hope, of course, that he would never be in a position of power here—he could give us some more information on the commission.

Of course, any public service has to be paid for—something that will become increasingly difficult as the UK continues to accelerate its programme of savage austerity. I note that it has been said today that Ed Miliband will support the UK Government's so-called charter for budget responsibility, which would sign Labour up to matching Tory budget cuts to Scotland pound for pound, and millions of pounds for millions of pounds.

That is part of the process that will take £6 billion out of the welfare system in Scotland by 2016. Those cuts are aimed at attacking the most vulnerable people in our society, and the Labour Party is wedded to them. For example, Labour's Department for Work and Pensions spokesperson, Rachel Reeves MP, said that Labour would be tougher than the Conservatives on benefits. Let us not forget that.

Where does it leave the Scottish Government when we see 100,000 disabled people in the firing line with further cuts to disability benefits, a further 100,000 children being pushed into poverty because of UK benefits changes, and thousands of families being worse off because of the tax credit changes? Christina McKelvie gave a very good exposition of why those savage cuts target women and children in particular.

The Scottish Government has pursued a policy of mitigation where it can, with £35 million for discretionary housing payments to end the bedroom tax—where we can—being made available in Scotland so that no one loses out; £38 million for the Scottish welfare fund in the face of UK cuts; funding of council tax benefit, which the UK Government has also cut; and the reopening of the independent living fund in Scotland, with more than £100 million each and every year for mitigation. The Scottish

Government is not just protecting public services, but is protecting the public, where we can.

Much has been made of the Scottish Government's so-called underspend. I understand that the figure is £145 million. The Scottish Government has already said for a significant time that the money will be spent in the financial year 2015-16. However, we have had retrospective funding bids for how the Labour Party would have wanted that money to be spent. "Let's just give it to councils." "Let's give more to the NHS." "Let's give it to colleges." "Let's give it to schools." "Let's give it to care workers." "Let's give it to fire staff." The total could be an eye-watering figure; indeed, Mr Findlay said that West Lothian Council alone should have had £88 million from that £145 million spent on it.

Neil Findlay: Will Bob Doris take an intervention?

Bob Doris: Labour has no credibility at all. Let me—

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Findlay, the member does not seem to be taking your intervention.

Bob Doris: No, thank you.

Let me tell members what the Scottish Government has said it will spend that £145 million on. We should remember that the Labour Party has spent it five, six or 10 times over. I am looking forward to adding up the bill that the Labour Party has accumulated today. The Scottish Government will spend the money on economic support in these difficult and straitened economic times. We will spend it to further mitigate the worst aspects of UK welfare reform.

When the Scottish Government makes those financial commitments, no one on the Labour benches should welcome them. They should actually criticise them, because they would have spent the money already; the money would be gone and the bank would be empty, with no more money to spend on protecting our economy and none left to protect the most vulnerable people from welfare reform. The cupboard would be bare.

There is absolute hypocrisy from the Labour Party. I look forward to there being no exercise in arch deceit when it gives its opinion when we spend that £145 million, as we will, on protecting the Scottish economy where we can, and on protecting our most vulnerable people, where we can.

I trust the SNP and this Government, in the face of savage UK Tory cuts, or red Tory Labour cuts

after the next UK election, to defend our public services.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Bob Doris: Gee whiz! I hope that the SNP is in a position to hold the balance of power at UK level so that we can protect the people of Scotland.

15:53

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Let me start on a consensual note and congratulate the Labour Party on the third part of its amendment, which

"calls on all parties to work together to tackle inequality, support economic growth and proudly protect Scotland's public services."

That is pretty hard to disagree with. Essentially, of course, it just replaces the last part of the Government's motion, which it deletes, with a slightly different formulation. More significant is what the Labour Party's amendment takes out of the Government's motion, which is most of it.

First, we might look at the deletion of the reference to and criticism of

"the impact that the UK Government's austerity agenda will have on the delivery of public services".

Labour obviously disagrees with that criticism, as it deletes it from the Government's motion.

Secondly, Labour's amendment seeks to delete from the Government's motion the reference to welfare cuts of £15 billion, so clearly the party agrees with those cuts.

Ken Macintosh rightly referred to the fact that Government spending at UK level currently makes up the smallest proportion of national income since the 1930s, but at 5 o'clock he will, if he so chooses, vote for a Labour amendment that seeks to delete the reference to that fact from the Government's motion.

The reality is that Labour's biggest and most important proposed deletion from the Government's motion relates to spending money on weapons of mass destruction rather than on other things. The motion is drawn quite widely and covers all levels of government. I will spend a bit of my time highlighting the need for proper defence for Scotland and our interests, which is an issue that also touches on the UK's wider interests.

Scotland contributes disproportionately more soldiers than does elsewhere in the UK. When our soldiers were peacekeeping in Kosovo, they had to use their personal mobile phones for communication because the Army's mark IV radios were so poor that they did not work properly

in the mountainous terrain. That is because money was not spent on developing communications systems that were fit for purpose.

When our soldiers were in Iraq, they were ordering boots by email from suppliers in the UK because the rubber soles on the boots that the Army had provided were melting in the desert sands. The equipment was not fit for purpose.

More fundamentally, in Afghanistan, the UK has so few helicopters that only 5 per cent of soldiers have gone to points of application by helicopter, in comparison with 95 per cent of US soldiers. The most dangerous part of deployment is when soldiers travel from their barracks to the point of application. As a result, the casualty rate among UK military personnel has been 50 per cent higher than the rate for the US military, because we are not investing money in the right equipment for our troops. That diminishes their effectiveness and leaves Scotland and the UK vulnerable.

In the past week, we have seen further evidence of underinvestment. As a result of money being diverted to weapons of mass destruction that will never be used in our maritime interests, we have had to scrounge support from other countries when there appeared to be threats off our shores.

Scotland has the longest coastline in Europe—in fact, our coastline is half the length of that of China, which is one of the biggest countries in the world after Russia. Every single country around us has a proper defence system. The Irish have maritime surveillance aircraft, as do the Icelanders and the Norwegians, but the UK has none. The Irish have eight vessels posted around their coasts to provide coastal defence, and the Icelanders also have vessels, but there is not a single vessel based in Scotland for the purposes of coastal defence or support.

Spending our money on weapons of mass destruction not only deprives our public services and public servants of proper funding; it does not even serve the purposes of defence by any reasonable measure that one might apply.

We need to get the basics right rather than spend money on weapons of mass destruction. I seek to make not a moral case against such weapons, as easy as that would be, but a simple pragmatic case that highlights the current priorities that the Labour Party, in common with other parties, seeks to delete from the motion. I assume that Mr Findlay and all his Labour colleagues will, at 5 o'clock, vote to spend £100 billion on new nuclear weapons.

There are only two of us in the chamber who were born—I think—before the creation of the national health service; I will not name the other member. I was fortunate—as others have been fortunate since the health service was founded—

because my parents were able to afford the cost of approximately £50 for an operation for my mother so that she could conceive me and give birth. There may be members in the chamber who regret that, but the kind of benefit that I got from my family is now, through the health service, extended to all our population.

I congratulate the Labour Party on having created the health service back then; would that the party once again adhered to the principles that carried the health service into being and resiled from the cuts agenda to which it is now irrevocably wedded.

16:00

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): I was enjoying that until that wee chat at the end.

Stewart Stevenson said that there is not a lot that we would disagree with in the motion. Few of us would disagree that

“strong public services are the bedrock of a fair and prosperous society”

or would not pay

“tribute to Scotland’s public service workers.”

In fact, there is an outstanding level of agreement about how we, collectively, would provide public services and how we would like them procured and so on. Why, then, have we spent the past couple of hours trading figures, finance and numbers, and talking about who did what and who cares more? None of us has a monopoly on care or on respect for the public sector and its workers.

Stewart Stevenson: I genuinely agree with Duncan McNeil that there are people in good heart, and they are not all on the Government benches. I just want the member to step up to the plate in what he actually does.

Duncan McNeil: I was not addressing my comment to Stewart Stevenson personally; I was referring to his speech. It was not meant as a personal attack on the member. It is a criticism of us all that, when there is such agreement about what we should be doing, we seek excuses for not doing it. That is the point that I will try to make.

The emphasis is on the austerity resulting from the financial crisis, and on various policies being pursued by a Government and a party that I have never supported. Many years ago, the effect that those policies had on my community, my neighbours and my friends drew me into politics.

We were discussing these issues 10 years ago. A decade ago, we had the Kerr review of the health service, which acknowledged that there were serious issues that we needed to address in health and that the demographic challenge would

put an impossible strain on health services as they existed—and as they still exist. As winter crisis follows winter crisis, the health service is dealing with increased numbers through the door.

We have been slow to see that as a priority. We ditched it many years ago. It is no surprise that, a decade on, we hear the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nursing calling for a review of the Kerr review.

Shona Robison: I very much welcome the tone of Duncan McNeil's contribution. However, does he think that one of the biggest public sector reforms that we have seen in a decade is the integration of health and social care, which takes place from April? Surely it is important that we all make that work.

Duncan McNeil: I agree with the cabinet secretary that we should make that work, but the fact that we had to introduce legislation to make it work gives us an idea of the scale of the challenge and the problem, a decade on, in integrating health and social care. Maybe if we stopped fighting about numbers and about who does what and where the Tories are, we would be addressing some of these issues.

Five years ago, Crawford Beveridge told us that we faced the worst financial crisis since the war. He was asked by the current Government to carry out an independent budget review. The purpose of the review was to present an informed and dispassionate account of the scale of the expenditure challenge that Scotland faces over the coming years and to look at the option of discounting the way in which we currently spend public money. That was the challenge five years ago. One of Beveridge's recommendations was to discontinue the council tax freeze; another was to impose a two-year wage freeze on council employees. It is strange that we can claim to have chosen to continue the council tax freeze but to impose a wage freeze on some of the lowest-paid workers in Scotland, without any doubt.

If Beveridge provided the economic imperative for politicians in Scotland—in this Parliament—who have responsibility for addressing all these issues, Campbell Christie outlined the moral imperative for us to act. Times of limited resources are when the politicians are tested. It is all right when we have money in surplus—now and in the past, the decisions are much easier—but when there is a decline in the budget, the decisions are much more difficult. That is when priorities must be put in place. Remember that Christie said:

“Alongside a decade of growth in public spending, inequalities have grown too”,

so the money that is spent is not necessarily the issue. I think that I would agree. When we had

money, we did not deal with the inequalities and it is all the more difficult now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude, please.

Duncan McNeil: I will finish at that point and leave members with that challenge. Let us have a constructive debate; let us accept our responsibility; and let us use the money that we have wisely to fulfil our commitment to reduce inequalities in Scotland.

16:06

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): I am pleased to follow the thoughtful and constructive speech that we have just heard from Duncan McNeil. I congratulate Keith Brown on his appointment as cabinet secretary and welcome Mary Fee to her front-bench position.

We have heard from speakers this afternoon that the UK Government's austerity agenda has failed. I certainly agree with that and I think that it is a view that is borne out by a range of evidence from a variety of reputable sources. The agenda has failed because it has impeded recovery and economic growth; it has failed because public spending, as we have heard, is at its lowest level in modern times; and it has failed on its own terms because borrowing is now higher than when the coalition Government came to power in 2010.

Austerity has failed because it has hampered economic growth. The UK economy is now forecast to be almost 4 per cent smaller than was predicted in 2010, when the chancellor first entered office. The fact is that austerity is harming the economy; it is putting pressure on household and family budgets and it is putting pressure on public services.

Austerity has failed because public spending is at its lowest level in modern times—a point that was made by Kevin Stewart and Ken Macintosh. As we heard, public spending will fall to 35.2 per cent of GDP by 2019-20 and will

“probably be the lowest in around 80 years”,

according to the OBR. Therefore the reality of the UK Government's austerity agenda is that total Government spending will be reduced to its lowest level since the 1930s, yet we know that the bulk of the cuts are still to come.

The chancellor has confirmed cuts of £25 billion—much of it from the welfare budget—beyond 2015. Analysis shows that 60 per cent of the revenue cuts to the Scottish budget are still to come. The Institute for Fiscal Studies analysis of the chancellor's autumn statement states:

“the overwhelming fact about the public finance plans remains that spending in ‘unprotected’ departments is set

to have fallen by more than a third by 2018-19, with most of those cuts still to come.”

The IFS goes on to state:

“A worsening of long run public finances gives the Treasury extra money to spend now. That is not a sensible way to think about fiscal policy.”

Finally, austerity has failed on its own terms because borrowing this year will be £108 billion—£50 billion higher than the chancellor predicted in 2010—which means that the total borrowing under this UK Government will be in the region of £430 billion.

If we agree that austerity has failed, what is the alternative? The Scottish Government has led the way in promoting an investment-led recovery by accelerating capital spending on vital infrastructure projects. It has protected the front-line public services—in particular the revenue budget of the NHS—and it has mitigated the impact of the UK Government’s welfare reforms on the most needy and vulnerable people in our society.

On capital spending, the Scottish Government has accelerated spending on infrastructure projects to secure economic growth and create jobs. Just two examples of that are the investment in the Forth replacement crossing, which is supporting 1,200 jobs, and the Scotland’s schools for the future building programme, which is worth £1.8 billion. That will deliver 91 new schools by March 2018, including the new Boroughmuir high school at Fountainbridge in my constituency and the new James Gillespie’s high school, which is also in my constituency.

As the cabinet secretary reminded us, despite the cuts to the Scottish departmental expenditure limit budget, the Scottish Government is committed to increasing the NHS revenue budget in real terms for the remainder of this session of Parliament and for each and every year of the next session of Parliament. Although the Scottish fiscal resource budget is being slashed by 10 per cent in real terms over this session of Parliament, the health resource budget will increase by 4.6 per cent.

One of the biggest scandals in the NHS and our public finances is the private finance initiative. As I have said before in the chamber, the PFI contract for the Edinburgh royal infirmary is one of the worst examples of an NHS contract anywhere in the UK. Over the lifetime of the contract, the taxpayer will have paid out £1.44 billion in service charges. In the current financial year, it will cost the NHS £47 million. That contract is robbing the NHS today—and will continue to do so well into the future—of valuable resources that should be used to safeguard front-line NHS services, recruit and retain hard-working healthcare professionals and provide the high-quality, patient-centred

healthcare to the people of Edinburgh and the Lothians that we all want. That is why I renew my call, with the support of Unison and the British Medical Association, for a full-scale parliamentary debate on the operation of the contract.

Christina McKelvie was right to remind us that welfare reform impacts disproportionately on women, as carers and single parents.

Neil Findlay: On PFI, does the member accept that the Government’s non-profit distributing project is just PFI by another name and that therefore, if we are going to look at one, we must also look at the other?

Jim Eadie: I am happy to have a debate on NPD and PFI, but it is time for Labour members to come off the fence and to decide whether they wish to back my motion and have that debate. The point about NPD is that we need to factor in the investment that we are not able to make through the public loan route, which I and the Government would prefer, because of the financial and borrowing constraints within which we currently operate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you must come to a close, please.

Jim Eadie: Let us have the debate about PFI and NPD. I look forward to it.

I will end with a quote from Unison Scotland’s convener, Lillian Macer, who has said:

“Public services are used by everyone at each stage of life. We want to see money spent on them not as a cost, but as an investment.”

Surely we can all agree with that.

16:12

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): The cabinet secretary said in his opening speech that we need public services that are sustainable and fair. I agree that, if we are to continue to provide public services, they need to be sustainable and fair. I agree with Duncan McNeil that we should look at ways in which we can move forward and protect our public services at the point of delivery.

No one in the Parliament disagrees that there has been austerity or that there are greater austerity cuts to come, although we perhaps disagree about the impact of those austerity cuts on services and about the Scottish Government’s priority of mitigating some of the cuts that have come to Scotland. There has been mitigation of welfare reform, which has impacted on the most vulnerable in our society. Duncan McNeil talked about tackling inequalities, and I agree that we need to tackle such issues.

I believe that some of the programmes that the Government has taken forward are right. The cabinet secretary mentioned concessionary travel, which is not just about getting a free ride on a bus; it enables people to get out of their homes.

Neil Findlay: Given that the member represents an area with a large rural population, does he agree that people who live in a rural area where there is no bus do not get out of the house?

Dennis Robertson: Perhaps Mr Findlay is not aware of the support that the local authority and Stagecoach provide in my rural constituency, so perhaps there are buses so that people can get out of their homes.

Free concessionary travel is related to health and wellbeing. It gives people the opportunity to take advantage of a service that they would otherwise have to pay for and, with limited budgets, would probably not be able to afford.

We should be able to agree about other services, such as free personal care for the elderly, and I think that we do.

Last week, I was at the North East College in Aberdeen. It is a wonderful new college that sees the way forward and is working closely with the University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University. It is considering what is needed to sustain the economy of the north-east, and it is providing the necessary skills and training in the college sector. The college commended the Government for the work that it did to bring the colleges together in the north-east, which was the right thing to do.

There are issues in the health service—no one can say otherwise—but the Scottish Government has realised that and has taken appropriate action. NHS Grampian has rightly been criticised recently. There is no doubt about that. There was mismanagement in the board and by management. No one shies away from that. However, NHS Grampian has a world-class service and a world-class new A and E department; it was just mismanaged. The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport and the previous Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing have visited NHS Grampian. Malcolm Wright, who is there at the moment, is taking cognisance of all the factors and putting things on the right path.

Yesterday, the cabinet secretary announced additional funding for NHS Grampian, bringing it to parity with the other NHS boards in Scotland. The Scottish Government has been working towards that ever since it came to power in 2007.

We need to applaud many aspects of the services that the Scottish Government has been moving forward, such as the protection of rural

schools. Rural schools take more out of the public purse—of course they do—but they support local communities and ensure that they survive.

I commend free eye tests to the members of the coalition Government parties and Labour because they are viewing the austerity programme through tunnel vision.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We turn to closing speeches. I call Liam McArthur, who has six minutes.

16:18

Liam McArthur: Thank you, Presiding Officer—and thank you for remembering my name.

I reiterate my support and that of my party for the work that is carried out by all the people who work in our public services. I am under no illusions about how difficult it has been for them over recent years or about the challenges that are set to continue. However, those challenges can be overcome, as has already been demonstrated by considerable innovation and creativity throughout the public sector. In difficult times, that gives cause for some optimism.

Public sector workers deserve our full-throated support across the chamber. However, that is not the same as giving false promises or setting out easy options that have more to do with short-term electoral calculations than a long-term commitment to the public sector. Unfortunately, there has been too much of that in a number of speeches, although there were honourable exceptions, including the speeches from Duncan McNeil and Stewart Stevenson.

To echo the touching expression of mutual admiration that Mr McNeil and Mr Stevenson were involved in, I have generally found Mr Brown to be a reasonable minister to deal with. We have had our disagreements—some of them fairly vigorous—but he has always been approachable and willing to listen, even if he has not always been willing to act in the way that I would have wished.

Therefore, I would normally be prepared to take on board and take seriously Mr Brown's call for all parties to work together to secure economic growth, tackle inequality and protect Scotland's public services. Unfortunately, the premise on which his call is based rather undermines its sincerity. For one thing, it presupposes that nothing is happening already, but that is simply not the case.

Having denied that the coalition's strategy for dealing with the debt and growing the economy would ever work, the SNP now blusters that it is the wrong sort of economic growth and that we should be racking up more debt. In fact, it is

growth and a debt-reduction approach that give the best prospect of protecting public services in the future. It is no wonder, then, that the SNP's own fiscal commission emphasised the need to match the UK's debt-reduction path for the foreseeable future.

Action to tackle inequality is also taking place in trying circumstances. That is what lies behind the delivery of the pupil premium, free early learning and childcare for 40 per cent of two-year-olds from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and free school meals for all pupils in primary 1 to primary 3. In each of those areas, the UK coalition Government has led. In response, the Scottish Government has followed, followed partially or flatly refused to follow at all.

Is there more that could be done to grow the economy, tackle inequality and protect public services? Absolutely. Does that mean that the SNP is not taking steps in all those areas? Absolutely not. However—as Iain Gray rightly suggested in his speech—we require more honesty from the SNP Government about where we are now and what the implications are of the choices that it has made, and we need a willingness to focus on using the powers that we have and are set to take on to deliver those critical objectives.

Unsurprisingly, today's speeches focused on three areas. In health, there is no getting away from the crisis that we are seeing in a number of areas, notably Grampian. Mr Stewart—who, clearly, was put off by my pre-Christmas haircut—was keen to focus on the Arbutnott formula. The review of the Arbutnott formula began in 2005 and concluded in 2007, and the agreement from the Government to take forward the reforms came in 2008. Therefore, I do not think that it is unreasonable of us to question why it has taken seven years to address the problems of underfunding in that regard.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Liam McArthur: I took an intervention from the member the first time I spoke.

Kevin Stewart: I promise to remember his name this time.

Liam McArthur: Not even on that basis.

With regard to NHS Orkney, where underfunding has again been an issue, the increase that we have seen will simply go towards paying off the borrowing that has been required to make good that underfunding.

On education, we have heard from a number of colleagues about pressures in our primary sector, in our secondary schools and in the college sector, which is coping with significant cuts, and we have heard about local authorities that have been put in

a straitjacket by a council tax freeze that removes local accountability and the flexibility to respond to local needs. In Edinburgh, Aberdeen and, indeed, Orkney, we are seeing relative underfunding.

In health and education, the Scottish Government has full policy and budget responsibility. As Ken Macintosh said—and as, by implication, Mark McDonald accepted—government is about choices, whatever powers we have. I think that Duncan McNeil was right to point out that those choices become more difficult in straitened times. Nevertheless, such choices are the stuff of government. Claiming credit for all the popular stuff—such as the things that Bob Doris was keen to rattle off—is credible only if the Government is going to take responsibility for not doing what the popular stuff prevents it from doing.

Independence offers no panacea—quite the reverse. A number of members referred to what has happened to the oil price over the past six months. The independence white paper said:

“With independence we can ensure that taxation revenues from oil and gas support Scottish public services”.

Today, we have heard an alternative prospectus that is based on tackling fraud in housing benefit and tackling tax evasion, which are both priorities for the UK Government—they are a priority for any Government—but they are not the basis on which to found an alternative economic vision.

We need to continue to anchor the economy in the centre ground and to continue to move from economic rescue to recovery. That is the best platform for a fairer society with high-quality and sustainable public services, which—as Stewart Stevenson acknowledged—we all want to see.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before we move on, I remind members not to respond to interventions that they do not officially allow, because that makes it difficult for our recording of proceedings.

I also remind members that all members who have participated in the debate are supposed to be in the chamber for closing speeches. In that regard, I regret to note that Iain Gray is not in the chamber.

16:24

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I also welcome Keith Brown to his new role.

I welcome the debate—hostile though it has been—if only as an opportunity to dispel some of the myths and scaremongering contained in the Government's motion, which Gavin Brown dealt with in his opening speech. Given that health is my particular interest, that is what I will focus on.

Personally, I have always felt that politics is demeaned when point scoring is used with regard to the NHS. Having begun my association with the NHS as a medical student 56 years ago, and having spent my entire working life in the health service and most of my time in Parliament dealing with health issues, I am all too aware of the constraints and pressures that are put on our front-line services. However, to keep resorting to slogans such as “the UK Government’s austerity agenda” when there is a real need to rein in public spending merely reinforces the narrow-minded approach taken by the SNP Government and its tendency to blame Westminster for all Scotland’s ills.

Let us look at some facts with regard to the rest of the Government’s motion. It looks pretty feeble to hark back to the 1930s, which was long before even I was born or the NHS was dreamed of—and, yes, I am the other older member referred to but not named by Stewart Stevenson.

There have been peaks and troughs over the years in the share of GDP that goes into public services, but it was 36 per cent in the late 1990s and it is predicted to fall to 35.2 per cent in 2019–20—a fall, but hardly the dramatic fall of SNP rhetoric.

What I do agree with in the motion is the need to pay tribute to Scotland’s public service workers in all our public services. Given my experience, I particularly pay tribute to all those who staff our NHS—every one of them, from porters to cleaners, cooks, secretaries, associated health professionals and medical staff in primary, secondary and tertiary care. Those are the people on the front line of NHS care. They are the people on whom patients depend and they, with the patients whom they serve, are the people who want to hear proactive thinking and co-operation from politicians, not the point scoring that we are increasingly hearing as election time approaches yet again.

The NHS has faced many crisis times throughout its existence, but there has never been a greater need for a united approach to dealing with the enormous pressures that currently face the service, as highlighted by Duncan McNeil, nor has there been a greater need for co-operation between the authorities that provide care for our increasingly elderly population. Only through the real integration of health and social care services, with a focus on people’s actual needs, can we expect to achieve our desired goal of people living at home or in a homely setting in the community for as long as possible, thus relieving some of the existing serious pressures on our overworked NHS staff.

The Liberal Democrat amendment, which has some merit, actually points to chronic

underfunding of the NHS over many years, particularly in some health board areas, which is only now being addressed. Yesterday’s announcement in Aberdeen of £15.2 million, while very welcome, has come only in the wake of the recent crisis in NHS Grampian. A and E problems are, in significant measure, due to the impaired flow of patients through the system, which leads to bed blocking because care provision in the community is not adequate. Aberdeen City Council has the lowest level of funding of all local authorities, as well as having to deal with competition from the oil and gas industry, which makes it difficult to recruit and retain carers in the city.

Shona Robison: Does the member acknowledge that Aberdeen City Council told me yesterday that it has an underspend in its social care budget because of the difficulty of recruiting and retaining staff? Does she therefore welcome the work that is going on to try to develop the key worker affordable housing option for all public sector workers in the area?

Nanette Milne: That is part of a range of measures that need to be taken, but there is still a very acute shortage of carers in the city.

Gavin Brown’s amendment rightly turns our attention to preventative spending—an area that the Government appears reluctant to even consider as an alternative option to overbloated public spending. We have today heard its usual arguments around that.

The NHS budget has been fully protected by the current Westminster Government, leading to Barnett consequential of around £1.3 billion since 2011. It is, of course, for the Scottish Government to determine how that money is spent. We do not always agree with its choices, but that is politics.

There are undoubted pressures on the NHS, given the demography of an ageing population in Scotland and a lack of qualified specialists in A and E and in the field of cancer care, for example. There is also a need to address waiting time delays, which have led to increased reliance on the use of the private sector—something that is denied by the SNP but which has been accepted by health boards such as NHS Grampian as they strive to provide care within the time limits set by the Government. Members on the Conservative benches fully support the principle of an NHS that is free at the point of delivery and need and which is funded from the public purse, but let us have a real debate about how care is to be delivered in the future.

The Government must address two areas of particular relevance: the care for older people change fund and the integrated care fund. It is

quite clear that the Government seems to be ignoring its commitment to a

“decisive shift to preventative spending.”—[*Official Report*, 22 September 2011; c 2162.]

When she sums up the debate, I therefore ask the health secretary to give an undertaking that the pledge of £500 million made by John Swinney in the 2011 spending review will actually be honoured and to acknowledge Audit Scotland’s grave concerns that there has been little progress on

“radical change in the design and delivery of public services”.

My colleague Jackson Carlaw and I are committed to the health service in Scotland and are happy to work with other political parties in the interests of delivering good patient care, but let us stop the blame game and stop living in the past, and instead focus on where we go from now on. We need to think beyond this year’s Westminster election and next year’s Scottish Parliament election and get down to the very difficult but essential task of some long-term thinking and a coherent strategy for the future.

I support the amendment in Gavin Brown’s name.

16:30

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): So there we have it—the general election starting gun has certainly been fired in the chamber today. The debate crystallises the choice that people face in the general election in May. If people inhabit the world of the SNP Government, everything is the UK coalition’s fault. I reject absolutely the Conservative-Lib Dem austerity plan, because it falls on the shoulders of the most disadvantaged and those least able to cope—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Jackie Baillie: However, I find it frankly extraordinary, but not surprising, that the SNP denies any responsibility. It must share part of the blame.

Before I turn to the SNP’s record, I will spend a little time on its offer going into the general election. On 8 January, Alex Salmond said that the election is about full fiscal autonomy: the ability to raise and spend all Scotland’s taxes in Scotland. I hear no disagreement about that from SNP members, which is really interesting, because that is a flirtation with reality. He is saying that he will plunge Scotland into deficit—

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland’s Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): Oh!

Jackie Baillie: Well, they sigh, but let us think this through. The oil price has declined rapidly. It

was estimated at \$113 a barrel in the SNP’s independence white paper, but it is down at \$48 a barrel today. Under independence, the revenues due to Scotland would be slashed. Oil is not some optional extra that is quite nice to have; it is central to our public services—it makes up 20 per cent of our tax base and the reality is that its price has fallen off a cliff.

A price of \$50 a barrel would mean an 85 per cent decline in revenues. That would mean almost £6 billion less to spend on public services annually, which blows out of the water the SNP’s position on cuts. Frankly, the hypocrisy is breathtaking, because the SNP’s cuts would be deeper and faster than even those of the UK coalition.

Let us spell out what that would mean. It would mean cuts. It would wipe out the schools budget in Scotland. It would wipe out the budget for all the nurses and doctors in our hospitals and our community health settings. It would wipe out the entire infrastructure programme for next year. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Jackie Baillie: Under the SNP’s plan for full fiscal autonomy, the Barnett formula would no longer exist. We would face £6 billion in cuts immediately. How many schools and hospitals would that close? How many teachers and nurses would we have to make redundant? Instead, we have the security of the Barnett formula, which has been guaranteed—in the vow and the Smith agreement—to continue.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: I ask Mark McDonald who warned how much Scotland would lose if Barnett was scrapped.

Mark McDonald: Allow me to pose a question to Jackie Baillie. The new Scottish Labour chief of staff said that Labour is committed to £20 billion of cuts if elected. What would the impact of that be on Scottish public services?

Jackie Baillie: I asked Mark McDonald a question; he failed to answer it. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Jackie Baillie: Let me tell Mark McDonald, if members want to listen, that it was Nicola Sturgeon who warned how much Scotland would lose if Barnett was scrapped. In October 2014, she spoke about

“£4 billion of cuts for Scotland that would result if the Barnett Formula is scrapped as so many Westminster politicians want.”

She said that in January, March and June last year, but scrapping Barnett is exactly what her former boss wants to do.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: No—we have heard enough from Mr Stewart.

Is it, as Alex Salmond says, full fiscal autonomy with billions of pounds of cuts that are deeper and faster than even those of the UK Government that will protect public spending in Scotland, or is it the Barnett formula? Is Nicola Sturgeon in charge or is Alex Salmond continuing as a back-seat driver?

Let us deal with the underspend of £444 million. That money was not spent in a time of growing austerity, when the cost-of-living crisis has had a huge effect on families across Scotland. That underspend occurred in a time when the SNP Government was cutting budgets. Just think what public services could have done with that £444 million.

Let me remind the SNP of the words of John Swinney. He said:

“Long gone are the days when hundreds of millions of pounds of government money would be underspent each year, doing nothing to help communities around the country.”

That was in June 2009. Really—I kid you not. That was when he claimed an underspend of around £30 million. Now the figure is 15 times that amount, at £440 million.

Shona Robison *rose*—

Jackie Baillie: Teacher numbers are down, college places and bursaries have been cut, and there is an underspend of £160 million in education. I will take an intervention from Shona Robison on why her Government is failing the people of Scotland.

Shona Robison: I wonder whether Jackie Baillie can address two points. First, the £145 million of that money that can be put into public services has been put into them by John Swinney. The rest of the money involves financial transactions and annually managed expenditure, such as student loans. As her party's finance spokesperson, Jackie Baillie must know that that cannot be redirected into public services. Can she say why, when she was a minister, she did not spend £718 million? [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Jackie Baillie: Let me remind Shona Robison of the words of John Swinney. He said:

“Long gone are the days when hundreds of millions of pounds of government money would be underspent”.

We have heard enough from the SNP.

Let us look at the SNP's record extremely quickly. In education, teacher numbers are down by 4,000 to a 10-year low. The promise of smaller class sizes has been broken, 140,000 college places have been slashed and 10 million hours have been cut from learning. Schools are starved of resources.

In health, accident and emergency services are struggling, despite the best efforts of staff. Some hospitals have closed to new admissions and people have been on trolleys for 14 and 17 hours; in one case, a person was on a trolley for 20 hours. That is ridiculous. Bed numbers have been slashed, there is pressure on social care and we have seen a spike in delayed discharges. Some £65 million of Barnett consequential is welcome, but that does not begin to address the problem. Some 12,000 patients have not had their 12-week waiting time target met. That is 12,000 patients who have been denied their legal right by the same Government that legislated for it.

Let me compare health spending in England and Scotland.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in her final minute.

Jackie Baillie: I have an interesting table that shows that health spending in England has gone up by 4.4 per cent, whereas health spending overall in Scotland has dropped by 1.2 per cent. That came from the Scottish Parliament information centre. I would prefer to believe it than the SNP.

Neil Findlay was right to ask you about the loss of public sector jobs, of course. There are more than 40,000 fewer public sector jobs across Scotland. I say to Christina McKelvie that women had the majority of those jobs.

Let me finish with a word on which party is actually progressive. Labour will have a top rate of income tax of 50p in the pound so that those with the broadest shoulders will pay more. Labour will introduce a mansion tax that will fund our pledge of 1,000 more nurses and more, and Labour will tax bankers' bonuses. The SNP simply wants to cut corporation tax even more than George Osborne does. It wants full fiscal autonomy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Jackie Baillie: That would mean £6 billion of cuts in public services.

That is the choice: fiscal autonomy with huge cuts with the SNP, or the security of the Barnett formula.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you must close.

Jackie Baillie: The SNP has been rumbled. It is prepared to sacrifice public services and not to reduce inequalities in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to address their remarks through the chair, please.

16:39

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): Am I the only member who remembers Jim Murphy's comment that we would see a change of tone under his leadership—that the Labour Party would cease to be the anti-SNP party? There is not much sign of that today from Labour.

The debate has given us an opportunity to reflect on the importance of our public services and the vital role that is played by the spectrum of people who teach, treat and serve our communities everywhere and in so many ways. All of us respect and value the people who work in our public services. Duncan McNeil was right on that point. It is not just members in one part of the chamber who care, but members in all parts of the chamber. However, we have different policy priorities for how public services should be delivered. I will say more about that in a minute.

As the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities said in his opening remarks, the five years of austerity imposed by Westminster have resulted in real-terms cuts. We have challenged that wrong-headed approach on many occasions in this chamber and beyond and will carry on doing so.

Despite the cuts, we have a different approach in Scotland, and we will continue to invest in and prioritise our work to protect and enhance public services as far as we can with the powers that are available to the Parliament.

Gavin Brown: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Shona Robison: In a minute. It should be noted that, while we have been having this debate, the Tory MP David Mowat has been on his feet in the Commons making the case for a Tory-Labour coalition after the election, based on the fact that Labour just supported the Tory austerity cuts in today's vote. The Labour Party cannot come along to this chamber calling for more money for every part of the public sector when its members have just gone through the lobbies with the Tories to support austerity cuts that will have an effect in this place as well as down south.

Jackie Baillie: The cabinet secretary seems to forget that from 2007 to 2011 she relied on the Tories to get the SNP budget through. There is a partnership for you.

Shona Robison: I think that that is called grasping at straws. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Shona Robison: Jackie Baillie is so aligned to and such a fan of the Tories' spending priorities down south that, a few minutes ago, she was praising the Tories' record on the NHS.

Let me come on to the health service, because it is an important subject and one that is dear to me. What an honour it is to be the health secretary. I do not for a moment underestimate the challenge. Duncan McNeil was right that there are challenges that we must deal with. I hope that we can sometimes do so collectively across the chamber. However, let me be clear that we are absolutely determined that all patients in Scotland should be treated as quickly and as effectively as possible, with the right care in the right place and at the right time.

We have committed to increasing funding despite Scotland's fiscal resource budget being slashed in real terms by 10 per cent since 2010 by Westminster. We have made sure that the health resource budget has increased by 4.6 per cent in real terms since 2010. That means more money for doctors, nurses and the health service. Next year, the health service will see an uplift of £380 million, which is £54 million more than the Barnett consequentials allocated from Westminster. What does that all mean? It means more doctors and more nurses, to build on the 1,700 additional nurses that the Government has delivered.

Be under no illusion: we will protect the health service. The £12 billion that will be allocated to health next year is a lot of money, but it is what we do with the money that is important. We need to look at redesign. The integration of health and social care is one of the biggest changes in public sector reform that we have seen in a generation. We must ensure that that integration leads to the better-quality, integrated services that our older people in particular deserve to have.

As I have said many times since becoming the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport, we need to tackle some of the issues in our systems. Tackling delayed discharge is my top priority. Over the past weeks and months, we have been working hard with partnerships to do that, and over the next weeks and months, I will ensure that we get to a point at which we have eradicated delayed discharge from the system, because delayed discharge means that beds are not being used for people who need them and that resources in the health service are not being used to the optimum level.

Duncan McNeil: The cabinet secretary said that lots of money is going into the health service, but sometimes that reflects the service's chaotic

nature: the money follows a crisis, rather than spending being planned. Ten years ago, Malcolm Chisholm instigated the Kerr review, and Kerr recommended a more preventative approach. Campbell Christie made the same recommendation five years ago. If we measure what is happening against the proposals in the Kerr and Christie reviews, can we say that we are achieving the shift from dealing with day-to-day issues to taking a preventative approach and spending the money where we need to spend it?

Shona Robison: There are signs of a shift, but not enough is happening and we need to do more. When we talk about the 2020 vision I will have more to say about that. Mr McNeil is right that any money that we put into integration must lever in big change. Integrated partnerships across Scotland will have £7.6 billion at their disposal, which is a huge resource, and any money that we put into the system must lever in a shift in the balance of care. I am happy to work with him and anyone else to ensure that that happens.

I will use the rest of my speech to respond to points that have been made in the debate. I say to Mary Fee—it is unfortunate that she would not take interventions on this point—that comments about the so-called underspend show the paucity of Labour's argument. Jackie Baillie was challenged with the facts, but she would not accept that every penny of the underspend that could have been redirected to public services has been so redirected.

Jackie Baillie *rose*—

Shona Robison: The rest of the money cannot be transferred to public services, and it is disingenuous in the extreme to pretend otherwise. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Shona Robison: It worries me greatly that the Labour Party's finance spokesperson, Jackie Baillie, thinks that money for student loans can somehow be redirected to public services.

Jackie Baillie: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Shona Robison: I will give you another chance to explain how you think that that is possible.

Jackie Baillie: The cabinet secretary should be clear that the opportunity was lost to spend that money in year, when it was needed. There is no denying that. She has starved the NHS and others of money that they required in year by that underspend.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary. I remind members again that they need to speak through the chair.

Shona Robison: What the member said is absolute nonsense. You cannot spend money that is annually managed expenditure on other things—

Jackie Baillie: In the following year—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Shona Robison: As the finance spokesperson for the Labour Party, you should know that. If you do not have a grasp of those facts, that is worrying for your party. It is hypocrisy in the extreme, too, because, as members said a number of times during the debate, when you were a minister, Jackie Baillie, you presided over—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, please address your remarks through the chair.

Shona Robison: I am sorry, Presiding Officer.

When you were a minister in the Scottish Government—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Shona Robison: I say through the chair that when you were a minister, Jackie Baillie, you presided over £718 million being sent back to the Treasury. John Swinney has made sure that every penny of the underspend that can be directed to public services has been so directed. Every penny has been transferred to public spending priorities, and rightly so.

I welcome Kevin Stewart's welcome for the £65 million that is NHS Grampian's share. It was important to address through the NRAC formula some of the hangers from the old Arbutnott formula, and I am proud that the Government has done that and ensured that NHS Grampian and other boards have the resources that they need. However, let me be clear: in getting those resources, NHS Grampian and others must start delivering on their targets and must improve patient care.

It is interesting that Neil Findlay had a lot to say about pay policy. At no point did he say anything about Labour's pay policy. What we know about Labour's pay policy is what we know about Wales, which is the only place in the UK where Labour is in power. Let us look at what Labour has done there. It did not implement the 1 per cent agenda for change pay rise for staff in Wales—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. The cabinet secretary is concluding.

Shona Robison: Labour members say one thing when they are in government and another thing when they are in opposition, but their record speaks for itself.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you must draw to a close.

Shona Robison: I am happy to stand here and defend our public services. Our record speaks for itself; there is nothing in the Opposition's record to speak for.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-11985, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, which is the draft Public Services Reform (Inspection and Monitoring of Prisons) (Scotland) Order 2014. I call Joe FitzPatrick to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Services Reform (Inspection and Monitoring of Prisons) (Scotland) Order 2014 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Two members have requested to speak against the motion.

16:51

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I rise to oppose the SSI, which, on the basis of the evidence that was given to the Justice Committee, I firmly believe will not result in the establishment of a superior system for prison monitoring.

Although the Scottish Government acknowledges that there are serious doubts about the proposed new system and whether it will be compliant with the optional protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment—OPCAT—it is nonetheless proceeding with it merely because it does not want any further delays. OPCAT's express purpose is to establish a system of unannounced and unrestricted visits to all places where persons are deprived of their liberty. To that end, state parties must guarantee the functional independence of the national preventive mechanisms as well as the independence of their personnel. As the visiting committees were resourced by the Scottish Prison Service, they lacked functional independence and were, therefore, not compliant with OPCAT.

The problem could easily have been solved by moving the visiting committees' functions to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. The committees, all of which were staffed by dedicated volunteers whose visits were all unannounced, could then have become a part of the United Kingdom's national preventative mechanism—a view that was endorsed by Dr James McManus in his evidence to the Justice Committee. Instead, there has been a four-year delay, during which the Government's position has shifted dramatically away from its seeming acceptance and approval of the Coyle review recommendations.

The system that is outlined in the order will erode the impartiality of independent prison monitors in at least two distinct ways. First, a rota

for the IPM visiting arrangements must be provided and agreed by both the prison monitoring co-ordinator and the prison governor. Additional IPM visits can be undertaken only with the agreement of the co-ordinator, and only if time and resources permit will there then be room for unannounced visits. Secondly, the internal complaints process will task monitors with the responsibility of assisting prisoners with the internal SPS complaints process, thereby creating a perception among prisoners that monitors are, in essence, part of the SPS and not independent.

Although there was room for improvement on the current visiting committees, if the draft order is approved by Parliament this evening an inferior system will be put in place. Put simply, it is more important to get the independent monitoring of prisons right than it is to rush the order through. That is why I move against the SSI.

16:53

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): The Justice Committee's report on the SSI is laden with provisos and caveats—in my view, far too many for comfort. Regular rigorous independent scrutiny of our prisons is essential in order to ensure that proper standards of care and decency are maintained. The proposals do not ensure that monitors will be truly independent; instead, independent prison monitors will sit in a hierarchy and their work will be directed by salaried co-ordinators who will, in turn, be overseen by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons for Scotland.

Further compromising their independence, the monitors will have to undertake routine visits in accordance with a rota that must be agreed with the prison governor. There are significant concerns about the capacity of monitors to undertake an expanded range of duties, and the right to take time off from employment in order to undertake monitoring will be removed. There is also concern about the Government's reluctance to commit to a minimum number of monitors.

The order also fails to protect the confidentiality of prisoners who wish to raise concerns with monitors.

I, too, want the system to be compliant with OPCAT sooner rather than later. Nevertheless, the shortcomings of the order, which have been highlighted by the Association of Visiting Committees for Scottish Penal Establishments, the Howard League Scotland and the Scottish Human Rights Commission, must be heeded. Professor Andrew Coyle, who reviewed the Government's initial ill-judged plans, has concluded with "considerable regret" that this latest effort "needs further amendment".

Too often, we are asked to rely on the cabinet secretary's willingness to monitor and respond to legislative shortcomings rather than to sort them out first. Despite a number of attempts by the Government to get it right, members are being invited to approve an order that we know to be deficient. Perhaps one last iteration with a new minister at the helm will bring a resolution that we can all support. Scottish Liberal Democrats will therefore oppose the order.

16:55

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): The order that Parliament is being asked to approve has been the subject of significant consultation. It has also been examined by the Justice Committee, and I am grateful to the committee for its detailed consideration of the matter.

The order meets our obligations under OPCAT and the national preventive mechanism, which the current system of prison visiting committees does not. It establishes an independent monitoring service for Scottish prisons, ensures that all aspects of prisons will be fully and independently monitored, and provides a system in which best practice can readily be identified and improvements made in relation to conditions in prisons and the treatment of prisoners.

I believe that Parliament should approve the order for a number of critical reasons. The new system will deliver improved outcomes for prisoners and wider society. The current system of prison visiting committees is not as effective or efficient as it could be. There are significant inconsistencies across individual visiting committees, there is a lack of accountability and there is no ability to look at trends or to share findings. The new system will introduce effective leadership and governance arrangements for monitoring that will address those areas.

The independence of independent prison monitors is secured through the oversight of the chief inspector of prisons. In addition, independent prison monitors will be given powers to visit a prison without prior notice at any time, to access any part of the prison, to speak to any prisoner privately, and to investigate any matter that a prisoner brings to them.

The new system provides for visits to be undertaken in three ways. It provides for them to be arranged through a rota that will be agreed by the independent prison monitor, the prison monitoring co-ordinator and the prison governor, or to be arranged between the IPM and the PMC. It also provides for them to take place at the discretion of the IPM alone. Any concerns that wholly unannounced visits may no longer take

place are totally unfounded. It is also wrong to suggest that unannounced visits will be infrequent.

The reason for allowing for visits to be agreed with the governor is that that will allow the governor to raise specific issues that may be discussed and shared with the IPM, or to highlight to prisoners the fact that an IPM will be available on a certain day. The reason for some visits being agreed with the PMC is to ensure co-ordination and the appropriate frequency of visits. A combination of announced and unannounced visits is consistent with the practice of the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and the principles of OPCAT.

A key element of the draft order is that it will require IPMs to visit each prison weekly. That will ensure that what is going on in individual establishments across the country will be monitored with regular frequency. In addition, the system will be subject to regular review.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for taking an intervention. I know that much progress was made during the discussions with the Justice Committee. Could he repeat the assurance that he gave us that if, on review, there are found to be problems with the order, he would be prepared to return to it and amend it if necessary?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, you are in your last minute.

Michael Matheson: The member makes a good point, because the order requires the chief inspector of prisons to set up an advisory group to keep the effectiveness of monitoring under review. Membership of the advisory group will be at the discretion of the chief inspector, who has indicated that it should have an independent chair and include the Scottish Human Rights Commission. Of course, if there was any indication that there were difficulties with the present approach or deficiencies in it, the Government would be more than happy to consider such matters when they were highlighted to us.

I make it clear that the Government is committed to delivering the best outcomes for prisoners, to tackling inequalities where they exist and to meeting our obligations under OPCAT. The order that the Parliament is being asked to approve today was approved by the Justice Committee by seven votes to one. The order will reform independent monitoring of our prisons and deliver better outcomes for prisoners.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the draft Public Services Reform (Inspection and Monitoring of Prisons) (Scotland) Order 2014. The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that in relation to the debate on protecting public services, if the amendment in the name of Mary Fee is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Liam McArthur falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-12034.2, in the name of Mary Fee, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12034, in the name of Keith Brown, on protecting public services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)

Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 35, Against 78, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that in relation to the debate on protecting public services, if the amendment in the name of Gavin Brown is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Liam McArthur falls.

The second question is, that amendment S4M-12034.3, in the name of Gavin Brown, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12034, in the name of Keith Brown, on protecting public services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)

Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)

McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 13, Against 65, Abstentions 37.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S4M-12034.1, in the name of Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12034, in the name of Keith Brown, on protecting public services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)

Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)

Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 39, Against 63, Abstentions 13.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-12034, in the name of Keith Brown, on protecting public services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 60, Against 54, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that strong public services are the bedrock of a fair and prosperous society; pays tribute to Scotland's public service workers who teach, treat, protect and serve communities and welcomes continued support for public services in Scotland, including an increase in funding for all NHS boards; expresses concern at the impact that the UK Government's austerity agenda will have on the delivery of public services; notes that, even excluding cuts planned for welfare across the UK, Scotland faces real-terms cuts to come that are estimated at £15 billion; further notes an assessment by the Office for Budget Responsibility that UK Government cuts will reduce government spending as a proportion of income to its lowest level since the 1930s; recognises that real-terms cuts in spending on services such as police, local government, infrastructure and education will total almost £1,800 per person while, at the same time, the UK Government proposes to spend over £100 billion on new nuclear weapons; further recognises that there is an alternative to the UK Government's austerity agenda, and calls on all parties to work together to secure economic growth, tackle inequality and protect Scotland's public services.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S4M-11985, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of the Public Services Reform (Inspection and Monitoring of Prisons) (Scotland) Order 2014 [draft], be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)

Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 98, Against 17, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Services Reform (Inspection and Monitoring of Prisons) (Scotland) Order 2014 [draft] be approved.

Ferry Service between Scotland and Scandinavia

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-11392, in the name of Angus MacDonald, on the need for a direct ferry service between Scotland and Scandinavia. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that, following the cessation of the DFDS Harwich to Esbjerg service in September 2014, there is no direct ferry service between the UK and Scandinavia; understands that the historic Newcastle–Stavanger–Bergen service ceased operation in 2008, which meant that there was no direct service between the UK and Norway; believes that a direct service between Scottish and Scandinavian ports would help to increase exports from the Falkirk East constituency and other parts of Scotland to northern Europe while simultaneously attracting tourists with high disposable incomes, and notes the calls for the Scottish Government, the Scotland Office, Scottish Development International and interested regional transport partnerships to work with port and ferry operators to investigate the feasibility of such a project.

17:09

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): I am pleased to have the opportunity to highlight in the chamber the need for a direct passenger and car ferry link between the United Kingdom and Scandinavia, which has been of concern to me and campaigners for some time. I thank all the members who signed my motion, particularly those on the Opposition benches, as that has enabled me to bring the issue to the chamber.

I am highlighting the issue here today because I feel that we are missing a trick in not attracting tourists with a high disposable income to Scotland and are missing out on a direct transport link for Scottish exports from Central Scotland and beyond.

In recent years, we have seen the demise of historic direct passenger ferry routes between the UK and Scandinavia. In September 2008, the last ferry sailed from Newcastle to Stavanger, Haugesund and Bergen in Norway, breaking a service that had lasted for 130 years.

Last year, DFDS Seaways announced that it had decided to withdraw the service between Harwich and Esbjerg in Denmark, which in effect means that there is now no direct passenger car ferry between the UK and Scandinavia.

There are, of course, small campaigns on both sides of the North Sea calling for the reintroduction of those services. One that seems to be gaining significant traction and support is the international campaign for the ferry to Norway, which has

demonstrated that there is considerable demand for the return of a UK to Norway ferry link. It has gathered a significant volume of evidence from campaign supporters and tour operators in the United Kingdom and Norway and throughout the Nordic region.

The ICFN highlights Office for National Statistics reports of a 48 per cent rise in visitors from Norway to the UK. Further analysis of those statistics shows that, in 2013, there were 1.175 million travellers between Norway and the UK. It is said that approximately 8 per cent of that figure would be required to make a UK to Norway ferry route a profitable ferry passenger service.

That is all well and good, but clearly will and investment from the private sector are required to make it happen, as there are, as always, state aid issues that hinder direct financial support from Government.

There is a glimmer of hope that the recently established firm Norwegian Seaways will resurrect the Newcastle to Norway service which, if successful, would reintroduce the historic service and mean that high-spending Norwegians would return to Scotland. The service would give Norwegians the opportunity to visit Scotland's vibrant cities and our rich and historic countryside, and would allow us to capitalise on good will towards Scotland from our Nordic neighbours.

We should not forget that the citizens of the Nordic countries are statistically some of the most frequent travellers in the world, with nearly 50 per cent of their travels being to a foreign country. The Scandinavian countries also have some of the highest average incomes per capita; Norway is at the forefront, with an average per capita income of more than £42,000. Our tourism industry could do with some of that.

Of course, there are legitimate commercial reasons for the withdrawal of the previous services. The DFDS ferry service from Harwich to Esbjerg was abandoned in part due to high fuel costs, which, as we have seen in recent months, are no longer the issue that they were.

Ship operators are also nervous about the increasing costs from the new sulphur reduction regulations that the International Maritime Organization has set. Ships that pass through an emission control area, including northern European waters, must now cut their sulphur emissions or face fines. The regulations demand that ships cut sulphur content in the fuels that they use to 0.1 per cent, compared with a sulphur content of up to 3.5 per cent that is allowed under the current rules.

The new directives have been set to help to reduce the amount of emissions, and to meet them shipping and ferry services are required to

use low-sulphur fuel or to fit their engines with a sulphur filtration system.

I know that fuel producers are already addressing the issue. In my Falkirk East constituency, Ineos, the operator of the Grangemouth refinery, has installed sulphur recovery units at considerable cost, which will go some way towards addressing the issue. As time moves on, therefore, we will see the arguments against the introduction or reintroduction of the ferry routes diminishing.

Given that there are fewer hurdles in the way of commercial operators that wish to start new services, I hope that the Scottish Government, perhaps in partnership with the Scotland Office, Scottish Development International and interested regional transport partnerships, will investigate the feasibility of establishing a new ferry link between Scotland and our neighbours across the North Sea.

We are watching closely to see whether there is any prospect of the Newcastle to Norway service being introduced. If that ferry service were to be resurrected in the near future, there would be no need for a Scottish service.

I am aware that Fergus Ewing, the Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism, has been actively involved in talks with the north east local enterprise partnership in England, and I hope that resurrection of the ferry service to Norway was one of the main items for discussion. Joint working between the Scottish Government and the north east LEP would clearly benefit the economies of both Scotland and the north-east of England.

If the Newcastle service is not to be resurrected, there should be no doubt that a direct link between Scotland and the Scandinavian countries could provide a valuable connection, which would aid an increase in trade and an increase in tourist footfall from Scandinavian citizens with high disposable incomes.

In my view, there are two options that would benefit Scotland directly: first, a Rosyth to Norway/Denmark service; and, secondly—albeit less likely—an Aberdeen to Norway service. Rosyth already has passenger terminal facilities in place, which it uses for visiting cruise ships. I have had informal discussions with Forth Ports officials, who would welcome approaches from interested ferry operators. Clearly, however, that would require significant financial investment from ferry operators and good will from local and national Government on both sides of the North Sea.

Approximately five years ago, Norwegian ferry operator Fjordline considered an Aberdeen to Stavanger/Bergen service. However, I checked recently with the chief executive officer of Fjordline, Ingvald Fardal, who confirmed that the

shipping company does not currently have any plans to establish a new route from Stavanger to Aberdeen; its priorities for the next few years are its existing three routes between Norway and Denmark and one route between Norway and Sweden. Encouragingly, though, its evaluation is that there could be a market for a service between the UK and Norway during four to six of the summer months. Mr Fardal cited autumn, winter and early spring as having limited potential, primarily due to increased competition from budget airlines such as Ryanair and Norwegian Air Shuttle. The other Scottish option, from Rosyth to Norway or Denmark, or a triangular route between all three, would be a much more viable option.

We have a small number of options, which, with co-operation, could be a reality. With the recent reduction in the cost of fuel, those options become even more realistic and not just part of a wish list. With the backing of the Scottish Government, Scottish Development International and local transport and enterprise partnerships, we can see the return of that historic link with our Nordic neighbours. I look forward to cross-party consensus on this issue as we get closer to our goal.

17:16

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I warmly congratulate my former Public Petitions Committee colleague Angus MacDonald on securing the debate. I support the objective of Mr MacDonald's motion and was pleased to sign up to it just before Christmas. I hope that, in a small way, I contributed to securing the debate tonight.

As members might guess, Mr MacDonald hails from the Western Isles, where ferries are not just a mode of travel but a way of life. When I met the leader of Western Isles Council last month in Stornoway, we spent the majority of our discussion talking about the future of ferry services in Scotland, from the important strategic level to the mundane but important subject of changing the ferry times to ensure that newspapers arrive in Stornoway before lunch time. I am sure that Mr MacDonald would sign up to that.

I, too, have an interest in ferry services. In the previous session of Parliament, I was part of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, which carried out a major inquiry into ferry services and, in particular, the development of new services. By the by, we held many consultations, including in Shetland and Dunoon. For members who have not read it, I would endorse that report.

I agree with Mr MacDonald that re-establishing direct links between Scotland and Norway would help to support our economy in Scotland. I am

particularly interested in the ports around Scotland, many of which have seen an increase in employment and in investment and trade from international shipping operations. Harbours such as Scrabster have invested extremely heavily. In my region, harbours in Inverness, Invergordon and Stornoway, which I visited recently, have all seen major investment. More widely, Aberdeen and Rosyth are excellent ports with great facilities. I am sure that my colleague Lewis Macdonald, who is sitting behind me, will want to endorse at least half of that argument.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does Mr Stewart agree that the plans for expansion of the harbour at Aberdeen create many possibilities for improved traffic across the North Sea to a number of potential destinations?

David Stewart: I am very happy to agree with that, and I am sure that the minister heard Mr Macdonald's strong endorsement extremely well. A direct link would bring in further investment through increased tourism—which is important—and freight transport. If I have read the agenda correctly, the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, which I will join tomorrow, is considering carrying out an inquiry into freight.

I recommend to Angus MacDonald, if he has not already read it, the book "Who Pays the Ferryman?" by Roy Pedersen, an ex-Highland councillor who, I suspect, is nearer to his political perspective than mine but nevertheless has great expertise in the area of ferries. Incidentally, Roy Pedersen claims to be the inventor of the road equivalent tariff. I accept that that is perhaps not the same as discovering penicillin or inventing the radio or radar; nevertheless, RET is something to be looked at and I endorse Roy Pedersen's expertise, which he developed in his time working for the Highlands and Islands Development Board as a young man.

Having read the book, in the few minutes that I have left, I want to really endorse a couple of principles that we should apply: we have to look at the frequency of the service; if it is a vehicle ferry, which I believe is essential, we have to look at practical issues such as the shortest feasible route; and we have to look at efficient vessel design, which is crucial for the crossing, as that will minimise capital costs and fuel consumption and perhaps avoid some of the problems that we have found with other ferry routes. There were problems with not having the correct ferry for the Gourock to Dunoon route, through Argyll.

In summary, in the few seconds that I have left, we need to look at having the right routes with the right speed, the best example of which is the P&O express catamaran service, which does 40 knots—the fastest in Scotland; we need to look at having the right port facilities; we need to avoid the

problems that there have been in Dunoon, where we have not been able to use the linkspan properly, for example; and we need to have the right frequency of services.

I believe that this ferry service is a very positive idea whose time has come and I wish Mr MacDonald well with his future campaign in this area.

17:21

Kenny MacAskill (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP): I, too, pay tribute to Angus MacDonald for lodging the motion. Such a ferry service is an important concept that has been around for a good few years. As I told him earlier, I remember going to speak at a conference in Kristiansund a decade or so ago, supported by Forth Ports Ltd, when the authority in the Kristiansund area was very keen on the idea.

Despite the fact that there is a great desire for such a service and good reason why it should happen, we should not underestimate the difficulties and the challenges. To be fair to Angus MacDonald, I do not think that he has underestimated them. It is a good idea and we need to work at it and for it.

I concur with what David Stewart said. I have read Roy Pedersen's book. I know him personally and would recommend the book. It is geared more towards Scotland's links than international links, but it makes relevant points.

There is good reason why we should have a ferry service. The links between Scotland and Scandinavia are long standing. When we look at a globe, an atlas or a map and see the close proximity, we can see that there is something manifestly wrong with not having a ferry link. Scots travelled over there long before they went down and up the Thames.

I remember that when I was in Kristiansund, I went on a walk from the hotel that I was staying in and noticed that the street that the hotel was situated on was called Ramsaygata. I was told that the street in from the airport was called Dalegata. The major company that we went to see, which was involved in fishing, was called Gordon. Indeed, other Scots names—Greig, for example—abound, due to immigration, which was encouraged by King Haakon back in the post-Jacobite era.

However, just because there are those historic links does not mean that such a ferry service could operate today. We should not underestimate the challenges. Low-cost carriers have come in, which has undermined efforts to have a ferry link. I concur with Angus MacDonald's comments on that. Although I went to Kristiansund a decade

ago, some four years ago, my son went to study for two years at Gothenburg university in Sweden. As the caring father, I thought that I could drive him over, catching the ferry from Newcastle. However, as Angus MacDonald said, I could not get a ferry from Newcastle. I then thought that I would go down to Hull, but I could not get a ferry from there, either. Eventually I learned that, as Angus MacDonald pointed out, the only route was to Esbjerg in Denmark, and I understand from him that that route is now gone. Having crossed the Øresund, I would have had to travel all the way back up through Sweden. There is something manifestly wrong with that.

Aside from an initial trip with my son to deposit his belongings, I appreciate that it was easier to take the Ryanair flight into Gothenburg. That is how people tend to go between Edinburgh and Gothenburg, but not all of them go that way, and the point certainly does not deal with trade. There are huge links between Scotland and Norway, and not simply in relation to the oil sector because the fishing industry is significant, too. I remember that at one stage there were discussions with Forth Ports to consider whether it would be possible to take the Rosyth to Brugge ferry up to Aberdeen, which would have linked in with ferries from Norway.

As I say, I think that there is a desire for such a service. We must recognise that there are challenges that go beyond being in the age of low-cost air travel, despite the challenges that that causes for the environment. Indeed, such challenges are probably a reason why we have to look at alternatives, because we cannot go on with the problems that we are causing our environment. People want low-cost travel, but we have to look elsewhere.

The challenge is significant. It is not simply about one Government; it is probably about two, if not more. As we will no doubt hear from the minister, it is also about interacting with the European Commission. We need to involve not only ferry operators but those who operate the ports, which in Scotland have been privatised in the main. We have to ensure that there is the travel and the trade. The trade can be generated, as can the travel. Many might choose to go by Ryanair, but others will wish to take a more sedentary journey and enjoy the sail, as we see from the growth of cruise liners.

I recognise the difficulties, but such a service is long overdue. I pay tribute to Angus MacDonald for raising the issue and I will support his campaign and any other campaign to try to ensure that we deliver that service.

17:25

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I congratulate Angus MacDonald on bringing the matter before Parliament. The motion is of great interest and I support it in principle. I will go into that in slightly greater detail before I finish my remarks.

I thank Kenny MacAskill for reminding us in a light-hearted manner that the crossing of the North Sea by ship has been happening for a good 1,200 years although, back then, the Scandinavians were not always as friendly as they are today. We need to work carefully to restore ferry links if possible. However, there are a number of challenges. As has been mentioned, cheap air travel exists between Scotland and Norway, so there is significant competition on the route.

It must be noted that, although there is no such ferry crossing in the North Sea today, there is a considerable trade in freight charters, not least for the oil and gas industry, in which there is a common interest on both sides.

We have heard mention of vessel design, which brings to mind the fact that vessels are not always designed for the routes on which they are used. The problem with the Rosyth to Zeebrugge route was that, although the route was profitable, the ship that was plying the route was more profitable elsewhere and, as a consequence, the service was lost.

We find ourselves dealing with an extremely difficult set of circumstances. There is a competitive route on which there is currently no ferry service, so whoever decides to take forward such a service would be taking a considerable risk. That is why it is extremely important that the suggestion in the motion is taken seriously. Everyone who has an interest in the matter, whether they are involved in the Government or in local government or have commercial interests, needs to work together. The port authorities in Scotland or the United Kingdom along with those on the other side of the potential route need to understand the demands of any route very clearly before progress is made.

If the route is to be run from here, the Government in Scotland will have to interpret European rules on competition and subsidy to ensure that, where money can be made available to underpin such a service, that is done on a limited scale and in a way that assists any operator to avoid fluctuations in demand and cost. Ultimately, it will also have to find its way past the European regulators, which is not always easy.

There is a great deal to be achieved if we can meet the objectives that are set out in the motion. That will not be easy, but we must do all that we can to improve links between Scotland and

northern Europe. At the moment, those who wish to transport freight across the North Sea in smaller quantities have to travel to the south of England and then drive back north again. That is a disaster if our objective is to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. It is also a disaster for those whose objective is to transport goods competitively and sell them in another market.

Such a route is equally important, if not more important, to the economy of the countries on the other side of the North Sea, as it would help them to link into the UK economy. Those who have relied on the easier access into central Europe will fast be realising that the UK is the fastest-growing part of the European economy and that the UK is where the market may expand in future if markets are lost in Germany and other central European nations.

For that reason, this is an opportune moment for us to discuss the possibility of ferry services crossing the North Sea once again. If we all work together and the idea gets a fair wind—no pun intended—we can achieve something. Now is the time to talk about it. Let us get together and have the discussions.

17:30

Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): As a frequent traveller to Scandinavia and the continent for many years by car, I used the ferry from Rosyth quite a bit. The problem with that service was its slow speed up the Forth—it took too long, so the freight companies did not use it. Rosyth was a great place, but the ferry was too slow. I also took the ferry from Aberdeen a couple of times and it took rather a long time, too.

I am a great believer in having a ferry service to Scandinavia. Just as Angus MacDonald said, such a service is very important, particularly because we have so many ties to Scandinavia. However, I wonder whether Esbjerg in Denmark would not be a better destination because the crossing is shorter. That is the key. The crossing needs to be shorter and not too extended.

The service from Rosyth was excellent—it had nice luxury ferries—but it did not prove economic. The freight companies did not use it because going up the Forth estuary at 15 knots took just too long. Therefore, I wonder whether we should use Newcastle, where there is a bigger catchment area. Aberdeen would be great, but although people would go up to Aberdeen from Glasgow and Edinburgh, they would not go up from England to take a freight ferry. That is the key.

We need to establish a ferry service if there is a will for such a service. I am very much in favour of it and I hope that we can get it. I fully support Angus MacDonald's motion.

17:31

The Minister for Transport and Islands (Derek Mackay): I thank Angus MacDonald for lodging the motion. It is important to recognise the strong cultural and historic ties between Scotland and Scandinavia, as well as the many links that exist through oil and gas, fishing and numerous other industries, along with an increasing number of high-spend tourists visiting our country. Those links result in considerable economic benefits to our economy. That would only be enhanced further by increasing the range of travel options available to tourists and businesses.

As members will know, the Scottish Government has been actively exploring ways of increasing the number of tourists coming to Scotland. That has been seen with the huge success in increasing the number of direct flight routes from Norway to Scotland from six in 2009 to 18 in 2015. Other members have picked up on that challenge and opportunity.

The Scottish Government certainly wants direct ferry connections from Scotland to Scandinavia to be expanded. That could bring a different type of tourist from those who already travel by air. We have a productive relationship with European ferry operators and we continue to explore all possibilities.

We have been approached on occasion by parties who are exploring the potential for a Norway service calling at a Scottish port. We have welcomed discussions and engaged with them enthusiastically, offering all the support that we can within the confines of state aid regulations, which members have mentioned. They have yet to overcome the challenges that are involved in putting in place a viable service, but we will continue to work with any potential operator that makes such a proposal. I am sure that members are aware that any such service would have to operate on a commercially viable basis. That would be a matter for any prospective ferry operator to consider fully.

It is important to recognise the enormous contribution that the maritime sector makes to our economy. Any additional ferry routes from Scotland to Europe would only increase the economic benefits throughout Scotland and provide considerable economic and environmental advantages.

One area of the maritime sector that continues to succeed is the cruise industry. Scotland is the UK market leader for inbound cruise tourism, with almost 400,000 people visiting our ports and injecting £41 million into the Scottish economy. Passenger numbers for this year's calls are forecast to be up on last year's.

In line with our team Scotland efforts to support air route development to Scotland, VisitScotland supports the development of inbound visitors to Scotland via ferry. That has included carrying out collaborative partnership marketing campaigns with Superfast Ferries and Norfolkline on their direct routes into Scotland, and it continues with partners including DFDS Seaways on the north of England routes, where there are considerable opportunities to grow the proportion of passengers who turn right on disembarking.

In 2013 there were 105,000 visitors from Norway to Scotland, spending £87 million, which makes Norway Scotland's sixth-largest international market. That has increased from 75,000 visitors from Norway in 2010.

Scotland is well connected to Norway by air, with direct flights available via Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Sumburgh, so the challenge for ferry operators would be to compete with that mode of transport.

We will continue to work in a team Scotland approach with regard to the potential for new services. That will include a range of marketing and tourism campaigns, focused on intelligent trade support.

Scottish Enterprise can help to evaluate the potential freight market and might also be able to offer joint funding support around marketing that element. The Scottish Government has explored options for other forms of commercial support that we might be able to offer potential operators as part of their overall business plan. That highlights some of the ways in which we can assist ferry operators and encourage more tourists to choose Scotland as their holiday destination.

Of course, there are some parallels here with the experience around the Rosyth to Zeebrugge ferry service. The challenges that were faced by that route over time are similar to those that would be faced by any potential new ferry operator. Despite the recent drop in wholesale oil and gas prices, which David Stewart mentioned, marine oil prices have become more expensive due to the introduction of the European Union directive on sulphur in marine fuels.

Regarding any possible Scottish Government funding, we have to be clear that, although it would be beneficial to our economy, a Norway service could not be considered a lifeline route, such as those to the Western Isles and the northern isles, so our options to provide funding support are more limited.

EU state aid rules limit possible funding to the freight facilities grant and waterborne freight grant schemes. Grant awards under those schemes are dependent on the transfer of freight from road to water, which is unlikely to be significant on a

Scotland to Scandinavia route. Any new passenger service would also require freight custom to be commercially viable. It should also be noted that there are currently freight services operating between Aberdeen and Norway, albeit not for passengers.

As Alex Johnstone mentioned, a further challenge for operators of passenger ferry services is the availability of suitably configured vessels in terms of cabin spaces, passenger facilities and fuel efficiency.

David Stewart: The minister knows that I raised the issue of vessel design as a crucial factor in how viable the proposal is. The difference between P&O's 40-knot catamaran, which I mentioned, and some of the slower vessels that other members have mentioned is crucial. Speed makes all the difference. Where there have been failures across Scotland, they have been in situations in which an ad hoc vessel was used, rather than a bespoke vessel for that particular route.

Derek Mackay: There are a number of issues within that point, and the Scottish Government will continue to be supportive in that regard. I was about to talk about how creative Government can be with regard to finding the right vessel and providing support, as has been the case with DFDS. The Scottish Government will do everything that we can to help ferry operators overcome challenges.

I am short of time, so I will simply say that, despite the challenges, we will continue to encourage ferry operators to keep under review the option of introducing a passenger ferry service from Scotland. The Scottish Government stands ready to work closely with any ferry operator that is looking to set up a new route linking Scotland directly to Europe.

Meeting closed at 17:39.

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e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-78534-676-7

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78534-695-8